

Ray Bradbury's BANSHEE

written by

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based on the the life and works of Ray Bradbury

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Cast of Characters

RAY DOUGLAS, a youthful, thirty-something American writer.

JOHN GREYHEART, an overbearing moviemaker, late-fifties.

FINN, a wizened, elderly lighthouse-keeper.

LEONARD MEAD, a lonely, middle-aged writer.

VOICE, a disembodied electronic policeman.

RENEE, a curvaceous nightclub dancer, mid-thirties.

SIO, an elegant adolescent Martian boy.

JACK TERWILLIGER, a prematurely balding special-effects man.

JOE CLARENCE, a short, rotund, acerbic movie producer.

MR. GLASS, a bespectacled lawyer of advanced years.

ASSISTANT, a callow motion picture production assistant.

THE WOMAN, the waifish ghost of a long deceased Irishwoman.

The play takes place in an Irish castle study, and imaginary settings: on a lighthouse rampart, on a futuristic Los Angeles city street, on a Martian desert, in a Hollywood studio screening room, and on an Irish moor.

ACT I

SCENE 1

In darkness, sound effects: rain, car tires driving on wet road, the metronome swish of windshield wiper blades.

LIGHTS occasionally sweep the stage as a VOICE OFF begins:

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

It was one of those nights, crossing Ireland, motoring through the sleeping towns from Dublin, where you came upon mist and encountered fog that blew away rain to become a blowing silence. All the country was still and cold and waiting. It was a night for strange encounters at empty crossroads with great filaments of ghost spider web and no spider in a hundred miles. Gates creaked far across meadows, where windows rattled with brittle moonlight -- It was, as they said, banshee weather.

Faintly, we hear the sound of a distant FOG HORN, then CAR SOUNDS FADE and CURTAIN UP:

A STUDY -- a large desk, two chairs, sofa, fireplace, liquor cart, rain falling on a dark window, books everywhere -- the clutter of a writer's den.

JOHN GREYHEART enters with RAY DOUGLAS, who is dripping wet, clutching a briefcase.

GREYHEART

(booming)

Good God, kid! Get that coat off. Give me the script. Finished it, eh? So you say. You got me curious. Glad you called from Dublin. The house is empty. Clara's in Paris with the kids. We'll have a good read, knock the hell out of your scenes, drink a bottle, be in bed by two and-- what's that?

Both men halt, looking back at the open door.

Dead leaves blow in with the SOUND OF WIND and, from OFF STAGE, the softest wail of a woman's voice.

WOMAN

Ohhh...

Greyheart stands, listening.

GREYHEART

You know what that is, kid?

DOUGLAS

What?

The SOUND OF WIND fades.

GREYHEART

Tell you later. Jump.

Greyheart slams the door and sets about pouring two glasses of whiskey.

GREYHEART

Off with those wet things. Let's warm you up. Sit. Drink. Give.

Douglas opens his briefcase, pulls out a wad of pages.

DOUGLAS

If you don't like it, today is my last day of employment, because I don't want to take money under false pretenses. If you don't like it, fire me.

Greyheart grabs the pages from him and immediately begins thumbing through them, sipping his drink and pacing as he reads.

Douglas drinks his whiskey too fast, coughs.

Greyheart stops by the fire.

Douglas sips his whiskey.

Greyheart reads, barks a laugh and marches to his desk. He keeps reading a moment longer and then he slaps the typescript onto the desktop.

GREYHEART

So, how are Maggie and the kids?

DOUGLAS

Oh, they're waiting for me in Sicily where it's warm.

GREYHEART

We'll get you to them, and sun, straight off! First though, I've got a wager for you.

DOUGLAS

A wager?

THUNDER, and then the wind moans softly outside.

GREYHEART

Listen, you said it best yourself: we're doing a film of a metaphor. What we're looking for are moments of truth, which will speak to the audience, so they'll know what's going on from the soul's midnight. To find those, we need to get the juices flowing, some literary calisthenics. Are you up for that? Before I start ripping you to shreds.

DOUGLAS

If you're unhappy with the new pages--

GREYHEART

The pages can wait. First, I want you to entertain me. Spin me a yarn. What was that one of yours they butchered into a monster picture? The Kraken from 20,000 Fathoms!

DOUGLAS

You saw that?

GREYHEART

Unfortunately, yes!

DOUGLAS

I didn't write that screenplay. They bought my story and slapped my name all over the posters. Four other writers--

GREYHEART

Made mincemeat out of your little piece from the Post. I know. Don't look so shocked. How'd you think I found you, laddie? C'mon, spin me that old yarn from the author's lips, and then we'll get to work.

Greyheart pulls a chair closer and sits to puff his cigarillo.

DOUGLAS

I can't recite from memory.

GREYHEART

I have every confidence in your recollection.

Douglas takes another swig of whiskey and climbs to his feet. He paces to collect himself and then faces Greyheart, who is watching him like a hawk.

The sound of wind rises, carrying with it the sound of a distant lighthouse FOG HORN.

DOUGLAS

The Fog Horn....

GREYHEART

That's the one!

LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM, leaving only Douglas illuminated.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

Out there in the cold water, far from land, we waited every night for the coming of the fog. And it came, and we oiled the brass machinery and lit the fog light up in the stone tower. Feeling like two birds in the grey sky, Finn and I sent the light touching out, red, then white, then red again, to eye the lonely ships. And if they did not see our light, then there was always our Voice, the great deep cry of our Fog Horn shuddering through the rags of mist to startle the gulls away like decks of scattered cards and make the waves turn high and foam.

As Douglas begins his story, curtain down.

SCENE 2

From darkness, the sound of the SEA
and then the mournful sound of the
FOG HORN bellows.

FINN

It's a lonely life, but you're used to it now,
aren't you?

The old man, FINN, appears holding
a lamp. Douglas joins him, dressed
in a great coat and carrying a
duffel bag.

Occasionally, a bright light from a
LIGHTHOUSE LAMP sweeps across them
at a slow, steady heartbeat pace.

DOUGLAS

Yes, I am. And you're a good talker, thank
the Lord.

Douglas sets down his duffel, and
Finn his lamp.

FINN

Well, it's your turn on land tomorrow to dance
the ladies and drink gin.

DOUGLAS

What do you think about, Finn, when I leave
you out here alone?

FINN

On the mysteries of the sea.

The men stare out to sea. The fog
horn bellows.

FINN

The mysteries of the sea. You know, the
ocean's the biggest damned snowflake ever? It
rolls and swells a thousand shapes and colors,
no two alike. Strange. One night, years ago,
I was here alone, when all of the fish of the
sea surfaced out there. Something made them
swim in and lie in the bay, sort of trembling
and staring up at the tower light going red,
white, red, white across them so I could see
their funny eyes. I turned cold. They were
like a big peacock's tail, moving out there
until midnight. Then, without so much as a
sound, they slipped away, the million of them
was gone. I kind of think maybe, in some sort
of way, they came all those miles to worship.

DOUGLAS

Strange.

FINN

But think how this tower must look to them, standing seventy feet above the water, the God-light flashing out from it, and the tower declaring itself with a monster voice. They never came back, those fish, but don't you think for a while they thought they were in the Presence?

The fog horn blows.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

We looked out at the long grey lawn of the sea stretching away into nothing and nowhere.

FINN

Oh, the sea's full. For all our engines and so-called submarines, it'll be ten thousand centuries before we set foot on the real bottom of the sunken lands, in the fairy kingdoms there, and know real terror.

Douglas sees the old man's eyes are fixed out to sea.

FINN

Think of it, it's still the year 300,000 Before Christ down under there. While we've paraded around with trumpets, lopping off each other's countries and heads, they have been living beneath the sea twelve miles deep and cold in a time as old as the beard on a comet.

DOUGLAS

Yes, it's an old world.

FINN

Douglas, I've got something special I've been saving up to tell you.

Douglas watches as Finn works a control that causes the lighthouse lamp to dim. The fog horn blows.

FINN

Sounds like an animal, don't it? A big lonely animal crying in the night. Sitting here on the edge of ten million years calling out to the Deeps. I'm here, I'm here, I'm here. And the Deeps do answer, yes, they do. You been here now for three months, so I better prepare you. About this time of year, something comes to visit the lighthouse.

DOUGLAS

The swarms of fish, you said?

FINN

No, this is something else. I've put off telling you because you might think I'm daft. But tonight's the latest I can put it off, for if my calendar's marked right from last year, tonight's the night it comes.

DOUGLAS

What comes?

The fog horn blows.

FINN

I won't go into detail, you'll have to see it for yourself. Just stay with me one more night. If you want, tomorrow you can take the motorboat into land and get your car parked there at the dinghy pier on the cape and drive on back to some little inland town and keep your lights burning nights. I won't question or blame you. It's happened three years now, and this is the only time anyone's been here with me to verify it. You wait and watch.

DOUGLAS

How long has this been happening?

FINN

One day many years ago a man walked along and stood in the sound of the ocean on a cold sunless shore and said, 'We need a voice to call across the water, to warn ships; I'll make one. I'll make a voice that is like an empty bed beside you all night long, like an empty house when you open the door, and like the trees in autumn with no leaves. A sound like the birds flying south, crying, and a sound like November wind and the sea on the hard, cold shore.

The fog horn blows.

FINN

'I'll make a sound that's so alone that no one can miss it, that whoever hears it will weep in their souls, and to all who hear it in the distant towns. I'll make me a sound and an apparatus and they'll call it a Fog Horn and whoever hears it will know the sadness of eternity and the briefness of life.'

DOUGLAS

Is any of that true?

FINN

Nope. I made up that story to try to explain why this thing keeps coming back to the lighthouse every year. The fog horn calls it, I think. And it comes...

DOUGLAS

But--

FINN

Hush! There!

Finn points out to sea. The fog horn blows.

DOUGLAS

Great God in Heaven.

Douglas reaches in his duffel, pulls out a pair of binoculars and stares out at the sea.

DOUGLAS

I see it!

FINN

Of course you do.

Douglas lowers his binoculars.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

You couldn't see far and you couldn't see plain, but there was the deep sea moving on its way about the night earth, flat and quiet, to color of grey mud, and here were the two of us alone in the high tower, and there, far out at first, was a ripple, followed by a wave, a rising, a bubble, a bit of froth.

The fog horn blows.

FINN

What did I tell you?

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

And then, from the surface of the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-colored, with immense eyes, and then a neck. And then, not a body, but more neck and more!

(MORE)

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

The head rose a full forty feet above the water on a slender and beautiful neck. Only then did the body, like a little island of black coral and shells and crayfish, drip up from the subterranean. There was a flicker of tail. In all, from head to tip of tail, I estimated the monster at ninety or a hundred feet.

Douglas backs away.

FINN

Steady, boy, steady.

DOUGLAS

It's impossible!

FINN

No, Douglas, we're impossible. It's like it always was ten million years ago. It hasn't changed. It's us and the land that have changed, become impossible. Us!

The fog horn blows.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

It swam slowly and with a great majesty out in the icy waters, far away. The fog came and went about it, momentarily erasing its shape. One of the monster eyes caught and held and flashed back our immense light, red, white, red, white, like a disc held high and sending a message in primeval code. It was as silent as the fog through which it swam.

Douglas gasps and cowers in fear.

DOUGLAS

It's a dinosaur of some sort!

FINN

Yes, one of the tribe.

DOUGLAS

But they died out!

FINN

No, only hid away in the Deeps. Deep, deep down in the deepest Deeps. Isn't that a word now? A real word. It says so much: the Deeps. There's all the coldness and darkness and deepness in the world in a word like that.

DOUGLAS

What'll we do?

FINN

Do? We got our job, we can't leave. Besides, we're safer here than in any boat trying to get to land. That thing's as big as a destroyer and almost as swift.

DOUGLAS

But here, why does it come here?

The fog horn blows.

The monster answers.

Transfixed, Douglas rejoins Finn at the parapet.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

It was a cry across a million years of water and mist. A cry so anguished and alone it shuddered in my head and my body. I saw the monster open its great toothed mouth and the sound that came from it was the sound of the Fog Horn itself. Lonely and vast and far away. The sound of isolation, a viewless sea, a cold night, apartness. That was the sound.

The fog horn blows.

The monster roars again.

FINN

(a whisper)

Now, do you know why it comes here?

Douglas nods.

DOUGLAS

I know.

FINN

All year long, that poor monster there, lying far out, a thousand miles at sea, and twenty miles deep maybe, biding its time, perhaps a million years old, this one creature. Think of it, waiting a million years; could you wait that long? Maybe it's the last of its kind. I sort of think that's true.

The fog horn blows.

The monster replies.

FINN

Anyway, here come men on land and build this lighthouse, five years ago. And set up their Fog Horn and sound it and sound it out towards the place where you bury yourself in sleep and sea memories of a world where there were thousands like yourself, but now you're alone, all alone in a world that's not made for you, a world where you have to hide. But the sound of the Fog Horn comes and goes, comes and goes, and you stir from the muddy bottom of the Deeps, and your eyes open like the lenses of two-foot cameras and you move, slow, slow, for you have the ocean sea on your shoulders, heavy. But that Fog Horn comes through a thousand miles of water, faint and familiar, and the furnace in your belly stokes up, and you begin to rise, slow, slow.

The fog horn blows.

The monster answers.

FINN

You feed yourself on minnows, on rivers of jellyfish, and you rise slow through the autumn months, through September when the fogs started, through October with more fog and the horn still calling you on, and then, late in November, after pressurizing yourself day by day, a few feet higher every hour, you are near the surface and still alive. You've got to go slow; if you surfaced all at once you'd explode. So it takes you all of three months to surface, and then a number of days to swim through the cold waters to the lighthouse. And there you are, out there, in the night, the biggest damned monster in creation. And here's the lighthouse calling to you, with a long neck like your neck sticking way up out of the water, and a body like your body, and most important of all, a voice like your voice. Do you understand now, Douggie, do you understand?

The fog horn blows.

The monster replies.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

I saw it all, I knew it all -- the million years of waiting alone, for someone to come back who never came back. The million years of isolation at the bottom of the sea, the insanity of time there, while the skies cleared of reptile- birds, the swamps dried on the continental lands, the sloths and sabre-tooths had their day and sank in tar pits, and men ran like white ants upon the hills.

The fog horn blows.

The monster wails.

FINN

Last year, that creature swam round and round, round and round, all night. Not coming to near, puzzled, I'd say. Afraid, maybe. And a bit angry after coming all this way. But the next day, unexpectedly, the fog lifted, the sun came out fresh, the sky was as blue as a painting. And the monster swam off away from the heat and the silence and didn't come back. I suppose it's been brooding on it for a year now, thinking it over from every which way.

The fog horn blows.

The monster answers.

FINN

That's life for you. Someone always waiting for someone who never comes home. Always someone loving some thing more than that thing loves them. And after a while you want to destroy whatever that thing is, so it can hurt you no more.

DOUGLAS

It's coming towards us!

FINN

Let's see what happens.

Finn steps away, into darkness, leaving Douglas alone and terrified on the parapet. A moment later Finn reappears, and Douglas realizes the fog horn has been silenced.

DOUGLAS

Oh, no...

The monster roars, raging.

DOUGLAS

Finn, switch it back on! Switch on the horn!

The monster roars again and, with a MIGHTY CRASH OF MASONRY, all light is suddenly extinguished.

In darkness: the monster wails.

FINN

Listen. Listen.

Finn illuminates his gas- lamp, revealing him cowering beside Douglas, their eyes raised skyward in fear.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

We stumbled and half fell down the stairs, hid there in the cellar, and then we began to hear it. First a great vacuumed sucking of air, and then the lament, the bewilderment, the loneliness of the great monster, folded over upon us, above us, so that the sickening reek of its body filled the air, a stone's thickness away from our cellar. The monster gasped and cried. The tower was gone. The light was gone. The thing that had called it across a million years was gone.

The monster wails, once, twice, retreating.

FINN

No!

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

And the monster was opening its mouth and sending out great sounds, the sounds of a Fog Horn, again and again. And ships far at sea, not finding the light, not seeing anything, but passing and hearing late that night must've thought: There it is, the lonely sound, the Lonesome Bay horn. All's well. We've rounded the cape.

The sound of waves slowly fades.

Douglas realizes that Finn is weeping.

The old man turns away, and
extinguishes his lamp.

SCENE 3

From darkness:

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

The sun was hot and yellow the next afternoon when the rescuers came to dig us from our stoned-under cellar.

Curtain up reveals Douglas standing in the study, Greyheart viewing him from his chair.

GREYHEART

What happened to the lighthouse?

DOUGLAS

It fell apart, is all. That was Finn's story. We had a few bad knocks from the waves and it just crumbled. There was nothing to see. The ocean was calm, the sky blue. The only thing was a great stink of algae that covered the fallen tower stones and the shore rocks. There were a lot of flies buzzing about, but the ocean was empty. By November next year, they had built a new lighthouse. I drove down alone one evening. They had a new horn sounding out there.

GREYHEART

And the monster?

DOUGLAS

It never came back. Gone back to the Deeps to wait another million years.

GREYHEART

Finn?

DOUGLAS

Apparently, he's still out there, but I didn't see him that day. I just sat there listening to that fog horn, wishing there was something I could say.

Greyheart stubs out his cigarillo, finishes his whiskey and gets up to pour another.

GREYHEART

I can see why they needed four screenwriters to make sense of that. Where'd your monster spring from? You got something against lighthouses?

DOUGLAS

No, a while back, Maggie and I lived in Venice Beach, California.

GREYHEART

Not Venice, Italy?

DOUGLAS

We were very poor, in a thirty bucks a month apartment near where the old Abbot Kinney Pier burned down. One evening, we were out for a walk and we saw the ruins of the old roller-coaster lying in the sand. I said to Maggie, 'I wonder what that dinosaur was doing lying there on the beach.'

GREYHEART

Hm. How about another?

DOUGLAS

Oh, no, thanks. I'd like to--

Douglas reaches for his briefcase, but Greyheart fills both their glasses and resumes his seat.

GREYHEART

No. I demand satisfaction. Another story, if you please. This time, how about we make it a bit more original? Do you have one in you that I haven't heard before?

Douglas laughs, but then he realizes that the old man is not kidding.

DOUGLAS

You know, John, even Weird Tales magazine paid five bucks a story.

GREYHEART

Well, you're not writing for Weird Tales magazine any more, son. You and me, we're about to harpoon one of the greatest literary epics of the English language. Give me another tale, and make it a good one. Thrill me with science.

DOUGLAS

I do have a new collection--

GREYHEART

Already read it.

DOUGLAS

I have a story that didn't make the cut. It was too taboo.

GREYHEART

You got my interest. What's it called?

DOUGLAS

The Love Affair.

GREYHEART

Needs a new title.

DOUGLAS

The Martian Love Affair.

GREYHEART

Better.

DOUGLAS

Glad you approve.

GREYHEART

Watch it, kid. It's going to be a long night.

Lightning flickers through the window and THUNDER CRASHES as the curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE 1

Curtain up on a red-rock Martian desert. RENEE -- a shapely woman in sunglasses, sun hat and sarong -- strides out with a beach bag and a small folding sun-bed. She picks a spot, strips down to her bikini, and then settles back to attend to sun cream and a paperback book.

Douglas appears, downstage, reading from his notebook:

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

All morning long the scent was in the clear air of cut grain or green grass or flowers.

SIO, an adolescent Martian boy, appears on a nearby rock. He is only subtly alien in his appearance, slender, golden-eyed, dark-skinned, carrying a canvas satchel. He sniffs the air savoring the Earth woman's scent. Sio is enamored. Renee is unaware.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

Sio didn't know which it was, he couldn't tell. He would walk down the hill from his secret cave and turn about and raise his fine head and strain his eyes to see, and the breeze blew steadily, raising the tide of sweet odor about him. It was like a spring in autumn. He looked for the dark flowers that clustered under the hard rocks, probing up, but found none. He searched for a sign of grass, that swift tide that rolled over Mars for a brief week each spring, but the land was bone and pebble and the color of blood.

Sio cranes his neck skyward and hunkers down in fright, ducking out of view. Renee removes her sunglasses, looks around her, and then squints skyward into the sun. She stands to watch an object, high up, passing overhead.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

He watched the sky and saw the rockets of the Earthmen blaze down, far away, near the newly building towns. Sometimes, at night, he crept in a quiet, swimming silence down the canals by boat, lodged his boat in a hidden place, and then swam, with quiet hands and limbs, to the edge of the fresh towns, and there peered out at the hammering, nailing, painting men, at the men shouting late into the night at their labor of constructing a strange thing upon this planet.

Renee sits up and waves feebly at the sky. She appears disappointed, adjust her bikini. Sio peeks out, fascinated by the woman's pale white body.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

He would listen to their odd language and try to understand, and watch the rockets gather up great plumes of beautiful fire and go booming into the stars; an incredible people.

Renee gives up with her book and glances round, making sure she is alone. Sio ducks out of sight. Renee folds flat her sun bed, unfastens her bikini bra strap and lays front down, with her naked back exposed. Sio takes great interest. He sniffs the air, drinking in Renee's scent.

Renee dozes in the sun.

The Martian rises from his hiding place. From his satchel, he takes out a Martian flower. Cautiously, he takes a step toward Renee.

The woman's PHONE STARTS TO RING. Sio drops the flower in fright and leaps silently away.

Renee recovers a tiny telephone from her beach bag and answers the annoying device.

RENEE

Hello? Janice? Oh my gosh, baby doll! No, no, just stretchin' out, catchin' some sun, you know?

RENEE (CONT'D)

What a hell-out-of-the-way place you sent me up to! I know, honey, a vacation. But it's sixty miles from nowhere. All I do is play cards and swim in the damned canal.

As she listens to her phone, Renee notices the discarded flower. She wraps herself in the sarong, and picks up the strange bloom.

RENEE

I can't stand it here, Janice. I know, I know. The churches. It's a damn shame they ever came up here. Everything was going so nice. What I want to know is when do we open up again?

Renee returns to her sun bed, replaces her hat and speaks out the corner of her mouth as she lights a cigarette.

RENEE

No, Bucky's gone for three more weeks so a girl needs something to occupy her mind. Why don'cha come on out an' keep me company? I got a case of wine an' all the dehydrated food you can eat. You'll love it! Say, just the other mornin' I took a hike out in the mountains and you never guess what I found. Caves all over. Paintings, too. Bucky said they found a whole Martian city across the way. Cathedrals made of glass, all crumblin' to dust. Can believe that?

Renee puffs on her cigarette, twirls the Martian flower in her fingers.

RENEE

Well, Janice, who's afraid of any Martian? How many are left, a dozen, two dozen. Line 'em up, bring 'em on. Right? Right! I'm not afraid of living out here alone.

Renee tosses the flower and laughs.

RENEE

God, Janice, but how soon? What about the other girls? What about the other towns? All of them closed down? On the whole damn planet? There must be one place! If you don't find a place for me soon, I'll...

Renee reacts to a call waiting signal.

RENEE

Oh, baby doll, that's Bucky on the other line. They got him ship-to-shore, I gotta take this. Okay, honey. Love you, too! Don't be a stranger!

Renee toggles her phone, stubs her cigarette, and instantly turns on the charm to her boyfriend.

RENEE

Well, how is my big man...?

As Renee coos and purrs into the phone, she packs up her belongings and makes her way offstage.

LIGHTS FADE, leaving just Sio's rock illuminated.

SCENE 2

Sio climbs into view from behind the rock and perches on top with his satchel. From his bag he produces a series of human artifacts: an empty can of peaches, a dusty Coca-Cola bottle, a page of faded newsprint 'Atomic War on Earth!'

He sets down each item like treasure, and then takes out one last piece: a toy rocket. He marvels at the shape and holds it up against the sky before settling down to eat berries and mossrocks from his satchel.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

Sio did not blame the Earthmen. It had been an accidental thing, the disease that had burned his father and mother in their sleep, and burned the fathers and mothers of great multitudes of sons. Since the invasion and the disease, he had slowed to stillness. His universe was sunken away by death. The sawed and hammered and freshly painted towns were carriers of disease. The weight of so much dying rested heavily on his dreams. Often he woke weeping and put his hands out on the night air. But his parents were gone and it was time, past time, for one special friend, one touching, one love.

Sio reacts to a soft breeze and pauses to sniff the air. Then he hears MUSIC, like a small orchestra playing, coming up through the narrow stone valley to his cave.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

There it was again. That strange aroma. That sweet, drifting scent of compounded flowers and green moss coming from a small house that the men of Earth had built for an archeological crew, a year ago. It had been abandoned and Sio had crept down to peer into the empty rooms several times, not entering, for he was afraid of the black disease that might touch him. But now, there was the woman, the woman who swam naked in the canal, and she was dancing.

A new spotlight finds Renee in her negligee, dancing, after a glass or two of wine. Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie play 'Ain't Misbehavin' on her record player.

Sio is entranced. He makes his way down from his rock to approach the house, moving with the stealth of a panther.

Renee whirls about. She sings to the ceiling, snaps her fingers, puts out her hands, like birds, flying, and dances around the floor.

Sio watches from a distance, half crouched, entranced.

Renee dances past Sio, without seeing him, encircles him, almost touches him. Sio shrinks from her touch, afraid, but she is oblivious as the music transports her. When Renee finally moves away from him, Sio scuttles back to his rock.

MUSIC FADES and light dims on Renee, leaving Sio alone, shaken by the encounter. He hurriedly packs away his belongings, and tries to settle down to sleep.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

It was not good, leaving the cave where he had often lived as a child. In that cave he had found for himself a dozen hobbies, developed a hundred tastes. He had hollowed a kiln in the rock and baked fresh cakes each day, of a marvelous texture and variety. He had raised grain for food in a little mountain field. He had made himself clear, sparkling wines. He had created musical instruments, flutes of silver and thorn-metal, and small harps. He had written songs. He had built small chairs and woven the fabric of his clothing. And he had painted pictures on the cave walls in crimson and cobalt phosphorous, pictures that glowed through the long nights, pictures of great intricacy and beauty. And he had often read a book of poems that he had written when he was fifteen and which, proudly, but calmly, his parents had read aloud to a select few. It had been a good existence, the cave, his small arts.

Light brightens as dawn breaks over the desert, and Sio wakes from a restless night. He stretches, peers out, and is surprised at what he sees.

Renee is curled up, sleeping just below, an empty wine bottle nearby. She stirs and stretches, but turns over in her sleep.

Sio watches her fearfully, trying to summon the courage to approach her.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

He sat in the mouth of the cave for an hour, as the moons set and the dim sun rose, and he could smell her breath, that breath of smoking promise, of warm words heated in her mouth. And at last he thought, I will go down and speak to her very quietly, and speak to her every night until she understands what I say and I know her words and she then comes with me back into the hills where we will be content. I will tell her of my people and my being alone and how I have watched her and listened to her for so many nights....

Sio carefully climbs down and surveys the sleeping woman. He almost touches her.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

But she is Death.

Sio shivers, pulls away.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

How could he have forgotten? He need only touch her hand, her cheek, and he would wither in a few hours, a week at the latest. He would change color and fall in folds of ink and turn to ash, black fragments of leaf that would break and fly away and turn in the wind. One touch and... Death.

Sio stands. He returns to his rock, goes through his satchel and finds the toy rocket inside.

He sees the Renee is still sleeping and cautiously returns. He places the rocket beside her and then retreats to hide behind the rock.

Renee wakes, hungover, not sure how she got here. She blinks against the sunlight, starts to climb to her feet, and then she sees the toy rocket beside her. Renee picks up the toy, she looks around, then exits, heading back home.

Sio climbs back into view, watching, happy, hopeful.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

A new thought came to him. She lives alone, away from the others of her race. She must like her own thoughts, to be so much apart. Are we not the same, then? And, because she is separate from the towns, perhaps the Death is not in her...? Yes! Perhaps!

Sio stands, he shoulders his satchel, prepares to set out.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

How fine to be with her for a day, a week, a month, to swim with her in the canals, to walk in the hills and have her sing that strange song and he, in turn, would touch the old harp books and let them sing back to her! Wouldn't that be worth anything, everything? A man died when he was alone, did he not? So, consider the house below. A month of real understanding and being and living with beauty and a maker of ghosts, the souls that came from the mouth, wouldn't it be a chance worth taking? And if death came.. how fine and original it would be!

Sio climbs down from the rock. He hesitates. Faintly, MUSIC STARTS playing -- 'Ain't Misbehaving' again. Sio stands tall and continues on his way.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

At precisely nine forty-five that night, she heard the soft tapping at her front door.

Curtain down.

SCENE 3

DOUGLAS steps into view with his notebook. He takes a breath, closes his book, tucks it away.

From across stage, GREYHEART joins him, whiskey glass in hand, and raises his glass.

GREYHEART

Damn. Almost got me that time.

DOUGLAS

Almost?

GREYHEART

Sure. Beautiful, though. Got a thing for Mars, ain't you? You and your 'Silver Locusts.'

DOUGLAS

I hope to visit there someday.

GREYHEART

You are a stubborn man.

DOUGLAS

Thank you.

GREYHEART

Tell me, is it true you live in Los Angeles and yet you never drove a car?

DOUGLAS

Not a day in my life.

GREYHEART

Stubborn, stubborn. Another. Tell me just one more.

DOUGLAS

Then can we get to work?

GREYHEART

Bring it closer to home. Make it more personal. Show me what you're made of.

Douglas sighs, takes out his notebook again, starts flipping through the pages.

Greyheart paces, drinks, fixes Douglas with a stare.

Douglas finds a story, regards his notebook, flips shut the cover and pockets it again.

DOUGLAS

Let me tell you why I don't like cars.

GREYHEART

I'd love to hear it.

DOUGLAS

When I was 16, I saw six people die horribly in an accident. I walked home holding on to walls and trees. It took me months to begin to function again. So I don't drive. But whether I drive or not is irrelevant. The automobile is the most dangerous weapon in our society -- cars kill more than wars do.

GREYHEART

(disdainful)

Bull.

DOUGLAS

No, not bull. In Los Angeles, a human without a car is a samurai without his sword. I would replace cars wherever possible with buses, monorails, rapid trains -- whatever it takes to make pedestrians the center of our society again, and cities worthwhile enough for pedestrians to live in.

GREYHEART

Pedestrians?

DOUGLAS

The Pedestrian.

LIGHTS FADE to leaving Douglas in a spotlight, and then dim completely.

SOUNDS of a distant police siren rises with the gentle thrum of freeway traffic, and nighttime city noises.

ACT III

SCENE 1

Curtain up on LEONARD MEAD -- middle-aged, in a coat and hat and running shoes. He walks out into pool of light under a city lamp post. He blows into his hands, plants his hands in his pockets and looks up and down, listening, watching.

DOUGLAS walks by, exchanges a nod with Mr. Mead, and then pauses to address the audience from his notebook at a corner of the stage.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do.

Mead takes out a piece of candy, unwraps it and chews, lost in thought.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

GREYHEART appears, with his whiskey, to view Mead and then Douglas disdainfully.

GREYHEART

'2053'?

Douglas pointedly waits until Greyheart shrugs and exits.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows.

Another PASSERBY, a woman with a small dog, walks by. Mead raises his hat and smiles at the dog. The woman hurries by without making eye contact.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomb-like building was still open. Mr. Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

Mead looks up and down again, chewing on his candy and then continues his stroll. He walks around the lamp in ever wider circles.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

Mead stops to regard something underfoot, and then a LIGHT casts a square of illumination on the stage. Mead stops just on its periphery, a voyeur.

MEAD
(to himself)
Hello, in there...

Mead checks his watch.

MEAD
Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?

The SOUND OF A TV GAME SHOW can be heard, faintly, with LAUGHTER within. Mead notices Douglas with his notebook regarding him from nearby.

MEAD
You know, in ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, I've never met another person walking, like me, not once in all that time.

Douglas shrugs, sympathetically. The house light goes out. Mead gives Douglas a smile, and continues on his way. Around and around.

As Mead walks, the sound of a THUNDEROUS SURGE OF CARS slowly rises, and then falls until the sounds of the night soften. Mead pauses, upstage, his back to the audience.

SCENE 2

With an electronic noise, light from a XENON ARC LAMP, godlike in intensity, pins Mead in its glare. The tinny sound of feedback is followed by a brief siren whoop and an amplified METALLIC VOICE.

VOICE

Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!

Mead turns to regard the light in terror, shielding his eyes.

VOICE

Put up your hands!

MEAD

But--

VOICE

Your hands up! Or we'll shoot!

Trembling, Mead raises both hands and steps forward, upstage center, into the full glare.

MEAD

But-- but--

VOICE

That's close enough!

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

The police, of course. But what a rare, incredible thing. In a city of three million, there was only one police car left. Ever since election year, 2052, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

VOICE

Your name?

MEAD

(stammering)

L-- Leonard Mead.

VOICE

Speak up!

MEAD
Leonard Mead!

VOICE
Business or profession?

MEAD
I guess you'd call me a writer.

VOICE
No profession.

MEAD
You might say that.

More electronic feedback.

VOICE
No profession. What are you doing out?

MEAD
Walking.

VOICE
Walking?

MEAD
Just walking.

VOICE
Walking, just walking, walking?

MEAD
Yes, sir.

VOICE
Walking where? For what?

MEAD
Walking for air. Walking to see.

VOICE
Your address!

MEAD
Eleven South Saint James Street, Sector Five.

VOICE
And there is air in your house? You have an
air conditioner, Mr. Mead?

MEAD
Yes.

VOICE

And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?

MEAD

No.

VOICE

No?

Mead shakes his head.

VOICE

Are you married, Mr. Mead?

MEAD

No.

VOICE

Not married.

MEAD

Nobody wanted me.

VOICE

Don't speak unless you're spoken to!

Mead lowers his gaze against the glare.

VOICE

Just walking, Mr. Mead?

MEAD

Yes.

VOICE

But you haven't explained for what purpose.

MEAD

I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk.

VOICE

Have you done this often?

MEAD

Every night for years.

Silence, and then electronic feedback.

VOICE

Well, Mr. Mead...

MEAD
Is that all?

VOICE
Yes. Here.

A pneumatic hiss, and then the sound of an electronic door opening.

VOICE
Get in.

MEAD
Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!

The police siren whoops again and red and blue lights begin flashing across the stage.

VOICE
Get in!

MEAD
I protest!

VOICE
Mr. Mead...

The sound of a plasma weapon charges up.

VOICE
Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi...

Mead stands for a moment longer, and then he falls to his knees.

MEAD
Where are you taking me?

VOICE
To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.

Mead crumples forward, pinned in the glare of the lights as the roar of the city rises up around him.

LIGHTS OUT with the sound of the pneumatic hiss and thump of the car door closing. The car engine revs and fades.

SCENE 3

From darkness, LIGHTS UP SLOWLY on Douglas with his notebook.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

The back seat was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there. The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty sidewalks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

As Douglas finishes his story, Greyheart re-enters with his ever-present whiskey. He finishes his glass, regards the empty vessel, and then Douglas, with distaste.

GREYHEART
You got here by car didn't you?

DOUGLAS
Taxi.

GREYHEART
I don't buy it. I don't care for robot cars and future cities. Don't you ever draw from what you know?

DOUGLAS
I did! That happened to me! Wilshire Boulevard, 1942!

GREYHEART
Yeah, yeah. You're still not listening to me. I told you I wanted something real. Let's have some meat and bone. I'll give you one more chance to prove I've got a real writer on my payroll. No offense, of course.

DOUGLAS
No offense? How could I not take offense? Is this the way you treat all your writers? If that's the way you feel, why ship me out here all this way?

Greyheart strides to Douglas, face to face, and pulls the notebook from his hands.

GREYHEART

Because you damn well wouldn't fly!

DOUGLAS

That's in my contract, and you know it. You fought every clause, you bastard.

A tense moment and then Greyheart barks a laugh in Douglas's face.

GREYHEART

Now that's the spirit! Glad to see you have some balls on you, man. One more story now, and then we call it a night. You got it in you?

DOUGLAS

Do I have a choice?

Lights down, and the SOUND of a movie projector begins.

ACT IV

SCENE 1

Out of darkness, a DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

CLARENCE

Shut it!

Curtain up on a dim-lit screening room, projector light beaming downstage. The door SLAMS SHUT and TERWILLIGER, a lanky man clutching a film can, enters. The small, round JOE CLARENCE is smoking a cigar beside MR. GLASS, a silent elder fellow in spectacles, and their young ASSISTANT.

CLARENCE

Jesus. You Terwilliger?

TERWILLIGER

Yes.

Mr. Glass peers at his watch.

CLARENCE

You're five minutes late! Shove your film in the projection room door. Let's move.

Terwilliger hesitates until Clarence swivels to regard him in his fierce gaze.

CLARENCE

Well? Let's get this crap off the screen and show me your damn reel. I ain't got all day.

Lights come up as the projector dims. Terwilliger hands his film can to the assistant, who hustles the reel backstage.

CLARENCE

Jesus. Sit. What is this?

Terwilliger sits at the far end of the loge.

TERWILLIGER

Tyrannosaurus Rex: The Thunder Lizard. Photographed in stop-motion animation with miniatures that I created to study life-forms on Earth one billion years before--

Clarence cuts him off by stabbing an intercom buzzer.

CLARENCE
Roll it, projection!

Lights dim and the projector starts up again, sending its flickering light downstage. Dramatic music begins, followed by sounds of prehistoric birds, followed by monster footfalls, and then a roar as unseen giant beasts engage on screen.

Terwilliger watches Clarence, who gazes impassively at the images before him, not giving anything away.

The assistant slinks back in with a clipboard, ready to take notes, but he is transfixed by what he sees on-screen. Another prehistoric roar.

ASSISTANT
(in awe)
Good Lord.

From out of the shadows, DOUGLAS and GREYHEART appear, to join the viewing party gazing up at the screen.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)
Morning fogs were strewn along eternal seacoast where immense flying dreams and dreams of nightmare scythed the wind. Huge triangles of bone and rancid skin, of diamond eye and crusted tooth, pterodactyls, the kites of destruction, plunged, struck prey, and skimmed away, meat and screams in their scissor mouths.

Suddenly, the group reacts in unison as a ferocious roar announces a death on screen.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

In the jungle foliage now, shiverings, creepings, insect jitters, antennae twitchings, slime locked in oily fatted slime, armor skinned to armor, in sun glade and shadow moved the reptilian inhabitants of Terwilliger's mad remembrance of vengeance given flesh and panic taking wing. Brontosaur, stegosaur, triceratops. How easily the clumsy tonnages of name fell from one's lips.

Terwilliger steps forward, his face raised toward the screen.

TERWILLIGER

My beauties. My little lovelies. All liquid latex, rubber sponge, ball-socketed steel articulation; all night-dreamed, clay-molded, warped and welded, riveted and slapped to life by hand. No bigger than my fist, half of them; the rest no larger than this head they sprang from.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

Step by step, frame by frame of film, stop motion by stop motion, he, Terwilliger, had run his beasts through their postures, moved each a fraction of an inch, photographed them, moved them another hair, photographed them, for hours and days and months. Now these rare images, this eight hundred scant feet of film, rushed through the projector.

TERWILLIGER

I'll never get used to it. Look! They come alive! Rubber, steel, clay, reptilian latex sheath, glass eye, porcelain fang, all ambles, trundles, strides in terrible prides through continents as yet unmanned, by seas as yet unsalted, a billion years lost away. They do breathe. They do smite air with thunders. Oh, uncanny! There stands my Garden, and these my animal creations which I love on this Sixth Day, and tomorrow, the Seventh, I must rest.

GREYHEART

Now there's a kindred spirit.

Music heralds the big finale of the reel, and Terwilliger resumes his seat.

ASSISTANT

Lord. This is beautiful footage, Mr. Clarence.

CLARENCE

Maybe.

ASSISTANT

Incredible animation.

CLARENCE

I've seen better.

MR. GLASS

Beautiful stuff.

CLARENCE

It's jerky. Don't you see it? Look! That was a bad shot.

MR. GLASS

Oh, yes. I saw that.

CLARENCE

Jerky.

The projector light goes white, flickers then goes dark; the music cuts and the monsters vanish.

CLARENCE

Glad that's over. Almost lunchtime. Throw on the next reel, Walter! That's all, Terwilliger.

Terwilliger remains silent, slouched into his seat.

CLARENCE

Terwilliger? Is that dumb bunny still here?

TERWILLIGER

Here.

CLARENCE

Oh. It's not bad. But don't get ideas about money. A dozen guys came here yesterday to show stuff as good or better than yours, tests for our new film, Prehistoric Monster. Leave your bid in an envelope with my secretary. Same door out as you came in.

Clarence stabs his intercom buzzer again.

CLARENCE

Walter, what the hell you waiting for? Roll the next one!

Lights dim and Terwilliger stumbles and hits his shin as he makes his way out.

The projector resumes, and more dramatic music follows, but all eyes go to Terwilliger at the door.

Terwilliger has a little fit of pain, hopping in agony, restraining an avalanche of curses.

Mr. Glass places his hand on Clarence's shoulder, and whispers to him. Clarence raises his voice over the music.

CLARENCE

Jesus Christ. Okay. We'll pay you one thousand dollars, Terwilliger.

TERWILLIGER

But I need a thousand for my equipment alone!

CLARENCE

Look, we're giving you a break. Take it or leave it!

An EPIC EXPLOSION on-screen, followed by SCREAMS OF CROWDS IN PERIL.

Curtain down.

SCENE 2

Enter Greyheart and Douglas.

GREYHEART

I am familiar with the concept of stop-motion photography, although I'll have you know, kid, I've no plans to use it in our collaboration. Don't have time for that fiddly business. Saw what he did, your Terwilliger, on The Fog Horn. Won't work in a real drama on the ocean.

DOUGLAS

I wouldn't second-guess Terwilliger.

Terwilliger arrives, carrying a folding table, a tool kit and a suitcase.

Greyheart and Douglas observe as the young man sets up his work space.

Terwilliger exits and returns with a director's chair. He lays out his tools and opens his suitcase, from which he removes a beautifully-machined, mechanical skeleton of an 18- inch-tall DINOSAUR PUPPET.

Greyheart steps closer to inspect the craftsmanship as Terwilliger tinkers with the puppet.

TERWILLIGER

(to himself)

Fuse flexible spine to sinuous neck, pivot neck to death's- head skull, hinge jaw from hollow cheek, glue plastic sponge over lubricated skeleton, slip snake-pebbled skin over sponge, meld seams with fire, then rear upright triumphant in a world where insanity wakes but to look on madness -- Tyrannosaurus Rex!

GREYHEART

This little thing, 24 frames per second, one frame at a time?

DOUGLAS

The footbone connected to the... anklebone, anklebone connected to the... legbone, legbone connected to the... knee-bone, kneebone connected to the...

Joe Clarence runs in, wildly.

CLARENCE
My God! Aren't you set up yet?

TERWILLIGER
No.

CLARENCE
This costs me money!

TERWILLIGER
No matter how much time I take, I get paid the same.

CLARENCE
Well, shake a leg. And make it real horrible.

TERWILLIGER
How many feet of blood and gore would you like?

CLARENCE
Two thousand feet of each! Let's look.

Clarence grabs the puppet.

TERWILLIGER
Careful!

CLARENCE
Careful? It's my monster, ain't it? The contract--

TERWILLIGER
The contract says you use this model for exploitation advertising, but the animal reverts to me after the film's in release.

Terwilliger carefully sets the monster back on his worktable.

CLARENCE
Holy cow. That's wrong. We just signed the contracts four days ago.

Terwilliger rubs his eyes.

TERWILLIGER
It feels like four years. I've been up two nights without sleep finishing this beast so we can start shooting.

CLARENCE

To hell with the contract. What a slimy trick. It's my monster. You and your agent give me heart attacks. Heart attacks about money, heart attacks about equipment--

TERWILLIGER

The camera you gave me is ancient.

CLARENCE

So if it breaks, fix it; you got hands? The challenge of the shoestring operation is using the old brain instead of cash. Getting back to the point, this monster, it should've been specified in the deal, is my baby.

TERWILLIGER

I never let anyone own the things I make. I put too much time and affection in them.

CLARENCE

Hell, okay, so we give you fifty bucks extra for the beast, and throw in all this camera equipment free when the film's done, right? Then you start your own company. Compete with me, get even with me, right, using my own machines!

Clarence laughs.

TERWILLIGER

If they don't fall apart first.

CLARENCE

Another thing. I don't like the way this monster shapes up.

TERWILLIGER

(affronted)

You don't like what?

CLARENCE

His expression. Needs more fire, more... goombah. More mazash!

TERWILLIGER

Mazash?

CLARENCE

The old bimbo! Bug the eyes more. Flex the nostrils. Shine the teeth. Fork the tongue sharper. You can do it! Uh, the monster ain't mine, huh?

TERWILLIGER

Mine.

Clarence bristles, then angrily
heads out.

CLARENCE

God damn the goddamn lawyers! Work!

As soon as Clarence is gone,
Terwilliger grabs the monster
puppet and pitches it throw.

But instead, he reconsiders, and
plants the creature back on his
worktable, stares at it a moment
and then wrenches off its head.

Out of his tool kit he grabs a new
block of clay, tears off the
wrapper and starts ripping and
chunks and squeezing out new
shapes. As he works the clay, he
mutters.

TERWILLIGER

A little goombah. A touch of mazash.

Douglas beckons Greyheart to one
side, leaving Terwilliger working
feverishly at his clay.

DOUGLAS

They ran the first film test on the animated
monster a week later. Joe Clarence liked it
better, but he wanted changes.

Clarence breezes in with his
assistant at his heel with armfuls
of notes and script pages.

CLARENCE

More horrific, bloodcurdling. Let's scare
the hell out of Aunt Jane! Back to the
drawing board.

TERWILLIGER

I'm a week behind schedule now. You keep
coming in, change this, change that, you say,
so I change it, one day the tail's all wrong,
next day it's the claws--

CLARENCE

You'll find a way to make me happy.

(MORE)

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Get in there and fight the old aesthetic fight!

Clarence and his assistant depart.

DOUGLAS

A month later, they ran a second test.

Clarence YELLS in:

CLARENCE

(off stage)

A near miss! Close! The face is almost right. Try again, Terwilliger!

Terwilliger looks as if he is about to scream, but instead he keeps working at the clay.

GREYHEART

He re-sculpted the whole thing?

DOUGLAS

He skinned the latex flesh off the skull, placed the skull on a pedestal and, painstakingly, with clay he worked until 3 A.M. on that awful face. Then he cast it up, baked out the rubber skin, glued it all back down and he animated that dinosaur's mouth so it said obscene things which only a lip-reader might catch, while the rest of the audience thought the beast was only shrieking.

Greyheart laughs.

Terwilliger throws a cloth over his clay sculpture, rummages in his toolbox then, with a magician's flourish, he pulls away the cloth to reveal he has exchanged the clay with a new completed stop-motion dinosaur puppet -- 15-inches tall, fleshed out in a textured painted rubber skin.

DOUGLAS

Told you he was good.

Terwilliger busies himself around the puppet with calipers and surface gauges, until he slumps before his creation and lowers his head, exhausted.

SCENE 3

Curtain up on the screening room, where projector light blazes again, mute, but with the sound of clattering.

Clarence is seated in front, leaning forward, with his assistant and Mr. Glass flanking him. Several other STUDIO STAFF are seated behind them.

CLARENCE

That's it!

Terwilliger, still at his workstation, opens an eye. He joins Douglas and Greyheart to sit in the loges.

Joe Clarence is ecstatic.

CLARENCE

Perfect! Now that is what I call a monster!

TERWILLIGER

You like my creature?

ASSISTANT
(muttering)

You seen one monster, you seen 'em all.

CLARENCE

Sure, sure, but this one's special. Even I got to admit Terwilliger's a genius!

Mr. Glass slowly stands to regard the screen more closely.

MR. GLASS

This monster. He sure looks familiar.

TERWILLIGER

Familiar?

MR. GLASS

He's got such a look. I couldn't forget, from someplace...

TERWILLIGER

Natural Museum exhibits?

MR. GLASS

No, no.

CLARENCE

Maybe, you read a book once, Maury.

MR. GLASS

Funny. I don't forget a face. But, that Tyrannosaurus Rex, where before did I meet him?

CLARENCE

Who cares? He's great. And all because I booted Terwilliger's behind to make him do it right. Come on, Maury, we gotta two o'clock with Fox!

MR. GLASS

You go ahead.

Glass eyes Terwilliger, and then leans over the front row seat to hits the buzzer.

MR. GLASS

Walter? Could you favor us with that beast again?

Terwilliger shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

CLARENCE

What are you playin' at, Maury? I never seen a lawyer pass up a free lunch before.

The projector lights dims, flickers fast, dims again, and then continues running. Glass studies the image on screen.

MR. GLASS

I almost remember. I almost know him. But...

Other film workers also take note at the images unfurling on the screen. From the darkness of the theater, a woman secretary sniggers.

Glass stiffens.

Terwilliger rises and edges toward the exit. Clarence pushes past him, staring at the screen.

A gasp runs through the screening room. Someone laughs quietly.

Then there is instantaneous
silence.

CLARENCE
Stop! Freeze it right there!

The projector stops flickering,
framing Clarence in its bright
cyclopean glare.

MR. GLASS
What's wrong?

CLARENCE
Wrong? What goes? What is this?

ASSISTANT
Only a monster, chief.

CLARENCE
Monster, hell!

He points at the screen.

CLARENCE
That's me!

Half the people lean forward, half
the people fall back, two people
jump up. Mr. Glass fumbles for his
spectacles, flexes his eyes and
moans.

MR. GLASS
So that's where I saw him before!

CLARENCE
That's where you what?

MR. GLASS
That face, I knew it was familiar.

CLARENCE
Terwilliger!

As Clarence bellows, everybody
looks toward the door. But
Terwilliger was gone.

Curtain down.

SCENE 4

Greyheart strolls back onto stage, whiskey in hand, laughing, beside Douglas who has to wait for Greyheart's laughter to abate before he can continue.

DOUGLAS

Of course, Joe Clarence fired him on the spot. They found him clearing out his studio. Clarence threatened to sue him and have him blackball from Hollywood.

GREYHEART

And did he?

Terwilliger appears, across stage, and mutely packs away his dinosaur puppet and tools.

DOUGLAS

Of course not. Clarence hadn't paid him enough to have anything to sue for. Terwilliger swore he didn't know he was doing. It was all subconscious. With all Clarence's yelling, all the screaming, do this, do that, Terwilliger had swallowed his bile and, without knowing, it came out through his fingers right into the clay and the animation. He didn't see it until it was up there on the screen.

GREYHEART

A likely story.

A PHONE RINGS, and Clarence's assistant enters holding a 1950s rotary telephone. Terwilliger accepts the call.

DOUGLAS

Mr. Glass the lawyer called him from the first preview show. Joe Clarence presents Monster from the Stone Age. The preview cards were through the roof.

TERWILLIGER
(into phone)

What?!

DOUGLAS

The film was a smash hit. Joe Clarence was there and, like Mr. Glass had promised, it was better than anyone predicted.

GREYHEART

How so?

DOUGLAS

They were talking sequels. Joe Clarence as the Tyrant Lizard in Return of the Stone Age Monster, Joe Clarence and/or Tyrannosaurus Rex in, maybe, Beast from the Old Country. starring Joseph J. Clarence--

GREYHEART

'Starring'?

Terwilliger stares incredulously at the telephone, and then at Douglas.

DOUGLAS

The lawyer, Mr. Glass, he knew they were already in the hole for six reels of animation. But then it hit him. This film was done from a feeling of honor and friendship for Joe Clarence. The man behind a desk, unsung hero of the motion picture industry, unknown, unseen, sweating out his lonely little life while who gets the glory? The stars. How often does a man in Atawanda Springs, Idaho, tell his wife, 'Say, I was thinking the other night about Joe Clarence -- a great producer, that man'? How often? Never!

GREYHEART

(laughing)

Son of a bitch.

DOUGLAS

How could he present the real Clarence to the world? The dinosaur is there; boom! It hits him! This is it, he thought, the very thing to strike terror to the world, here's a lonely, proud, wonderful, awful symbol of independence, power, strength, shrewd animal cunning, the true democrat, the individual brought to its peak, all thunder and big lightning. Dinosaur: Joe Clarence. Joe Clarence: Dinosaur. Man embodied in Tyrant Lizard! Immortalized like a statue, only moving. Years from now people will say, 'Remember that film, The Monster from the Stone Age?' And people will say, 'Sure! Why?' 'Because,' the others say, 'it was the one monster, the one brute, in all Hollywood history had real guts, real personality. And why is this?

(MORE)

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

Because one genius had enough imagination to base the creature on a real- life, hard-hitting, fast-thinking businessman of A-one caliber.' He's the one with history: Joe Clarence.

Terwilliger finally answers the phone.

TERWILLIGER

What can I do for you, Mr. Clarence?

A spotlight illuminates Clarence across stage, on another phone.

CLARENCE

Terwilliger, we've done it! Your animal! Great! Is he mine now? I mean, to hell with the contract, as a favor, can I have him for the mantel?

TERWILLIGER

Mr. Clarence, the monster's yours.

CLARENCE

Better than an Oscar! So long!

The spotlight on Clarence snaps off. Terwilliger stares at the dead phone, returns it to the assistant, and rummages in his toolbox. Terwilliger finds the dinosaur puppet and speaks to the rubber monster.

TERWILLIGER

God bless us all, said Tiny Tim.

Mr. Glass enters holding a fancy whiskey bottle, and herds the assistant out.

TERWILLIGER

He sounded almost hysterical with relief.

MR. GLASS

So maybe I know why. A little girl, after the preview, asked him for an autograph.

TERWILLIGER

An autograph?

MR. GLASS

Right there in the street. Made him sign. First autograph he ever gave in his life. He laughed all the while he wrote his name. Somebody knew him. There he was, in front of the theatre, big as life. Rex Himself, so sign the name. So he did.

Mr. Glass places the whiskey bottle on Terwilliger's table.

Terwilliger places the puppet into Mr. Glass's hand. Glass pats him on the shoulder and then starts to leave.

TERWILLIGER

Wait a minute.

Mr. Glass halts.

TERWILLIGER

That little girl...?

MR. GLASS

My youngest daughter. So who knows? And who will tell?

After a pause, Terwilliger picks up the whiskey bottle.

TERWILLIGER

Not me.

Terwilliger exits with Mr. Glass, carrying the whiskey and the rubber dinosaur between them.

Greyheart laughs again, and this time claps Douglas on the shoulder.

GREYHEART

That's how you see us, eh? Hollywood? Lawyers and dinosaurs? The ugly movie business?

DOUGLAS

No, I was madly in love with Hollywood. I became a writer to escape the hopelessness and despair of the real world and enter the world of hope I could create with my imagination.

GREYHEART

Well, you did it. You passed the test. Now, let's see what my genius, my left ventricle, my right arm has birthed.

Lights out. THUNDER booms. The
sound of RAIN begins.

ACT V

SCENE 1

Curtain up, back in the study, as rain continues. It is a foul night out. Greyheart is standing by the fireplace, typescript littered around him, reading through the last of the pages. He lets page after page fall to the floor. Douglas is seated across the room, looking drawn and nervous after a night of storytelling.

LIGHTNING flashes from outside, and THUNDER rumbles again. Then, with the wind, comes the sound of a far away VOICE.

WOMAN

Ohhh...

Douglas glances toward the door, jittery, and then he sees Greyheart looking up from the his last script page.

DOUGLAS

What is that?

Greyheart lets the final page flutter to the carpet. He takes out a small cigarillo, lights it and puffs smoke toward the ceiling, making Douglas wait.

GREYHEART

You son of a bitch. It's good. Damn you to hell, kid. It's good!

Douglas exhales in relief.

GREYHEART

It needs a little cutting, of course!

DOUGLAS

Of course.

Greyheart gathers the script pages.

GREYHEART

Someday, kid. You must teach me how to write.

DOUGLAS

Someday, you must teach me how to direct.

GREYHEART

The Beast will be our film, son. Quite a team. Quite a team we are.

A noise from outside stops him again, the sound of an iron gate CREAKS and CLANKS and then, faintly, the voice:

WOMAN

Ohhh...

The wind rises outside, carrying the voice away with it.

Greyheart listens with his mouth wide and his eyes large, returns the script pages to Douglas, and leans in close.

GREYHEART

Shall I tell you what that sound is, kid?

Douglas nods.

GREYHEART

A banshee.

DOUGLAS

A what?

GREYHEART

Banshee! The ghosts of old women who haunt the roads an hour before someone dies. That's what that sound was.

Greyheart goes to the window and parts the shade to reveal the night and rain on the window.

GREYHEART

Sh! Maybe it means-- us!

Douglas laughs, quietly.

DOUGLAS

Cut it out, John!

GREYHEART

No, kid, no. I lived here ten years. Death's out there. The banshee always knows! Where were we?

Breaking the melodramatic spell,
Greyheart returns from the window,
gathering the remaining scattered
script pages.

GREYHEART

You ever figure, Ray, how much The Beast is
like me? The hero plowing the seas, plowing
women left and right, off round the world and
no stops? Maybe that's why I'm doing it. You
ever wonder how many women I've had?
Hundreds! I--

He stops, suddenly full of joy.

GREYHEART

Brilliant!

Douglas looks to the script pages,
in confusion.

GREYHEART

No, not that!

He shoves the script pages aside,
seizes a copy of the London Times
from his desk and stabs his finger
at an open page.

GREYHEART

This! A brilliant review of your new book of
stories!

Douglas jumps up.

DOUGLAS

What?

GREYHEART

Easy, kid. I'll read this grand review to
you! You'll love it. Terrific! Listen.
(reading, like Ahab from the holy
text)

'Ray Douglas's stories may well be the huge
success of American literature--'

(he winks)

How you like it so far, kid?

DOUGLAS

Continue, John.

Douglas drinks his whiskey.

GREYHEART

(reading)

'--But here in London, we ask more from our tellers of tales. Attempting to emulate the ideas of Kipling, the style of Maughm, the with of Waugh, Douglas drowns somewhere in mid- Atlantic. This is ramshackle stuff, mostly bad shades of superior scribes. Ray Douglas, go home!'

Douglas tries to grab the newspaper, but Greyheart tosses it with a lazy flip into the fire. Douglas watches the flames dance, feeling weak on his feet.

Greyheart studies Douglas's face, happily.

Douglas feels his fists tightening in involuntary rage, and then he bursts into sobs.

GREYHEART

What's wrong, kid? You feeling poorly?

DOUGLAS

John, for Christ's sake! Did you have to do that?

Douglas kicks at the hearth.

GREYHEART

Why, Ray, I didn't think--

DOUGLAS

Like hell you didn't! Is that what this was all about? This whole evening? The stories? The great John Greyheart needling my skin?

GREYHEART

Hell, kid, no. It was a fine review, great! I just added a few lines to get your goat!

DOUGLAS

I'll never know now! Look!

Douglas gives another kick toward the fireplace.

Greyheart takes the whiskey bottle and refills Douglas's glass.

GREYHEART

You can buy a copy in Dublin tomorrow, Ray. You'll see. They love you. God, I just didn't want you to get a big head, right. The joke's over. Isn't it enough, dear son, that you have just written the finest scenes you ever wrote in your life for your truly great screenplay?

Greyheart puts an arm around Douglas's shoulder.

GREYHEART

Know what your problem is, Ray?

He shoves the whiskey glass into Douglas's trembling fingers.

DOUGLAS

What?

GREYHEART

The thing is, Ray. You don't love me half as much as I love you!

DOUGLAS

Come on, John--

GREYHEART

No, kid, I mean it. God, son, I'd kill for you. You're the greatest living writer in the world, and I love you, heart and soul. Because of that, I thought you could take a little leg-pull. I see that I was wrong--

DOUGLAS

No, John. It's all right.

GREYHEART

I'm sorry, kid, truly sorry--

Douglas laughs.

DOUGLAS

Shut up! I still love you. I--

GREYHEART

That's a boy! Now--

Greyheart claps his hands together, span and grabs the manuscript and reshuffles the pages like a cardsharp.

GREYHEART

Let's spend an hour cutting this brilliant,
superb scene of yours and--

The wind rises, carrying with it
the VOICE:

WOMAN

Ohhh....

Abruptly, the tone and color of
Greyheart's mood changes. His eyes
narrow, he stands swaying in the
middle of the room like a man
underwater.

GREYHEART

Ray, you hear it?

The wind rattles the house, a
mournful, keening howl.

GREYHEART

Banshees.

He glances to Douglas.

GREYHEART

Ray? Run out and see.

DOUGLAS

Like hell I will.

GREYHEART

No, go on out. Like you say, this has been a
night of misconceptions. You doubt me, you
doubt it. Get my overcoat, in the hall.
Jump!

Greyheart snaps into action, rushes
to the coat rack, grabs a great
tweed overcoat, and beckons Douglas
toward him like a bullfighter with
a cape.

GREYHEART

Toro! Hah!

DOUGLAS

(wearily)

John...

GREYHEART

Or, are you a coward, Ray? Are you yellow?

Again, the far away VOICE.

WOMAN

Ohhh...

GREYHEART

It's waiting, kid! Get out there and run for the team!

Douglas swallows his whiskey, sets down the glass, crosses to the door and accepts the coat. Greyheart buttons him up.

GREYHEART

I'll be in the stands, kid, cheering you on. I'd go with you, but banshees are shy. Bless you, son, and if you don't come back-- I love you like a son, son!

Greyheart grabs Douglas by the ears and kisses his brow.

DOUGLAS

Jesus.

Douglas flings wide the door. The wind rises and a bluster of leaves blows in.

Suddenly, Greyheart appears afraid and leaps between Douglas and the night.

GREYHEART

Don't go out there, kid. I've changed my mind! If you got killed--

DOUGLAS

John--

Douglas shakes Greyheart's hands away. LIGHTNING flashes silently outside.

DOUGLAS

You want me out there. You've probably got Kelly, your stable girl, out there now, making noises for your big laugh--

GREYHEART

Ray! I swear to God!

DOUGLAS

John -- so long.

Wind blows in again, but Douglas runs out. THUNDER crashes loudly as the stage is plunged into darkness.

Curtain down.

SCENE 2

Darkness persists as WIND HOWLS and the sound of RAIN becomes all encompassing. Then a spotlight picks out Douglas, huddled in the great tweed coat, leaning against the wind. After a few steps, the wind subsides and Douglas gasps, catching his breath.

DOUGLAS

Jesus.

Douglas looks over his shoulder, back toward the house, and steps forward to review the desolate landscape around him.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

I could see him at the library window. Was he laughing? I don't know. But I could see him there a minute later, with his whiskey glass in hand, peering out at this night theater of which he was both director and hilarious audience.

The wind rises again. Douglas hunches and pulls the coat tight around him.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

I'll give it a fast ten minutes, I thought. Worry John, turn his joke inside out, stagger back in, shirt torn and bloody, with some fake tale of my own. But then--

WOMAN

Ohhh... God....

Like a paper kite blown among the hedges, the pale figure of THE WOMAN appears in another spotlight across stage.

Douglas regards her in fright, a cry dying in his throat.

The woman remains at a distance, dressed in a moon-colored dress and a hip-length heavy woolen shawl. She seems not to see Douglas, or if she does, she does not care.

She simply stands there, staring at the house.

Douglas is transfixed.

DOUGLAS
(narrating)

She had the face of snow, cut from that white cool marble that makes the finest Irish women; a long swan neck, a generous if quivering mouth, and eyes a soft and luminous green. So beautiful were those eyes, and her profile against the blown tree branches, that something in me turned, agonized, and died. I felt that killing wrench men feel when beauty passes and will not pass again. You want to cry out: Stay. I love you. But you do not speak. And the summer walks away in her flesh, never to return.

WOMAN
Is he in there?

DOUGLAS
What?

WOMAN
Is that him? The beast? The monster. Himself.

DOUGLAS
I don't--

WOMAN
The great animal that walk on two legs. He stays. All others go. He wipes his hands on flesh; girls are his napkins, women are his midnight lunch. He keeps them stashed in cellar vintages and knows their years but not their names. Sweet Jesus, and is that him?

Douglas looks toward the house,
then back at the young woman.

DOUGLAS
Who should he be?

WOMAN
Him. Him that lives there and loved me and now does not.

The young woman begins to quietly weep.

DOUGLAS

He doesn't live there any more.

The young woman steps toward at
Douglas in sudden fury.

WOMAN

He does! Why do you lie?

Douglas tries to gently put himself
between the woman and the house.
Clearly she is not sane.

DOUGLAS

Listen. That was another time.

WOMAN

No, there's only now! And I love him still,
so much I'd kill for it, and myself lost at
the end!

DOUGLAS

What's his name? His name?

WOMAN

Why, Will, of course. Willie. William.

DOUGLAS

There's only a Johnny there now. A John.

WOMAN

You lie! I feel him there. His name's
changed, but it's him. Look! Feel!

She puts up her hands toward the
house.

WOMAN

That's him!

DOUGLAS

It's a friend of mine.

WOMAN

No friend of anyone, ever!

Douglas looks into the woman's eyes
and is chilled by what he sees.

DOUGLAS

(narrating)

My God. Has it always been this way, forever
for some man in that house, forty, eighty, a
hundred years ago?

(MORE)

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

Not the same man, no, but all dark twins, and this lost girl on the road, with snow in her arms for love, and frost in her heart for comfort, and nothing to do but whisper and croon and mourn and sob until the sound of her weeping stilled at sunrise but to start again with the rising of the moon.

For the first time, the woman meets Douglas's gaze.

WOMAN

If that truly be your friend, then you are my enemy.

Douglas backs away.

DOUGLAS

Go back to where you came from.

WOMAN

Is there to be no peace, then? Must I walk here, year on year, and no comeuppance?

DOUGLAS

If the man in there was really your Will, your William, what would you have me do?

WOMAN

Send him out to me.

DOUGLAS

What would you do with him?

WOMAN

Lie down with him, and ne'er get up again. He would be kept like a stone in a cold river.

DOUGLAS

Ah.

WOMAN

Will you ask him, then, to be sent?

DOUGLAS

No. He's not yours. Near similar. But not yours.

WOMAN

And no love in him ever?

DOUGLAS

He says 'love' like fishermen toss their nets
in the sea.

WOMAN

Ah, Christ, and I'm caught! Ohhh...

The woman gives a cry that sounds
like it could summon the dead.
Douglas looks back at the house in
fright.

WOMAN

He's at the window again. I'll stay. I'll
stay here the rest of the night. Surely he
will feel me here, his heart will melt, no
matter what his name or how deviled his soul.
What year is this? How long have I been
waiting?

DOUGLAS

I won't tell you. The news could crack your
heart.

She regards him again.

WOMAN

Are you one of the good ones, then, the gentle
men who never lie and never hurt and never
have to hide? With your stories and your
tales warming the minds and hearts of men and
women.

DOUGLAS

Love is easy, and i love writing.

WOMAN

Sweet God, I wish I'd known you first.

The wind rises. Lightning
flickers.

DOUGLAS

I must go in.

WOMAN

Get in with you, then. You'll catch your
death.

DOUGLAS

And you--?

WOMAN

Ha! I've long since caught mine. It will not
catch again.

She backs away.

WOMAN
Get away with you! And tell him he's needed.

She slips back into darkness.

Douglas stands alone, shaken to his core.

THUNDER and blackout.

SCENE 3

Curtain up as Douglas slams open the door, hurriedly enters and shuts out the night. Greyheart is by the fire, drinking whiskey, a second glass already poured.

Douglas pulls off his coat and then swigs down his whiskey. Greyheart refills the glass.

DOUGLAS

Was it all a joke, then?

Greyheart laughs.

GREYHEART

What else?

Outside, the wind stirs, with the woman's wail.

WOMAN

Ohhh...

DOUGLAS

That's your banshee, John. It's out there. It knows. It knows what you are.

GREYHEART

That was a joke, Ray. You got to watch out for me.

DOUGLAS

No, it's there.

GREYHEART

You saw it, did you?

DOUGLAS

It's a young and lovely woman with a shawl on a cold night. A young woman with long black hair and great green eyes and a complexion like snow. Sound like anyone you ever in your life knew, John?

GREYHEART

Thousands.

DOUGLAS

She's waiting for you. Down at the bottom of the drive. That was the sound we heard, out by the gate. She described you or someone like you. Called you Willy, Will, William. But I knew it was you.

GREYHEART

Young, you say, and beautiful, and out there right this moment...?

DOUGLAS

The most beautiful woman that I've ever seen.

GREYHEART

Not carrying a knife?

DOUGLAS

Unarmed.

GREYHEART

Well, then, I think I should just go out there and have a chat with her, eh, don't you think?

DOUGLAS

She's waiting.

Greyheart moves to the door.

DOUGLAS

Put on your coat. It's a cold night. I'll call a taxi.

GREYHEART

It's late. Why don't you stay in the guest room? We've plenty of room. Pull the covers over your head, then we'll take a fresh crack at our monster in the morning.

Greyheart finishes putting on his coat, puts his hand on the doorknob, and the voice rises outside, clearer than ever.

WOMAN

Ohhh....

GREYHEART

God. She's really there.

He opens the door and stands in the cold weather, peering out at the long walk into the dark.

DOUGLAS

Wait! There's one thing I haven't told you. She's out there, all right. And she's walking. But... she's dead.

GREYHEART

I'm not afraid.

DOUGLAS

No, but I am. You'll never come back. As much as I hate you right now, I can't let you go. Shut the door, John.

WOMAN

Ohhh....

DOUGLAS

Shut the door.

Douglas walks to the doorway, but Greyheart holds up a hand and cocks his head, shrewdly.

GREYHEART

You're really good, kid. Almost got me there. I'm putting you in my next film. You'll be a star.

Greyheart exits into the night and shuts the door, quietly.

Douglas listens as the wind picks up outside. He walks to the hearth, grabs a poker, shoves around in the ashes.

DOUGLAS

(to himself)

All the country was still and cold and waiting....

After a moment more in thought, he walks back to the desk, picks up his briefcase, takes out his notebook, finds a pencil and writes.

DOUGLAS

(reading, as he writes)

It was a night for strange encounters at empty crossroads with great filaments of ghost spider web and no spider in a hundred miles. Gates creaked far across meadows, where windows rattled with brittle moonlight -- It was, as they said, banshee weather.

The WIND HOWLS.

Curtain down.

End of play.