

"Border State"

FADE IN:

EXT. HMS ORION - DECK - NIGHT

The iron hulled steam liner HMS ORION rocks in the volatile Atlantic Ocean. Titanic waves breach the deck of the ship. Rumbling THUNDERCLAPS follow flashes of LIGHTNING and a downpour of rain. The mood is frantic and the weather, hostile.

A British CREW scurries on deck, trying not to get washed overboard as they attempt to lower the sails.

SUPER:

TRANSATLANTIC CROSSING
NOVEMBER, 1860

The CAPTAIN, a weather-worn and icy man, SHOUTS orders from the helm.

CAPTAIN
Reef the sail! Reef the sail! We're
heeling port side!

A lightning bolt strikes the smaller mast at the aft of the ship. A loud CRACKING sound ripples from the wood as it begins to tilt.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Move! Move, goddammit!

Crew scrambles to avoid the falling mast as it plummets toward the deck. DECK HAND 1 slips and the mast comes crashing down on his leg. SCREAMS can barely be heard above the din.

INT. HMS ORION - CABINS - MOMENTS LATER

The America bound PASSENGERS hold on for dear life as the ship rocks. They sit on the floor with their eyes closed - many praying.

INT. HMS ORION - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Cabin doors open and SLAM shut as the ship is battered by the waves. DECK HAND 2 runs down the hall SHOUTING...

DECK HAND 2

Any doctors onboard? We need a doctor!

SAMUEL WERTHAM (23), a young man just out of medical school with smouldering eyes and an eager demeanor, on his way home to Missouri, exits his cabin and steps into the hall...

SAMUEL

I'm a doctor!

Deck Hand 2 looks Samuel over skeptically, then...

DECK HAND 2

We need you above deck sir. Got a man lodged under the mast.

SAMUEL

Under the...

Deck Hand 2 takes off down the hall at a full run.

EXT. HMS ORION - DECK - MOMENTS LATER

The storm continues to pound the deck. Crew stand around the pinned Deck Hand 1 who writhes and SCREAMS in pain. His lower leg is mostly separated from the knee. Bone protrudes from large lacerations in the skin. Blood pools beneath him. The wooden decking is beginning to crack under the weight of the large fallen mast. Captain walks calmly over to the gathered Crew as Samuel and Deck Hand 2 arrive at the scene.

DECK HAND 2

Got a doctor Captain!

The Crew waits for Captain's orders. They look jittery.

CAPTAIN

Give doctor...

Captain looks at Samuel expectantly.

SAMUEL

Wertham. Samuel Wertham.

CAPTAIN

Give Doctor Wertham whatever he needs. The rest of you, get to work cutting the mast away from the ship! We don't have much time before the deck gives way!

Crew hurry off. Some stay and wait anxiously for Samuel's orders.

Samuel freezes, years of medical training have all lead to this moment.

The Captain is impatient.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Doctor Wertham?! Doctor Wertham!

Finally, Samuel snaps into gear, giving orders to Crew.

SAMUEL
I need a length of rope and a saw... and get me some light!

The Crew scatters.

Samuel kneels by Deck Hand 1's leg. He palpates around the knee. Deck Hand 1 SCREAMS in pain.

EXT. HMS ORION - MAST BASE - CONTINUOUS

Crew take hatchets to the mast, hacking away, hoping to relieve the pressure on the deck.

EXT. HMS ORION - DECK - CONTINUOUS

Flashes of lightning show the gruesome scene more clearly. A cavernous hole is beginning to form near Deck Hand 1 as the decking starts to splinter under the mast's weight.

Deck Hand 2 returns with a piece of rope and hands it to Samuel.

Samuel ties the rope tightly around Deck Hand 1's leg, above the knee.

DECK HAND 1
Jesus, God! Please don't let me die!

SAMUEL
Don't worry. I won't let you die.

Samuel digs through his medical satchel. He pulls out a small wooden spoon and a flask.

Deck Hand 3 returns with a saw and hands it to Samuel.

Samuel hands the wooden spoon and flask to Deck Hand 3.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
 (to Deck Hand 3)
 Give him a drink then put this in
 his mouth.
 (to Crew)
 Bring the light down this way!

Crew surround Samuel, holding their lanterns high.

Deck Hand 3 pours a shot of liquor in Deck Hand 1's mouth
 then puts the spoon handle lengthwise in his mouth.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
 (to Deck Hand 1)
 Bite down on that if you want to
 keep your tongue.

Samuel takes a firm grasp of the saw and begins to cut, right
 above the knee. Blood squirts everywhere.

Deck Hand 1 MOANS before passing out.

Deck Hand 4 drops his lantern and PUKES.

Samuel points to Deck Hand 4.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
 Get him out of here! I need that
 light!

Crew escorts Deck Hand 4 away from the bloody scene.

DECK HAND 5 retrieves Deck Hand 3's lantern, relights it and
 holds it up for Samuel, shaking.

EXT. HMS ORION - MAST BASE - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN
 Goddammit! Faster! Get that mast
 free!

Crew, soaked by the storm, swing their hatchets rapidly and
 in sequence.

A large wave breeches the deck and sweeps a CREW MEMBER into
 the sea.

EXT. HMS ORION - DECK - CONTINUOUS

Beads of sweat and rain pour off Samuel's brow as he
 continues to saw off Deck Hand 1's leg. The leg finally comes
 free from the thigh.

SAMUEL

Pull him out!

Crew pulls Deck Hand 1 free of the mast. All hurry away from the hole as the Crew cuts the mast away from its base and pushes it into the sea.

Samuel sits on the deck of the ship, leaning against a wall, breathing hard. He looks down at his bloody, shaking hands and pukes.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. LOUIS MEDICAL COLLEGE - LECTURE HALL - MORNING

The small lecture hall is filled with MALE STUDENTS who listen attentively to DR. JAMES WERTHAM (44), a kind, eloquent professor and ingenious surgeon, lecture. He refers to a diagram of a leg amputation on the blackboard as he explains the procedure.

SUPER:

ST. LOUIS MEDICAL COLLEGE
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

JAMES

If touch does not suffice, and I stress as a rule, *always* palpate before cutting, then place your knife as such...

James holds an amputation knife up to the diagram to show how the knife should enter the skin. He pantomimes everything he describes.

JAMES (CONT'D)

...heel perpendicular to horizon, and edge perpendicular to bone. Then, while applying consistent pressure, move the knife in a see-sawing motion along the plane of the leg until the knife enters the joint.

In the doorway to the lecture hall the Dean of the Medical College, EUGENE GORMAN (47), a helpful and intellectually curious man, makes eye contact with James.

James nods at Eugene and wraps out his lecture.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Tomorrow I will discuss both oval and circular methods of flap preservation. I hope to see you all there. Dismissed.

James packs his notes into a leather briefcase as STUDENT 1 approaches.

STUDENT 1

Dr. Wertham, will there be an opportunity to work with a real cadaver this semester?

James shoots a look to Eugene then...

JAMES

That is still under review with the College. I suggest you get a private tutor if you are interested in laboratory work.

STUDENT 1

Do you have any vacancies sir?

JAMES

Come and see me during my office hours. We can discuss it then.

STUDENT 1

(excitedly)
Thank you sir!

Student 1 exits the lecture hall.

James begins to erase the large blackboard as Eugene approaches.

EUGENE

You know we can't have cadavers James.

JAMES

No, what I know is that the College is stuck in the 18th century. You can't teach students to be doctors without hands on experience Eugene.

EUGENE

Be that as it may, it's not Christian to chop up the dead.

James gathers his suitcase.

JAMES

But it is Christian to chop up the living?

James and Eugene exit the lecture hall.

INT. ST. LOUIS MEDICAL COLLEGE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hallway is lined with beautiful, large wooden doors. The neoclassical, federalist architecture is resplendent with warm brick and reddish brown hues. Its calm, vaulted archways give the hall space.

James and Eugene walk together through the hallway.

EUGENE

Look, I will set a conference for you to present your case to the guarantors yourself but I cannot and will not, with good conscience, advocate for it.

JAMES

Pray on it a while Eugene. Now, tonight. Seven o'clock. You're bringing Ann?

EUGENE

Yes, yes. But you must know if we don't get enough people behind your hospital idea *this time* you'll have to let it go. People just don't understand the concept and, quite frankly, I'm tired of trying to explain it to them.

JAMES

What I don't understand is why the great medical minds of St. Louis don't want to be at the forefront of innovation.

EUGENE

People are, by nature, cautious.

JAMES

No people are by nature comfortable with the status quo.

EUGENE

I've roused a few potential donors for the idea.

(MORE)

EUGENE (CONT'D)

They'll be there tonight and I assure you, they are not status quo types.

JAMES

Great. Now remember this isn't a fund raiser... at least not according to my wife.

EUGENE

Your wife is the biggest fund raiser in Missouri.

JAMES

Yes but she mustn't know that.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSINESS DISTRICT - MORNING

The business district is bustling. SHOPPERS cross to-and-fro through a menagerie of boutiques, specialty stores, and small businesses that litter the street. It's a lively affair.

SUPER:

BUSINESS DISTRICT
DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

EXT. FABRIC SHOP - CONTINUOUS

THERESA WERTHAM (32), a sexy, sharp-witted, St. Louis socialite, exits a fabric shop accompanied by her daughter ROSE WERTHAM (15), a naive and stunningly beautiful young lady. They are laden with bags which they bring to a carriage parked at the side of the road.

COACHMAN 1 steps down from the carriage to assist the ladies with their bags. As Theresa hands her bags to Coachman 1...

THERESA

(to Rose)

I must stop by the confectioners shop before we return home.

Rose hands Coachman 1 overstuffed bags filled with fabrics. She pulls out a long piece of embroidered silk from one of the bags and shows it to him.

ROSE
It's going to be a shawl when I'm
finished. You see?

Rose wraps the silk around her shoulders, smiling broadly.

Coachman 1 nods, genuinely charmed by Rose.

COACHMAN 1
Quite lovely miss.

Theresa has lost patience.

THERESA
Come along Rose.

Rose hands the silk to Coachman 1 and rushes to Theresa's side.

As Theresa and Rose continue arm and arm down the street, various SHOPKEEPERS nod at them in recognition. They nod back politely. Theresa keeps her eyes forward, searching the crowd of Shoppers for people she knows. Rose rattles on excitedly.

ROSE
I absolutely cannot wait for this evening mama. I think I shall wear my blue crinoline dress with the matching ostrich plumed hat. Or maybe the red dress with...

EXT. NATHANIEL TOOLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Theresa spots CONGRESSMAN NATHANIEL TOOLY (39), a ruggedly handsome, charming and cut throat politician, leaning in the entryway to his office smoking a cigar and TALKING with GOVERNOR MORTIMER SINCLAIR (54), a well dressed, slightly bulbous older man with an air of intensity.

A plaque next to the door reads: CONGRESSMAN NATHANIEL TOOLY
FIRST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF ST. LOUIS

THERESA
(to Rose, distractedly)
Red is for whores.

Theresa discretely eyes Nathaniel as Nathaniel's eyes move from Rose to Theresa.

Nathaniel tips his hat to the ladies.

NATHANIEL

Good morning Mrs. Wertham. Miss
Rose.

Rose smiles politely, blushing slightly. Theresa slows...

THERESA

Good morning to you Congressman
Tooly. Governor Sinclair.

MORTIMER

Mrs. Wertham.

NATHANIEL

We are looking forward to this
evening's festivities. It will
surely be the event of the year.

THERESA

You are too kind.

NATHANIEL

And do you have an escort to the
soiree Miss Rose? Surely the whole
city must be clamoring for your
good favor.

ROSE

I...

Theresa cuts Rose off.

THERESA

She is too young for gentlemen
callers. Good day Congressman,
Governor.

NATHANIEL

Good day to you both.

Nathaniel's eyes linger on Theresa as she and Rose continue
down the road and into a confectionery shop.

CUT TO:

EXT. GEORGE L. DORNER & CO. SHIPYARD - DAY

It's overcast at the shipyard and the Mississippi River is
fighting it's banks, full from yesterday's storm. A large
wooden plank swings by on a set of pullies and is lowered
onto the deck where a crew of SHIPYARD WORKERS - mostly black
men - wait to receive it.