

Jordan Ramp Cover Letter

Hey Matthew,

My name is Jordan Ramp and I'm currently a writers' assistant on the FOX show "Family Guy." I just wrote my first script for the show, due to air in the Spring of '25. However, like you, despite working on a sitcom, my goal is to be staffed on an hour-long show.

My favorite show of all time is "Mad Men," and my favorite episode is "The Wheel." The direction, score, performance, and writing of the final sequence in which Don sits alone on the stairs is an integral part of why I wanted to become a TV writer in the first place. It's perfect.

My goal in this business isn't necessarily to work on shows, but to work with people, and you're at the top of that list. I would cherish the opportunity to learn under you and will show up every day with an attitude to make your job easier. I'm sure you're currently in development, but the next time you're staffing a show, I would love to have the opportunity to throw my hat in the ring. I've attached a resume and writing sample and have additional samples available on my website.

Jordan Ramp

Jordan Ramp
(503) 476-7149, JRamp22@yahoo.com

QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

- Hour-long television writer with a focus in sports drama, true crime, and contemporary Westerns.
- Contributed stories to “Family Guy” while editing and maintaining every script in production.
- Semifinalist for the 2022 Disney Entertainment Writing Program; semifinalist for the 2022 WeScreenplay TV contest; pilot ranked in the top 5% of all scripts on coverfly.com.

EDUCATION

YALE UNIVERSITY, Writers’ Workshop, Summer 2023

- Participated in Yale’s 2023 Summer Workshop with an emphasis on short stories.

WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY, College of Liberal Arts, Salem, OR B.A. in Film Studies, Jan 2016

- Recipient of merit-based scholarship, 3.4 GPA.
- Recipient of Willamette Leadership Scholarship; Honor Roll 2 years.

SHERWOOD HIGH SCHOOL, Sherwood, OR, June 2011

- Oregon Athletic Director’s Association Scholarship Regional Winner, 3.94 GPA.
- Captain of 2010 varsity football team; 1st Team All-OSAA Pitcher in 2010.

EXPERIENCE

FAMILY GUY, FOX TV ANIMATION, Los Angeles, CA

Writers’ Assistant, January 2020 - Present

- Proof and distribute drafts and outline.
- Record notes in writers’ room every day.
- Pitch jokes and help in breaking stories.
- Type at 95 WPM.

LIKE FUN PRODUCTIONS, Los Angeles, CA

Feature Writer, November 2022-Present

- Commissioned to write film script titled “The Phantom Outlaw.”

PERSONAL INTERESTS

COLLEGIATE VARSITY BASEBALL PLAYER, 2011-2015

- **Willamette University**: NCAA Division III Baseball Player

REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

"Pilot"

Written by

Jordan Ramp

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INT. CIRCUS TRAIN - DAY (1981)

We OPEN ON TERRANCE BARCLAY, staring directly at us. He's 40, African-American. Scenery through the window is static, telling us the train is stationed.

TERRANCE

(to O.S.)

Used to be there were circuses all around. Then time, reality came along, left 'em all in the rearview. All except us.

EXT./ESTAB. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A BIG TOP merges into the star-lit sky. STRUNG LIGHTS stream down, spangling the canvas, as GUESTS swarm towards the glow within.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

Found a way to numb the Summer.
People were quick to their wallets,
knowing it was transient, too.

INT. TICKET OFFICE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

We see a row of REGISTERS frantically POPPING OPEN with each transaction. Tickets exchanging hands.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

Thrived in the small towns, mostly.
Ones longing for the halcyon days.
There's a feeling they ain't had in
a while.

ANGLE ON Terrance at the back of the booth, monitoring the operation.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

The stands are packed, colors ebullient. ANNA OSWELL, mid 20s, Osage Indian, stands in the ring, sumptuously dressed. She speaks into a microphone, but the words are DROWNED by audience ANTICIPATION.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

Went good for a time. Then, as all journeys go... at some point, you look back, realize you're in the shadow of a fading peak.

Anna points upward. A SPOTLIGHT tracks and holds on the trapeze artist, THERESA WILLIAMSON (30s), African-American, suspended fifty feet in the air. She pulls herself up across the horizontal bar, then wraps her legs around it, allowing herself to dangle.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

All the textbooks out there, think they'd tell you how to recognize the destination. You'd think.

From THERESA'S POV, we look down onto the harrowing depths. A net is set up in the center of the ring.

ANGLE ON Terrance, at the edge of the canvas, surveying the captivated faces.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

Some'd say it's measured in numbers... but it ain't. So you start to seek answers in other places.

ANGLE ON Theresa, who pulls herself back up. She balances her stomach on the bar, extends her arms, drawing "oohs" from below. Kicking her feet back, she starts to gently sway. On the third swing, she grips the bar, then flips forward, contorting her body. On the transition, her hand slips; the audience GASPS.

ANGLE BACK ON Terrance, maintaining equanimity -- *that's why the net is there*. But when he glances O.S., he goes panic-stricken.

From his POV: we see one of the ropes has become loose.

Above, Theresa extends her other hand, can't quite reach.

In SLOW MOTION, she lets go -- silence envelops the arena.

TERRANCE (V.O.)

They say in the Gospel of Matthew, the Devil told Jesus, "Throw yourself down. For He will command his angels, and they will lift you in their hands, so you will not strike your foot against stone."

Terrance hurtles forward in desperation. He's ten feet away. Five. Reaches out...

TERRANCE (V.O.)

Weird thing was...

INT. CIRCUS TRAIN - BACK TO PRESENT

ON Terrance, buried in the memory.

TERRANCE

(to O.S.)

...he told me somethin' completely different.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: he's speaking to a befuddled TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOY.

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD

Uhh, you said you needed to talk to me about my work?

Terrance snaps from the troubled reverie.

TERRANCE

Right, yeah. Far as your contract, entertainment breeds a system of meritocracy. And when you're cuttin' excess, first place you look is the bottom row.

(extends hand)

What I'm trying to say is: while we appreciated your service here with the Regal Circus Company, as of today, your employment's no longer.

His hand hangs there for a beat, waiting to be shook.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

(still to O.S., re: hand)

Go on. And while I can't pay for your cab fare, I feel your experience here the past few weeks was truly invaluable. Hope you look at it that way, too.

ANGLE BACK on the boy, unsure what just hit him.

TITLE CREDITS.

EXT. CIRCUS TRAIN - CAT CAR - DAY

We're looking at a LION named Samson, lazily flicking his tail. An amber-haired 22-year-old, JAY REGIS, enters FRAME in double denim, reaching his hand through the cage.

NATHAN (O.S.)

Here for labor work?

Jay turns to see a man on crutches, NATHAN TOLLIVER (30s), addressing him.

JAY
Yes, sir. I'm Jay Regis. I--

NATHAN
-- S'go.

Jay retrieves his SUITCASE and follows.

INT. TERRANCE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Cigarette smoke hazes the air. Terrance has his feet up on the desk. As Jay settles into the seat where the boy was just fired:

TERRANCE
Felony or misdemeanor?

JAY
What's that?

TERRANCE
Come through that door, means
others are burning down behind ya.

JAY
Oh, I'm clean -- honest. I know
the ad said labor work, but I'm
here to be a performer.

TERRANCE
What's your act?

JAY
Well... I mean, I've always been a
performer.

TERRANCE
Regurgitation ain't an act. Though
maybe these days...

JAY
It needs some time, but I can help
wherever you need me. I worked for
the city every summer, so I'm
versatile.

TERRANCE
Another way of sayin' you ain't
good at any one thing.

JAY

Well I was the best athlete in my class. I played wide receiver. Shortstop. Lead in three school plays. Mister Leason said I was the best Biff Loman he--

TERRANCE

-- Everything come outta you in past tense?

Jay's face shows a tinge of crimson.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Look, I get it, you were featured in the yearbook. But if you're here for the conversation piece, there're better ways. We're still getting up on our feet around here, and I need everyone down there in the trenches with me.

JAY

(resolute)

Then I'll stack sandbags until I hear the whistle to send me over the top.

This amuses Terrance, who takes another drag.

TERRANCE

Real tactician, are ya?

(then)

Tell you what: I'll give you a two-week trial period. We'll give you a place to sleep, no pay. You can help set up tents, whatever else we might need. End of the two weeks comes, you prove your worth, we'll talk about a working wage. Settled?

EXT. TERRANCE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nathan waits by the tracks as Jay and Terrance exit.

TERRANCE

(to Nathan, re: Jay)

He needs a look around the bunker.

NATHAN

(to Jay)

Ten minutes, meet me back here.

JAY
 (re: suitcase)
 Actually I'm all set.

NATHAN
 Well go check the tracks for
 dynamite or something.

Jay crosses away, suitcase in hand. As he goes:

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 Awfully arrogant to bring your shit
 to the interview.

With Jay out of hearing, Nathan looks up at Terrance.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 Beaux said we're headed to Oregon
 now? Could've just sprayed mildew
 on your bunk, it'll give the same
 effect.

TERRANCE
 Small town Oregon's where the money
 is.

NATHAN
 Better hope so. I've seen the
 numbers.

TERRANCE
 They don't tell the whole story.

NATHAN
 Well... Bank seems to think they
 do.

Nathan produces a letter from his pocket.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 Lucas left this. Probably thought
 it was a medical bill -- rare time
 it wasn't. Says loan payment's
 due. Do we got any shot at four
 grand by Monday?

TERRANCE
 (looking away)
 S'not a problem.

NATHAN
 I know we've been operating an inch
 left of bankruptcy.
 (MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So fill me in, or I tell all these people you're leading 'em straight off a cliff.

Terrance checks for eavesdroppers, then:

TERRANCE

(admitting)

Between us? It's gonna be tight. Between us. Crew finds out, panic sets in, not gonna help anybody. We get to Oakridge, everything's red-line. Put on our best show, sellout our product. And we'll be alright.

Nathan nods, askance.

NATHAN

Yeah, sounds like you got it all figured.

(tossing letter over)

You need me, I'll be in the crow's nest of the Titanic, tying cinderblocks to my feet.

EXT. CIRCUS TRAIN - LATER

The train is stationed, bordering fields of tawny grain. Nathan leads Jay down the tracks--

NATHAN

This ain't like of one those big operations where grunts and talent are segregated. We only got four performers, so everybody's gotta chip in.

JAY

(re: O.S.)

She's the animal trainer, right? I saw her earlier.

As they pass, we see inside a chic SLEEPER CAR (velour couch, mauve-painted). MAGGIE MAYNOR (the trainer), mid 20s, freckles, is unpacking a suitcase. Anna, the ring leader, brushes her hair at a gold-trimmed vanity.

NATHAN

Ahh, suppose that's her official title.

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Terrance keeps her around 'cause she doesn't mind cleaning up animal shit. Invaluable quality as any.

JAY

Who's the duchess?

NATHAN

That'd be Anna Oswell. Wouldn't get any ideas, though. She's the type of girl you buy breakfast, next thing you know you're not invited to lunch.

They reach a CAR second to the front.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And on that note...

Jay steps forward, SLIDES OPEN the door to reveal his CAR: it's a COT and a DESK. Jay pulls himself up, looks it over.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So, whaddya think?

Jay catches an effluvium, spots red stains on the hardwood.

JAY

Is that blood?

NATHAN

Yep. This beauty was an old stock car seized by the government as part of a human trafficking investigation. Probably a few hundred cattle took a bullet to the dome right on this very spot. Anyway, we got it on a discount.

(then, gesturing to pilot car)

But before you settle, there's one last person you should meet.

Jay hops down, they continue on.

JAY

(re: crutches)

You sprain your ankle doing acrobatics or something?

NATHAN

Got polio. Acrobatics of a sort.

JAY
I didn't know people still got
that.

NATHAN
Yeah, well, typhus was already
taken.

They reach the ladder leading to the pilot car.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
(re: ladder)
Which leads me to my enemy. You go
ahead. Not gonna wanna watch me
scale this. It sorta resembles
horse insemination.

INT. PILOT CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Manning the controls is a corpulent man with a thick,
straggly white beard, BEAUX TUMMS (late 50s). Jay and Nathan
beside him.

BEAUX
(shaking Jay's hand)
Very good. Beaux. Glad to get
another man like you aboard.
(looking Jay over)
Yuh. Good energy about ya. Ever
worked a show before?

JAY
(shaking head)
Always seemed like my type of
vocation.

BEAUX
Oh, you'll love it. You joined at
just the right time, too, Oakridge
is one of my favorites. They got
this bar along the main street -
three stories with a pole goin'
down the center.

NATHAN
Sounds like you got soused and
wandered into a fire station.

BEAUX
Buddy of mine and I went on a
fishing trip. You'll see once you
get there.

(MORE)

BEAUX (CONT'D)

I swear to ya, boys, there's a
Heaven on earth, and who knew it
was this far west of Mississippi?

SMASH TO:

EXT./ESTAB. OAKRIDGE, OREGON - MORNING

SUPERIMPOSE: OAKRIDGE, OREGON - 1963

We're looking out at the paragon of idyllic small town
America: crisply-painted storefronts demarcate streets
teeming with PEDESTRIANS as boat-sized VEHICLES pass. In the
distance, smoke billows from a LUMBER MILL. We hang here for
a beat, noticing the energy, the gaiety, the warmth.

Then, we RAPIDLY TIME-LAPSE: drab suits become jeans and neon
shirts, cars grow slimmer. But more noticeably - buildings
decay, streets thin out and grow sordid. Activity at the
mill ceases. We slow to NORMAL SPEED. The once flourishing
town is now squalid.

On-screen text transitions to read: OAKRIDGE, OREGON - 1981

NATHAN (O.S.)

Well, shit.

REVERSE TO REVEAL Nathan, Jay, and Beaux on the train station
platform, looking out over the dismal scene.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Who woulda guessed a town whose
sole economy ran on the lumber mill
wouldn't last?

BEAUX

(to Jay)

I'll show you to the trucks, kiddo.

(re: Jay's suitcase)

That all you brought? What about
the weekend sportcoat?

JAY

(shrugs)

Never really saw the point in
accumulating things.

Beaux smiles at him, nods.

BEAUX

Zeus energy. Like it. Some might
not understand, but that's okay.

INT. CARGO TRUCK - MORNING

LUCAS, 16, black, drives. He wears football pants and a t-shirt (and will continue to do so) for reasons later explained. Anna is in the middle, Terrance shotgun.

TERRANCE
(noticing O.S.)
What's with the decor?

BULLET SHELLS are scattered across the floor of the cab.

LUCAS
I guess they rented it out to a Reserve Base or something. I don't know -- Oscar booked it.
(rubbing his forehead)
My migraines won't go away. They didn't take the first two credit cards...

TERRANCE
(snapping)
Anna doesn't wanna hear about that.

ANNA
Actually, I'd genuinely like to know where we stand.

LUCAS
Well, I talked to the dude in parks about pre-sales.

TERRANCE
Luc, we're good. Numbers get tossed around--

ANNA
-- I said I'd like to hear.

Terrance shuts up, stares out the window. Lucas continues on, oblivious to his boss's discontent.

LUCAS
Well, the guy told me six hundred. But Rhett was the one in charge of the ad. He should've come to me.

ANNA
Six hundred dollars? Is that all? Terrance, does that sound right?

We follow Terrance's gaze to see the truck pass a few decrepit HOMES, separated by rusty chainlink fences. A stray DOG wanders.

TERRANCE
 (still looking out window)
 Liquor sales oughta be up. We'll
 set general admission at ten.

LUCAS
 The flyer says six.

TERRANCE
 And when they get to the gate,
 they'll pay ten. It's four bucks,
 or a crying kid. What do you think
 they're going with?

LUCAS
 (re: road ahead)
 Man, this shit...

We ANGLE THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD to see traffic has stopped up ahead. A DUMP TRUCK is pulled onto the shoulder, and a slew of TRASH BAGS and DEBRIS have spilled onto the street. PEDESTRIANS have gotten out of their cars to rubberneck as the DRIVER clears the detritus; it's clear it will take a while.

Lucas slows.

TERRANCE
 Let's go on then. Got to get there
 quick.

Lucas checks his side mirror.

LUCAS
 I don't know if this thing's
 capable of making three-point
 turns.

TERRANCE
 No, pull around these cars and go
 ahead.

LUCAS
 There's--

TERRANCE
 (volatile)
 -- Dammit, Luc, what's so hard?!
 Hit the gas and go around!

LUCAS
There's people--

TERRANCE
-- You think they're gonna play
martyr?! Jesus Christ. You listen
when I tell you what to do.

Lucas takes a beat, then pulls into the left lane. The truck ACCELERATES ahead, bystanders parting to let it pass. Lucas winces as we hear a few CRUNCHING noises via the debris.

OUTSIDE THE TRUCK

We see a trash bag get lodged between the tire and the wheel well.

INSIDE

Terrance shakes his head, checks his watch.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
Can't afford to dissipate. It's
red-line schedule. Get there,
games set up...

Lucas struggles with the steering wheel.

LUCAS
This piece of junk, dude.
Should've just rented a boat.

He THRUSTS the gas a few times.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
I don't-- can you see--

He glances down at the gas pedal.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, we see the truck start to veer into the oncoming lane.

TERRANCE
Luc! Watch the road!

Luc sees the impending danger. Furiously jerks the wheel to the right.

OUTSIDE

The bag of debris dislodges. The truck swerves violently, and off the road... where it COLLIDES head first into a tree.

INSIDE

Lucas sits mortified at the wheel.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
You gotta be shittin' me.

Terrance notices Anna's head leaned against the dash, hair obscuring her face.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
Anna, you alright? Lucky this
thing can't reach top speed.
(beat, then)
Anna?

Anna slowly leans back. She parts her hair, revealing a gash on her forehead. Blood flows in a steady stream.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

NINE-YEAR-OLD TERRANCE rides shotgun. Marvel consumes his face as iridescent lights reflect off the windshield. The car stops. He rushes to exit--

EMMITT BARCLAY (O.S.)
(stern)
Hold up.

REVEAL Terrance's father, EMMITT BARCLAY (late 20s, earnest), behind the wheel.

EMMITT BARCLAY (CONT'D)
Watch the door on your way out.

Young Terrance nods, chastened.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

We see a three ring TENT, with a sign that reads: "RINGLING BROTHERS." Terrance slows along the midway, gawking at the sights. Eventually, he realizes his father is beelining ahead, so he runs to catch up.

INT. RINGLING BROS CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

Young Terrance and his father sit in the nosebleeds, waiting for the action. Terrance appraises his father, who glares onward, steely.

After a few beats, a BAND TUNES, three CLOWNS enter the ring, juggling.

Terrance's eyes light up. He takes this in, then glances back up at his father, expecting the same austerity as always. But they lock eyes, and as they do, Terrance recognizes a foreign joy.

EMMITT BARCLAY
Pretty cool, huh?

Emmitt hands his son a TICKET STUB. Terrance admires it, then delicately places it in his pocket for safekeeping.

EXT. EMPTY FIELD - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

CLOSE ON Terrance, ruminating.

NATHAN (O.S.)
Heard they put up the caution flag
on accounta' your understudy. He
doing alright?

WIDER: Nathan stands nearby as Terrance stakes down a canopy.

TERRANCE
(still hammering)
He's fine. Anna's got a cut across
her forehead -- Beaux said he can
cover it.

NATHAN
So here we lie, blood pooling
around us. You think we'll get
cremated? Or will Barnum take us
back in their graces?

TERRANCE
Least the furnace'd have the
thought to acknowledgement me.

NATHAN
I get it -- I got a bone to pick,
too.
(under breath)
Luggage would always end up in the
freak show pile.
(short beat, then)
So what do we do about Luc?

TERRANCE
Cut his pay already. Told the truck
company the damage was done by the
Army base previous.

NATHAN

Nice, well, as much as I appreciate desecrating our country's heroes, it's not what I meant. I get you're trying to take him under your wing and all. And the year he's had? God bless him. But we can only cover the engine with so much tape.

TERRANCE

(looking up)

When I go, they can do whatever they want with my body, but Luc's gonna have something left behind.

NATHAN

(beat, then)

This ain't you bill to pay, man. Never has been. And we both know I'm only confirming your thinking.

Terrance, stone-faced, simply resumes his hammering.

INT. ANNA'S TENT - DAY

Anna, bandage on her forehead, sits in an opulent chair, reading Scott Fitzgerald's "This Side of Paradise". Like her train car, the tent is a luxurious blip among the fledgling circus.

We hear kids RUN BY just outside, causing the vestibule flaps to drape open.

ANNA

There's somebody in here! Hello!
 (beat, then, calling off)
 Well don't just leave it exposed!
 If you...

But they're gone. She SCOFFS, irritated she should have to close the aperture herself.

As she moves towards the opening, we see a dropped FLYER. She picks it up, surveys.

The header reads, "THE REGAL CIRCUS COMPANY. PERFORMING SATURDAY AND SUNDAY NIGHT. GATES OPEN AT 5PM. MAIN SHOW STARTS AT 7PM. FOLLOWED BY WHAT THE DAYTON DAILY NEWS CALLS 'A GRANDEUR FIREWORKS DISPLAY THE WHOLE FAMILY WILL ENJOY. YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS IT!'".

The bottom of the flyer reads, "HEADLINED BY OUR MAGNIFICENT RINGLEADER - THE DAZZLING ANNA OSWELL." The image laid underneath is a caricature of Anna, accentuating her features: high cheek bones, sharp jawline, hair flowing in layers.

Anna scrutinizes the depiction, then espies her reflection in a mirror: eyes puffy, forehead swollen. She drops her sight line, unable to bear her affliction.

INT. MESS TENT - LATER

In the background, the "BIG TOP" has nearly been erected. Nathan and Jay sit shoulder-to-shoulder at a too-small picnic table, eating alongside the crew.

NATHAN
(re: crowded table)
Never said it was a pavilion.

Jay sees Lucas filling a plate, still in his football pants.

JAY
(to Nathan, re: Luc)
Are we playing the Jets later?

NATHAN
I don't know, don't make eye contact.

Beaux squeezes beside them, wearing full clown makeup.

BEAUX
This trip turned into one hell of a dud, boys. Went down to where the warehouse used to be, but it burned down apparently. And from its ashes... a Mervyn's. Can you believe it?

NATHAN
Small towns everywhere've had the allure rubbed off. Survived the Industrial Revolution, but turned out to be the freeways that got 'em.

BEAUX
It's not the town. It's the time.

JAY
Things will work out. It's like Knievel says, "There aren't any problems in life, just situations."

BEAUX

Where you from, anyway, kiddo?
Sure I can figure the number of
stoplights.

JAY

Bellevue. It's a suburb.

BEAUX

Yeah... I bet you look out the
window and see a cloudless sky.

Beaux forlornly stands, heads for the buffet line.

JAY

What'd I do?

NATHAN

Ah, he clings onto every kid that
comes through here. Then one day,
he wakes up, remembers the time.

JAY

Does that happen a lot? With the
turnover?

NATHAN

(shrugs)

Lotta people want the show, but not
the parts before or after.

Jay can tell he's not getting the whole truth, so he presses--

JAY

Yeah, well, I'm here for the long
haul. Sold my car, just so I'd
have walking-around money. Cut the
lease at my place even.

Nathan stiffens, clearly uncomfortable, and not doing well to
hide it.

JAY (CONT'D)

Yep... gave away everything so I'd
finally have something. Told my
parents I wouldn't be back for the
holidays, withdrew from classes--

NATHAN

-- Okay, stop stop stop. I get
what you're aiming at.

(beat, then)

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Look, you seem like a good kid, so I'll do you this service: if you can do anything else, have any other skills, I'd go do that. Laborers never have a long tenure here. Terrance hands out a trial period, then lets 'em walk. Gets some free labor, then does it all over again. Sorry to tell ya. But better you know now: you're just here to change furniture.

This lands on Jay. And just like that - distress swarms the place confidence once stood.

EXT. MENAGERIE TENT - AFTERNOON

Beneath a canopy is the circus' caged lion. In b.g., a HORSE and CAMEL are hitched to a pole. Maggie is there, trying in vain to corral three PIGLETS. She DIVES at one, arms spread, but it evades her. Terrance marches by, stops at the sight of the swine.

TERRANCE

Dammit, Maggie, what'd I say?!

MAGGIE

This is different -- I found 'em.

TERRANCE

Where? At the Elks Club, lookin' for work?

Maggie's eyes find her shoes.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Maggie, tell me you didn't steal these pigs.

MAGGIE

(timid)

Well... what happened was, I took a truck from the station and saw a farm on the way in. I just, y'know, was gonna ask for tips in case I ever got any of my own. But they didn't look like they was being looked after, so...

TERRANCE

(caustic)

Great. And you think they're gonna eat free?

Maggie didn't consider that. Searches for an out--

MAGGIE

Well, maybe-- y'know, maybe if I train 'em right well, they'll earn their keep.

TERRANCE

You haven't-- look, they got a six month shelf life of having charm, before livin' out the rest of their days vile. And we only come around but once a year. One night folks ain't thinkin' about the bills they can't pay. When I see pigs, I think of shit.

Maggie looks down at the piglets, who have temporarily calmed.

MAGGIE

Okay. Well how 'bout I try an' train 'em, and if nothing comes of it, we sell 'em to a butcher? You'll admit a good breed pays.

Terrance SIGHS. She's not getting it, but he's got more salient issues, so he simply walks away.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

(to piglets)

Y'all hear that? Ya better get it together quickly.

Anna darts over, using a hand to conceal the cut on her forehead. She sees the piglets, plugs her nose.

ANNA

God, what a fetid stench.

MAGGIE

(looking down at pigs)

Maybe if I put little overalls on 'em...

(then, noticing)

You alright? I heard about the wreck. You been crying?

ANNA

(defensive)

No! It's a new style of makeup. I can see what you think of it.

MAGGIE

Oh, it's just... smeared is all.

ANNA

You'd know if you'd read "Cosmo".
Jaclyn Smith was on the cover.

MAGGIE

(means nothing to her)

Oh.

ANNA

Listen, something's come up -- an
item needs to be obtained, and I
would appreciate if you were to
fetch it. It'll be in the
Russian's trailer. Naturally, I
can't be seen dealing with it.

MAGGIE

Uh, alright... well what is it?

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - LATER

Terrance squints to study a clear, slightly turbid liquid
inside a MASON JAR held by VASILY KOLENCHENKO, 60s, thinning
white hair. Lucas stands off to the side.

VASILY

(Russian accent)

I told you, it strongest I make.
Two shots, stars arrival.

TERRANCE

(still examining)

Yeah, I think I can see 'em.

Terrance hands the jar to Lucas.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

There's a bar along the main
street. I need you out front,
offering a shot to anyone headed
inside. You tell 'em to come on by
the fairgrounds, we'll sell it by
the batch. You handle that?

LUCAS

(nods)

I got it. And earlier, I meant to
tell you, but the pedal felt slick,
so...

TERRANCE
 We press on, right?
 (nodding to door)
 Now don't come back till every town
 drunk's redirected.

Lucas exits. Terrance turns to Vasily.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
 Water it down. Need people to come
 through multiple times. We'll
 start it twelve a shot.

VASILY
 I sell this to teenage kids
 already.

TERRANCE
 That's fine, means more'll be
 coming. And for the rest of the
 day, I want you producing as much
 as possible. Need every ounce
 moved this weekend. Wheat ain't
 exactly been fruitful this year,
 and Tsars are coming along to
 collect payment.

EXT. MIDWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lucas grips the mason jar tight, weaves through the booths
 and canopies, eager to rectify his earlier mishap. Nathan
 sees him running, calls out:

NATHAN
 Passing out mail, Walter Payton?!

Lucas halts.

LUCAS
 I don't know who that is.

NATHAN
 Did you grow up under a power line?
 I had my hospital bill go to the
 wrong location.

LUCAS
 I dropped everything. If it wasn't
 there, it never came.

NATHAN
 Yeah, given your history, you could
 see how I'd be unconvinced.

LUCAS

I dropped what I had, man. There's like six buildings in town -- I'm sure one of 'em says "post office" down the side.

NATHAN

When'd you learn to talk back?

LUCAS

(re: mason jar)
I gotta handle this for T.

As Lucas dashes away:

NATHAN

Luc, buddy, c'mon--

But he's already gone. Nathan tosses his head back in frustration.

EXT. VASILY'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

A Ford Shasta CAMPER is parked in the field, cordoned off on all sides by canopies.

We see a HAND emerge from the sunroof and place a MASON jar filled with clear liquid on top. Maggie then pulls herself up, stands. She spots something O.S., drops to her stomach. A beat later, Vasily enters FRAME, opens the door to the Shasta, revealing a COPPER STILL within. Maggie stealthily crawls to the back of the camper. She descends the ladder, drops to the earth, and dashes away.

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - DUSK

Terrance has his feet up on his desk, stumps out a cigarette.

TERRANCE

(to O.S.)

Lucas ran us into a tree today.
Anna sittin' in the middle. One
twist of the wheel and everything
I'm trying to rebuild nearly out
the window.

(short beat, then)

Gotta believe me when I say I'm
doin' my best to raise him as my
own, but this motherfucker's makin'
it difficult. No offense.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: he's speaking to a framed photo of himself with his arm around Theresa, the trapeze artist from the open.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

And now it appears we're mountin'
the final steps up to the gallows.
You met anyone with some pull up
there, I'd say now would be a good
time to exonerate our sentence.

(deep breath, then)

Anyway, I miss ya. If we're due
for a big night, don't say nothin'.

ANGLE ON the photo for a beat. BACK ON Terrance.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

(shrugs; as he rises)

You say so.

The aperture of his tent opens; Jay enters.

JAY

Where you got me batting tonight?

TERRANCE

Can't deal with this now.

JAY

I was practicing juggling earlier.

TERRANCE

Ain't you hear me?

JAY

Sure, I did. Heard about the terms
of your labor contracts, too.

Terrance flashes a quick glance, knowing he's caught.

JAY (CONT'D)

That's not how it's supposed to be.

TERRANCE

Always gonna be kids who think this
is what they want, till they done
it.

JAY

(indignant)

Have you *seen* me working? This is
it for me. I gave up every--

TERRANCE

I don't have to the money to pay you! Got me?! This isn't what you think it is! You got big dreams? Hollywood's callin'. Least there you'll be freeloadin' next to an ocean breeze.

A beat as Jay takes this in, then:

JAY

(resolved)

You know, you were right earlier -- I've been thinking a lot about the past. And the last year and a half, you know what I felt? Nothing. I see the tracks, at the end of which is a few hours to myself on Sundays. And I'm not there yet. I'm just not there. So I'm getting a contract here. I have to earn it? Fine. But two weeks is gonna come, and you won't find a more valuable employee.

TERRANCE

Think so?

JAY

I know it.

TERRANCE

Well 'til that day comes, can you at least let me be? If I need stakes planted, I'll find you. Circus is in town, and it's time to get goin'.

Terrance strides past Jay.

EXT./ESTAB. CIRCUS - ENTRANCE GATE - DUSK

Opening time. A film of canted light filters through the tree line, rendering the tents lucent. At the gate, a flashing "REGAL CIRCUS" sign welcomes a modest stream of TOWNSFOLK.

EXT. CIRCUS - CARNIVAL GAMES AREA - LATER

Flashing lights, CALLIOPE MUSIC, and the smell of hay. We FIND Nathan beside a bucket toss game, where an inebriated HIGH SCHOOL KID (wearing a way-too-small Letterman's jacket) tries to win a prize for his GIRLFRIEND.

NATHAN

(to kid, re: jacket)
Holy smokes, what's the goal here?
Auto asphyxiation?

HIGH SCHOOL KID

(slurred)
I don't even know what that is.

NATHAN

Yeesh. Noticed no Honor Roll
patches on your sleeve.

HIGH SCHOOL KID

Whatever, tough guy.
(facing target)
I got this lined up.

NATHAN

Yeah, surely range of motion won't
be an issue.

The kid makes his first throw, which comes up short.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Ohhhh, just off. Maybe try your
dominant hand.

The kid goes to take off his Letterman's.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Oh, see that was the problem! No
way he misses now.

The kid shoots again; it goes wide.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Yikes! You feel that pressure
mounting?! You had one job, bucko.
(re: his girlfriend)
She came to the circus with the
idea plastered in her mind of
walking away with a stuffed animal.
You really gonna ruin that for her?

HIGH SCHOOL KID
You're lucky I don't jaw you right now.

NATHAN
There we go. On the ropes and the petulance starts brimming.

The kid tries to ignore Nathan. He shoots for the final time. It HITS the center of the bucket and ricochets out.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Dammit, 'O' for three! But I tell you what: I can see how bad you want it, so I'll give you another five for four bucks. How's it sound?

HIGH SCHOOL KID
It sounds like you've been talking shit for too long with no one saying anything about it.

The high school kid takes a belligerent step towards Nathan.

NATHAN
Hey, I'm not the one missing shots with prizes on the line--

Suddenly, the high schooler stops, leans forward... and THROWS UP all over the ground. The surrounding bystanders repel.

From where he stands, Nathan examines the clear liquid on the ground, sniffs, then:

NATHAN (CONT'D)
(disconcerted)
Did a Russian guy sell that to you?

INT. ANNA'S TENT - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Anna's sickly face. She ducks out of frame.

REVEAL Maggie next to her, holding a bucket to VOMIT into.

MAGGIE
Aw, rats. I saw Vasily pulling bottles of river water outside Reno. I told him he ain't oughta. There was soot floating all over the surface, and I saw diapers on the bottom.

ANNA

(through coughs)

You have to tell Terrance I can't go on.

MAGGIE

Me? I don't know. That news ain't gonna sit well comin' from me.

ANNA

No one can see me like this. It's unbecoming.

MAGGIE

Well, how am I supposed to go about it?

ANNA

I'm not available. That's all him or anyone else needs to know. And no one can see me. Not now. Not like this...

Anna buries her head in her hands. Off Maggie's building anxiety--

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Maggie bursts in. Terrance and Nathan, who were clearly discussing the high school kid incident, hush at the sight of her.

TERRANCE

(to Maggie)

Unless the horse is mid-labor, it ain't a good time.

MAGGIE

Uhh, well... I just come to tell ya Anna can't go up tonight.

TERRANCE

Bullshit.

NATHAN

(slightly after
Terrance)

Is she sick?

MAGGIE

I ain't at liberty to say. And you shouldn't bother going over there 'cause she's sealed in from the inside. Point is, she's out of commission.

TERRANCE
Maggie, I need you to look at me
right now. What's the problem?

Maggie fidgets with her hands.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
Maggie...

MAGGIE
(head down, timorous)
She ain't feeling right.

Terrance POUNDS the desk.

TERRANCE
Goddammit!
(short beat, then, to
Maggie)
And how'd she get her hands on the
firewater anyhow, errand girl?!
Vasily knows better!

NATHAN
What's the play?

TERRANCE
Anna was the play!

Terrance takes a beat to compose himself.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
And now...
(trails off)

He takes a beat, calculating--

CUT TO:

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Young Terrance, still around age nine, is dressed in all
black, studying something O.S.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: an easel displays a portrait shot of his
father in a military uniform, set up next to a COFFIN.

LAWYER (O.S.)
Terrance?

A middle-aged LAWYER proffers a SMALL BLACK BOX.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

I'm in charge of organizing your father's estate. I'm to inform you this afternoon we'll have a reading of the will. But he set this aside -- with very clear instructions. Wanted to hand deliver it to you personally.

Terrance accepts the box.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, son. Me, along with everyone in the community. If you need anything, anything at all, please don't hesitate to reach me.

Terrance flips open the lid: a DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL is displayed inside.

INT. TERRANCE'S HOME - DAY (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

Still in funeral attire, Young Terrance sits on his bedroom floor, medal in hand. He pulls a SHOEBOX out from beneath his bed, opens it, and places the medal within. As he does, we see one other item: the ticket stub from their night at the circus. Vestiges of his father.

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - BACK TO PRESENT

ON Terrance, still picking up the pieces.

TERRANCE

(to Nathan)

Check on Anna. If she's disposed...

(thinks, then)

They'll be at the gate demanding refunds if we give 'em twenty-five minutes. Kid we just brought on thinks he's got talent.

NATHAN

Still don't have a ringleader.

TERRANCE

I can't do it -- ain't got the optics. Neither do you.

(looks at Maggie)

Neither does she.

(to Maggie, raising voice)

(MORE)

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

And I would find some other place
to be.

Maggie, head still down, scurries out of sight.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

(to Nathan)

Find someone to host, I'll talk to
the All-American.

As they exit:

NATHAN

Spent a lotta time around him
already. If he doesn't pull
something off, self-belief won't be
the reason.

TERRANCE

Just need the brink of danger.
People didn't stop showing 'cause
of the fall. They stopped showing
'cause we no longer had anything
death-defying.

As Nathan walks away:

NATHAN

I'll see if they can fit all that
on the marquee.

INT. POPCORN BOOTH - LATER

Jay stands behind the counter. He has a handful of plastic
knives, and practices THROWING them against the back wall.

One of the knives gets stuck. As he goes to retrieve it, he
hears NONDESCRIPT VOICES on the other side of the canvas. He
pulls the knife free, peers through the hole:

Vasily is there, opposite a few TEENAGE GIRLS. Jay watches
as they hand him cash. Vasily then surreptitiously
distributes MASON JARS containing minuscule amounts of a
clear liquid.

BACK ON Jay, whose brow furrows.

TERRANCE (O.S.)

Got any pointers for him, Biff?

Jay turns to see Terrance just outside the tent.

JAY
 (appalled)
 You know about it?

TERRANCE
 I know the price of transgression.
 And the stuff we sell, they'll pay.

JAY
 Those girls are like thirteen!

TERRANCE
 You're fond of your schooling. How
 much you think we're making?

JAY
 What-- how about the kid that gets
 fucked up and drives off the road?!
 What about that?! I mean, what are
 we doing here?! Where's the
 ethics? Values?

TERRANCE
 For what? To help you sleep?

Terrance SCOFFS, takes a beat, seemingly looking through Jay.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
 Yeah... I bet you spent your whole
 life being told how to behave. A
 part of you kept tucked away, just
 so you may hear those sacred words:
 that "you're okay." But guess what?
 That part of you -- it's still
 there. Hidden in the dark, just the
 same. But the thing about the
 circus? Everywhere you look,
 there's light.

Jay looks at him like he's insane.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
 So you want this to be any more
 than fleeting, you got ten minutes
 in tonight's show to prove it.
 (off Jay's shock)
 Opening act, one hour.

Terrance walks away.

We stay ON Jay - his righteousness having been leapfrogged -
 knowing this is his shot.

EXT. BEHIND THE POPCORN BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Terrance approaches Vasily as the teenage girls skulk off.

TERRANCE
How we doin'?

VASILY
Not many sale.

TERRANCE
(incredulous)
I've seen kids stumbling all over
the place.

VASILY
Kids, yes. Adult? Not yet.

TERRANCE
Damn. We need the watering hole
committee.
(thinks)
You seen Luc?

EXT. BAR - LATE AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Lucas solicits outside the bar, jar of moonshine in hand.

BAR OWNER (O.S.)
Help you with somethin?!

LUCAS
Shit.

Startled, Lucas drops the mason jar; it SHATTERS.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
Shit!

He hovers over the fallen glass for a moment, then flees the scene.

EXT. ANNA'S TENT - NIGHT

Nathan tries to peel open the aperture, but it's tied shut.
He looks down:

The tent wall hangs six inches above the dirt. Nathan SIGHS,
sets his crutches aside.

NATHAN
 (to himself)
 This is how I go out, huh. Feet
 up, petering out like a turtle...

He awkwardly falls forward, strains to look underneath:

INSIDE we see Anna passed out on the couch, her complexion
 ghastly. There is vomit on the floor next to her.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 (beat, then)
 Yikes.

INT. MENAGERIA TENT - NIGHT

Maggie continues her effort to train the piglets.

MAGGIE
 Stay. Stay there. Hold on-- stay.
 No. No. No, listen to me.

They nose around, impervious to her commands.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
 (sighs)
 If this has anything to do with the
 butcher comment earlier, I told
 you, I couldn't be more sorry.
 Don't know how else to say it.

Jay rushes over, wide-eyed.

JAY
 Have you seen any acts that don't
 require a lot of prep time? I get
 to perform tonight, but I got
 nothing.

MAGGIE
 I don't-- maybe you could do the
 cloud swing...? Er, no, rats.
 Think we mighta sold the swing.

JAY
 What about-- what about when they
 hold onto that frame and swing
 another person around?

MAGGIE
 Cradle? Right, well, you could
 try, if you had another person.

He looks directly at her. After a beat, she clues in.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Well I can't do it!

JAY
I'll just swing you around.

MAGGIE
I can't.

JAY
Of course you can.

MAGGIE
I can't go out there in front of
those people. Look at me.

He does. He sympathizes for her - how she sees herself.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Doesn't have to be all cannons and
whistles, anyway.

JAY
But that's what people remember.

MAGGIE
(under breath)
Don't I know it...

Jay spots a wire, supporting a nearby tent.

JAY
What all do you need to walk the
tightrope? Balance? Mettle?
(convincing self)
I can do that. Easy... People
sitting in bleachers can't dismiss
someone standing on a wire, right?

MAGGIE
(beat, then, genuine)
Don't you know how scared you're
supposed to be?

EXT. VASILY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Nathan evaluates Vasily, who reads off CUE CARDS.

VASILY
(monotone)
Good eve.
(MORE)

VASILY (CONT'D)

Thank you for come to show. It is
delight. Our next act is total
scream.

(checks cue card)

Costume change.

NATHAN

You don't have to read the part in
parentheses, but by all means, you
can wear Anna's outfit if it feels
right.

(then)

Think you're ready.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT

Sparsely occupied portable BLEACHERS surround the ring.
Beaux, the opening act, has just finished. Vasily takes the
center, microphone in hand. He wears faded jeans and a
stained grey long-sleeve shirt, as if he wandered down from
the crowd.

VASILY

(reading from card,
monotone)

Thank you, truly. That was clown.

ANGLE ON Terrance, watching from the edge of the tent.

TERRANCE

(to himself)

Christ's sake.

Terrance spots a nearby STAGEHAND on a ladder, securing a
WIRE into place.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

(to stagehand)

Draw that up three feet higher.

STAGEHAND

You sure? Any higher, he falls,
could do real damage.

TERRANCE

(beat, then)

Yep.

The stagehand gives a peculiar look, then obliges.

VASILY (O.S.)

Now onto stage...

(trails off)

ANGLE ON Jay, waiting in the wings for the rest of his introduction, which never comes.

In b.g., we see Vasily walk off. Jay uses this as a cue to climb a fifteen-foot LADDER to a hanging ROPE.

He gets to the top rung, but his foot can't reach the now-raised wire. He stretches, grasps it in both hands, and pulls himself up.

He struggles to stand for a beat. Finally, he starts across, the first few steps slow, trying to gain balance. His knees shake, but he remains upright. His arms are out to either side.

Another few steps. A DRUNK HECKLER JEERS. He looks straight ahead, finding a spot on the wall on which to fixate.

He's a third of the way across. One step at a time.

A few beats. Halfway across. Picking up speed, gaining confidence.

Then, three-quarters of the way... he oversteps. Sways a little, and grabs the rope to steady himself.

The CROWD laughs. After a beat, he clammers forward, hunched over, more timid than before.

He's ten feet away. Five. And with a final lunge... he's done it. It was far from graceful, but he's reached the other side.

He puts a hand to the wall, turns, and looks out to the audience when he realizes: no one cares. There's a perfunctory smatter of APPLAUSE, and that's it. All around, bored faces. He does a half-bow, then climbs down, eager to get out of sight.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Nathan huddles inside, phone to his ear, letter in hand.

NATHAN

(into phone)

Hey, yeah, I'm calling about this payment that's coming due. The hospital told me I'd receive the invoice in the mail, but I never got it.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
 (through phone)
 What's the address on the account?

NATHAN
 P.O. box 3445. Redding,
 California.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
 Okay, and you said the account
 ended in "4494"?

NATHAN
 (checking letter)
 Uhhh, yep, that's what it says. I
 just don't wanna get screwed here.
 I mean, if it's an administration
 problem, I shouldn't have to pay.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
 Okay, so it's showing an
 outstanding balance of zero on my
 end. The most recent payment was
 made via credit card on May 28th.

Nathan, nonplussed, thinks for a beat.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
 Sir? Does that sound right?

NATHAN
 Yeah-- I just-- can't remember.
 What was the name on the card?

CUT TO:

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - SAME TIME

Terrance mopes inside, collapses onto his chair. He drops
 his head into his hands.

TERRANCE
 (to himself, plaintive)
 This is really how it ends, huh...

He regards the framed photo of him and Theresa.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)
 I screwed it all up, T. Led by
 instinct, and wound up here. Last
 place you or I wanted to be.

Terrance rubs his forehead, reaches for a cigarette, but the pack is out. He opens his desk drawer, pauses.

ANGLE INSIDE, where the shoebox from his childhood sits.

He opens it, empties out the ticket stub and medal. Eyes them both. Gets an idea.

EXT. MIDWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jay wanders upstream through the throng, despondent. He notices someone ahead, and flickers with hope.

We see it's pretty BLONDE WOMAN, 22, walking towards him. He smiles on her approach... but she continues past.

His ego's in free fall. He looks around, searching, as he melts into the crowd.

INT. ANNA'S TENT - LATER

A gaunt Anna lets Maggie inside, then crumples back onto the couch. Sweat pours down her brow, hair mussed.

MAGGIE

How you feeling?

ANNA

(sullen)

Do you see how I look?

MAGGIE

I don't know. You always look pretty to me.

Somehow this makes Anna angrier.

ANNA

I can't believe this happened to me.

Maggie steps over to a bucket.

MAGGIE

This one ready to go?

(sees contents of bucket)

Whoa, who knew your stomach could fit that much in there?

ANNA

Did they continue with the show?
I've heard hardly a blip.

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

Not that I can gauge much over the sound of my own composition failing me.

Maggie sits on a wingback CHAIR facing Anna.

MAGGIE

Yeah, it's a light crowd. Think it'll be even emptier tomorrow. Not much appeal without the star attraction.

Anna scrutinizes Maggie. Then:

ANNA

You know, though I'm sure it's never been expressly stated, I am rather envious of you.

MAGGIE

(diffident)

Me? What for? I've been tossin' vomit all day, and it ain't even the foulest thing.

ANNA

Oh, but you embrace yourself completely. Absent a veneer. Not on the outside looking in, like the rest of us.

MAGGIE

(perplexed)

I don't... know who else I could be?

Beat. Anna appears aloof, speaks in a disembodied cadence--

ANNA

It's alluring, isn't it? Clinging on to your place in the world. Safe, at the very least. But lately I've begun to think... holding on really affords you nothing more than decorum.

MAGGIE

I'm not sure you're feelin' right.

ANNA

And you know what? I'm tired. Tired of expending all this energy propping up something tangible as mist. There's something about that. There's something there.

Maggie's at a loss.

ANNA (CONT'D)

But therein lies the dilemma,
doesn't it? Because as enervated
as I may be... I'm also afraid.
For what if a light's shone, and
people tell me it's not quite
right... because that's not how it
was before.

MAGGIE

I do know what it's like for people
not to think you're living how you
oughta.

Anna looks directly at her. The spell comes to an end.

ANNA

I shouldn't have treated you this
way. The way I have. After all,
you're the only one who truly knows
me.

Maggie drops her head, bashful.

MAGGIE

Oh. Well, thanks for saying that.
Glad you can trust to count on me.

They smile at each other.

ANNA

Thank you for coming, dear Maggie.
For taking care of me, nights
hitherto this one.
(short beat, then)
Now... could you please remove that
bucket? The smell is making me
nauseous all over again.

EXT./INT. MENAGERIA TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Maggie, with a newfound air of dignity, saunters towards the canopy.

UNDERNEATH

She stops; her smile abruptly dissipates.

MAGGIE

Aw, shoot.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: the lion cage is empty, door left ajar.

INT. BIG TOP - SAME TIME

KIRA, an 18-year-old Japanese-American girl, is in the center of the ring, balancing on three CHAIRS stacked on top of each other. The scattered crowd comes alive with MARVEL for the first time all evening.

She bends at the knee, and, with ineffable grace, JUMPS from the top chair, and sticks the landing. She takes a bow to moderate APPLAUSE. Some stand. A few drunks WHISTLE. As she walks off we hear:

VASILY (O.S.)

Thank you for come to show. Now
there is great firework display. I
need fifteen minute. Then...
explosion.

IN THE WINGS

From behind, we TRACK with the circus' lion (Samson) as he plods toward the ring.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL Samson's being led on a LEASH, only a few feet of leather separating him from Jay.

Crowd members point in awe as Jay, STOOL in one hand and BRANCH in the other, guides Samson to the center of the ring.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

Terrance is half-cast in shadows, standing between two cars. There is a MAN opposite him, of whom we only see their silhouette. We discern a stack of cash exchanging hands. Terrance takes a beat, then reaches into his pocket. We see a flicker of gold as far-off light catches on the medal. But before Terrance hands it over...

There's an explosion of FUROR from the big top. Terrance's head whips in that direction.

INT. BIG TOP - MOMENTS LATER

Jay finds his mark. Takes a quick glance around, notes the building intrigue. His heart rate jumps, adrenal glands fire.

He sets down the branch. Then, carefully brandishing the stool, he leans forward, unhooks the leash. Samson doesn't flinch.

Jay backs away. Six feet now between them, he stops, retrieves the branch.

There are several beats, then Samson simply lies down, indolent.

Jay doesn't know what to do - he figured he'd be fighting for his life about now. Another few beats.

Eventually, he prods the branch out, poking Samson's front paw. Some JEERS reign down from the stands, egging the beast on. Samson responds with some lazy swipes, then lays down.

JAY

Come on, these people are here to see you. Give me something. Anything. This is gotta be--

Samson is jabbed on the shoulder; responds with a GROWL.

JAY (CONT'D)

-- There we go. Come on... Here we go...

Another prod. Another SNARL - this one with more bite behind it. Samson gets to his feet.

ANGLE ON the crowd: a KID SHRIEKS.

BACK ON Samson, who's drawn to the sound. It's like he notices the audience for the first time. He trudges off to his right, directly towards the kid.

We see Terrance duck under the canvas wall.

TERRANCE

Jesus fu--

BACK ON Jay. He sprints over, heads Samson off. He TAPS the branch on the dirt, redirecting the lion's attention.

Samson unleashes a ROAR, lowers himself to pounce. In a flash, he SPRINGS forward. Jay holds the stool to ward off the attack, shifting his body out of range of a SWIPING PAW. Samson angles to the left, faces up.

As Jay backs away, he notes crowd members pointing at him. And that's when he sees it: a claw from the previous assailant has pierced his forearm, leaving BLOOD spewing. The SOUND OF THE CROWD dulls.

Blood now drips down onto Jay's shoes. We see a flicker of uncertainty cross his face. As he circles, he picks up Vasily in the wings, CIGARETTE dangling from his mouth. Light glints off something in the Russian's right hand... and we see he's raised a PISTOL to his side. Recourse is a finger-twitch away.

But then... the ROAR OF THE CROWD CASCADES back in. And we see the realization hit Jay: this is it. What he's feeling right now. The adrenaline. Attention of the masses. This is where he's meant to be. So he shakes his head at Vasily, calling him off.

BACK ON Samson, who CHARGES. This time, Jay sidesteps out of the way like a matador, gaining confidence.

They circle for a beat. The lion SALLIES again. Jay holds firm, maintaining the stool barrier.

Finally, Samson shows his teeth. GROWLS with primal ferocity... and Jay knows he's done enough. It's time to live to see another day. He sets the branch down, produces the leash.

Samson doesn't move, continues to leer.

JAY

Alright, buddy. We had fun, but that's it. I'm sorry I had to badger you, but I needed this. You probably don't know it, but you needed it, too.

Samson feints a CHARGE. Jay jerks backward. More CHEERS.

JAY (CONT'D)

Okay... okay. It's time. Alright? It's time. I get it. I get it. But you eat me, not gonna be a good ending for either of us.

(displaying leash)

So I'm gonna put this shit on you. Then we'll go back and get you something to eat. Alright? And you don't have to be put down or sold to some asshole in Texas. Sound okay...?

Jay cautiously half-steps forward, stool ready. Samson relents a bit. Jay's four feet away... three... two... If Samson wanted, this could be it. Jay reaches out with the leash, SNAPS it on, then quickly backpedals away. The audience CRESCENDOS.

JAY (CONT'D)

(to Samson)

Thank you.

(deep breath)

Thank you.

ANGLE ON the same blonde woman in the stands, who walked by Jay earlier, not giving him the time of day. She smiles down at him. They lock eyes - the fondness is requited.

EXT. BIG TOP - MOMENTS LATER

Jay walks Samson along the same path he took post-tightrope, but this time the throng parts to let him pass. All eyes are upon him. People CLAP, CHEER. KIDS watch in amazement.

INT. MENAGERIA TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Maggie sits on the ground, head between her knees. Jay enters, Samson in tow. She looks up with an ambivalence of confusion and relief.

MAGGIE

What the heck are you doing?! What happened?!

JAY

Told me he needed a walk.

MAGGIE

And here I was, thinking I held the door open to a massacre!

JAY

I would've been victim number one, if it makes you feel any better.

As Jay guides Samson back into his cage:

MAGGIE

How is that supposed to make me feel better?!

Terrance rushes over. Jay dips his head slightly, knowing the euphoria is about to be tempered.

TERRANCE

Beast of prey with a clear shot to the audience?! There were kids sitting in the goddamn front row!

MAGGIE

(to Jay)

You performed with him?

TERRANCE

Performed ain't the right word for it. He volunteered himself to be ripped tendon and bone. In my show!

JAY

(head down, hushed)

I didn't--

TERRANCE

-- Dirt ain't got any answers for you!

JAY

(little louder)

I held him at bay. Crowd appreciated it.

TERRANCE

Seven years I worked to set up my own shop. Everything I ever owned, invested in this. Six months -- treading water. And all that nearly thrown out in the last fifteen minutes. 'Cause of you. 'Cause your ego couldn't handle the thought of takin' a back seat.

Beat. Terrance's voice lowers, but the intensity remains--

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

So here's what's gonna happen: you finish out your two week trial pro bono like we agreed. We purchase a chainlink cage that'll come out of your first week's pay. And from now on, every night you'll go up for ten minutes. I expect you training every day -- that branch shit ain't gonna cut it. I'm talkin' polished. And as long as you hold your own... you got a job. So congratulations. Not gettin' your head ripped off is your new vocation.

Terrance spots the piglets in a cage nearby, SQUEALING.

MAGGIE
(off his look)
I'm, uh, I'm trying to sell 'em.

Terrance shakes his head, leaves.

ANGLE ON Jay, in a state of post-tirade abashment. But after a few beats, gratification seeps in - a subtle smile forms.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(re: Jay's arm)
You alright? There's an awful lot of blood.

JAY
Yeah, it's dried mostly.

MAGGIE
I'm happy to show you a few things so it doesn't happen again. Actually a sweet soul, Samson is. Knows how to sit and stay already. Coulda showed ya, but...

JAY
I didn't have any other option. When I came over, you were gone.

MAGGIE
Oh. Right, well, I was tending to Anna.

JAY
The hot Indian chick? What's wrong with her?

MAGGIE
Uh, well, I think maybe how you referred to her might be part of the problem. She's all bent outta shape, wondering if she's alright. Weird thing was, seemed like the first time she even realized there was a question.

Over the last few words, Jay checks his arm again -- noticing new blood beginning to form.

JAY
I should probably get some alcohol on this.

MAGGIE

Beaux keeps a pack of Blue Ribbon
in the trailer. Though, appreciate
it if ya didn't tell him.

JAY

That's okay. There should be a
bathtub full somewhere.

(then)

And thanks, Maggie. Maybe tomorrow
we can start working on our act
together.

Hand on his forearm, Jay walks away. Alone again, Maggie
looks down:

Two of the piglets are asleep by her feet. The third sits
at attention, as if awaiting her behest. A brief moment of
triumph.

EXT. EDGE OF FIELD - NIGHT

Vasily has a florid entanglement of MORTARS and WICKS before
him. He notices Lucas walking by, headed for the crew tents.

VASILY

(to Lucas)

You. Come help here.

LUCAS

I can't, I got something for T.

VASILY

And I got something for you, you
don't help. Come. Now.

As Lucas mopes over:

LUCAS

That's not even how you use that
expression.

VASILY

I hear you crash car.

LUCAS

It was a truck, you idiot. And it
wasn't my fault -- the brakes
locked up.

Lucas bends down, reads off a mortar label:

LUCAS (CONT'D)
 "Property of United States Armed
 Forces"?

VASILY
 I get Army surplus. They sell
 explosive no problem. People see
 me, think I have secret Soviet
 technology. Really, it's same shit
 they used in jungle.

Vasily STRIKES two MATCHES, hands one to Lucas.

VASILY (CONT'D)
 We light same time.

LUCAS
 Is all this safe?

VASILY
 Safe? Yes. Safe.
 (as Lucas lights wick)
 Unless you're on other end.

Vasily lights a wick, then steps back and uses the same match
 to light a CIGARETTE. Fireworks SHOOT upward, a hundred feet
 in the air, and EXPLODE in a magnificent web, illuminating
 the sky.

EXT. ANNA'S TENT - NIGHT

As fireworks continue to flash overhead, Jay meanders through
 the row of tents and canopies. He glimpses inside Anna's,
 sees there's a light coming from within. He peers around,
 sees her at the vanity.

INT. ANNA'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Jay saunters in.

JAY
 Hey, do you happen to have a bottle
 of whiskey in here or something?

She shoots daggers at him through the mirror.

JAY (CONT'D)
 It's just, my arm-- I tamed the
 lion for the show, but he got a
 lucky shot in.

Still nothing, but he's undeterred--

JAY (CONT'D)

I don't know if you could hear the crowd from here. They were short on acts.

ANNA

Indeed. A screeching audience is always welcome for someone with a splitting headache.

JAY

Oh, right, sorry. I can try to tone it down next time. Have Samson fill out tax forms.

ANNA

Proud of yourself, are you?

JAY

I was.

(then)

Show took a step back without you, though. Not that Vasily didn't have the people out there sweating.

ANNA

Vasily hosted? You're joking.

JAY

It wasn't bad. His commentary on the Soviet-Afghan War seemed a little one-sided, but other than that...

A meager smile from Anna. Jay walks deeper into the room, sits on her chair.

JAY (CONT'D)

You're Osage, right? Isn't that the tribe that dug up all the oil?

ANNA

(nods)

Seeped from our bountiful land of forced relocation.

JAY

So does that make you rich then?

An extended beat as ambivalence sears through Anna, tugging in either direction. Before she can respond--

MAGGIE (O.S.)

How'd it come, findin' that bottle?

ANGLE ON Maggie, hovering in the opening to the tent, looking down at her shoes.

JAY
Uhh, yeah, no luck yet.
(glances at Anna)
Still looking.

INT. TERRANCE'S TENT - SAME TIME

Terrance sits at his desk, pouring over numbers. Nathan limps in.

NATHAN
Everyone was pretty fired up about the lion tamer. Tomorrow's ticket sales up two-hundred percent. Means we should hold off the bank another month.

TERRANCE
Always had an eye for talent.

Nathan sits at the table across from Terrance.

NATHAN
We get Anna back in the right mind, those two might keep us afloat for a little while. Maybe.

TERRANCE
That's the goal, ain't it? Hold your position till it's safe to take the next trench?

NATHAN
Guess I'm only wondering how long till gangrene sets in, and the rats have their way.
(patting legs)
Already got their start on some of us.

TERRANCE
We survived another day. What else you want from me?

NATHAN
What were you doing out in the parking lot earlier?

Terrance silences, clenches his jaw.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

All the years I've known you, never
seen you leave a show in progress.

A beat. Then, Terrance retrieves the shoebox from the desk
drawer, holds it open for Nathan.

TERRANCE

Was buying antibiotics... stave off
your gangrene.

Nathan's eyes narrow, bemused.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Medal my father left me. For his
time in Italy. Anzio. Figured I'd
pawn it for a couple hundred.

NATHAN

You serious? A family heirloom?
You can't put a price on that.

TERRANCE

Sure you can. Mine was five-
hundred.

(short beat, then)

Only held onto it 'cause that's
what you're supposed to do. When
he got back, he found life so
futile, didn't see the point in
living it. Left me with two
memories.

(holds up medal)

This one's of a lead box.

NATHAN

But you didn't sell.

TERRANCE

Not yet. Maybe I'll add a new
association. Like how close we got
to this all going to shit.

NATHAN

Certainly warms my heart. Or maybe
you were waiting to see if my
insurance would accept the medal as
payment.

They lock eyes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You shouldn't--

Lucas abruptly enters.

LUCAS
 (frenetic)
 Terrance? I gotta show you
 something, man. It's really heavy--

Lucas eyes Nathan, viewing his presence is an inhibitor.

TERRANCE
 You lose your way back?

LUCAS
 Yeah, there-- there was an
 accident. It wasn't my fault,
 but...

Lucas eyes Nathan again.

NATHAN
 (getting to his feet)
 Shoot, meeting of the ambulatory,
 just say so. No problem.

TERRANCE
 (to Nathan)
 Sit down.
 (to Lucas)
 What's going on?

Lucas looks around nervously, then:

LUCAS
 Well, so after the bar, I got to
 walking through town, trying to
 stir up business, you know? Spread
 the word. When I got to the police
 station, the cops asked what I was
 doing. I told 'em, and they let me
 make copies, so I could post it
 around town. And when I got in
 there, I saw another poster hanging
 up. Figured you'd want to see.

TERRANCE
 Alright. What is it?

Lucas reaches into his pocket, produces a "WANTED" poster.
 In the center is a picture, accompanied by a name: "JAY
 REGIS".

Off the guys' reactions, we go:

HARD TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT