

ARISE, SER HUNCHBACK

FADE IN.

INT. VILLA VILLAINY, RALSTON'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Bookshelves, a neatly made bed, a terrarium filled with rainbow ants--this nerdy nook of quietude is dominated by a wall-sized painting of a black knight.

RALSTON (O.S.)
"Evil" is "live" spelled backwards.
Thus, to be evil, you must live
backwards.

We trace the painting from top to bottom: a burning village, a horn-helmed figure with sword-scratched onyx armor and a triple-bladed greatsword thrust into charred earth. The caption at the bottom of the frame reads: DAD.

Beneath it, RALSTON, a freckled runt with square-framed glasses, runs a finger across lines of an open tome: On Ignorance, A Beginner's Guide to Evil.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
And what is the opposite of "you,"
but "not you," the opposite of
live, but "not live?" Ergo, to
attain true evil, you must make
those that are not you not live.

His stomach GURGLES.

He DRY HEAVES over a waste basket beneath his desk.

He stands, SHUTS the tome, and then PUSHES it away.

CLOSET

Quick shots of his accoutrement as he dresses for the day:

A belt BUCKLES after its second trip around his waist.

A clipboard SNAPS into his hip holster.

Shoe straps get tugged tight and then VELCRO-ED.

Fingers quickly TAP and clear a calculator watch.

A "Mathlete" pocket protector CLASPS into his front pocket.

EXT. VILLA VILLAINY, WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ralston enters on MAUDE--yesteryear's trophy wife: old, cold, and glamorous in a black strapless cocktail dress, matching elbow-length gloves, and a chic lace mourning veil. She DRAGS off her long-handled cigarette holder, a SILVER FERRET draped across her shoulders.

The ferret HISSES, teeth bared, hackles raised.

Ralston jumps, his glasses slipping from one ear to hover over a cheek until he fixes them.

Maude smiles, vulpine--the abyss is in her eyes.

He offers her his arm as they walk. She doesn't take it.

MAUDE

Inherit your father's fiefdom, and
this is your first official act?

She BLOWS a cloud of cigarette smoke from the corner of her mouth that gathers in Ralston's face.

He COUGHS, waving the smoke away.

RALSTON

The internal audit? What better way
to get a proper count of the
comings and goings?

MAUDE

Dracula was a proper count.

RALSTON

He slept all day, Maude. That
hardly seems industrious.

MAUDE

My stepson, the Overlord.

Her ferret SNICKERS.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

It's a wonder the Rebel-sistance
doesn't take your silly half-
measures for surrender.

RALSTON

I'm not sure I take your meaning.

TERRACE

A balcony overlooks hundreds of hench-goons: mermen sparring with surfboards, WerePoodles marching in step, animate shrunken heads assembled in formation--all of them wearing pink and grey uniforms.

MAUDE (O.S.)

The new color scheme comes to mind.

RALSTON

What's wrong with the uniforms?

MAUDE

They're pink and grey, Ralston.

RALSTON

Fuchsia and charcoal, colors from the same base hues as the old red and black, only less extreme. It's called rebranding.

MAUDE

You're not softening the colors.
You're softening the army.

RALSTON

You there.

RALSTON raises a finger to stop a JUBJUB on roving guard.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

How do you like the new uniform?

JUBJUB

What's not to like, squawk? Local, organic, sustainably sourced--they're on-trend and humane, not to mention breathable.

Maude seizes him by the collar of his uniform and pitches him headlong over the balcony.

Her ferret rushes to the railing to watch.

JUBJUB (CONT'D)

Sqauaaaa--

He lands with a CRASH.

MAUDE

"Breathable," he says. Now who's breathing?

Every hench-goan in the courtyard freezes, their rapt attention now fixed upon Maude and Ralston.

Maude grabs Ralston's face, puckering his lips like a fish's.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

When you gaze upon your hench-goons--
-mermen, WerePoodles, animate
shrunken heads--your spine should
tingle with a primal fear that
sends your inner monkey up a tree.

Her ferret CHIRPS, running up her leg onto her shoulder.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

Your father chose red and black to
evoke the blood and cinder that
awaited those who opposed his will.

Ralston finger-tweezes her wrist to remove her grip.

RALSTON

Father's way was excessive, an
unplanned marathon of murder and
mayhem. That's why the Heroes'
Union deployed Sven Marcos. You
remember him don't you?

MAUDE

What woman wouldn't? Tight muscular
buttocks, hair as bright as his
mind was dim--

RALSTON

If we can get away with doing less
evil for longer, we will have done
more evil in total.

MAUDE

Your father would be ashamed.

RALSTON

He would be alive if he'd done the
same. Moderation is a virtue in all
things, even vice.

The hench-goons MUTTER and WHISPER among themselves.

Maude and her ferret FACE-PALM in unison.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Now, who's ready for an audit?

He draws his clipboard from its hip-holster.

INT. GUILLOTINE ASSEMBLY LINE - DAY

A conveyor belt lined with guillotines stops one at a time before a scary LIZARD-MAN. A sign reads: QUALITY CONTROL.

A line of dirty human PEASANTS in rags and manacles waits.

The lizard-man latches the first peasant into the first guillotine.

Before he can throw the switch, Ralston hurries in waving his hands. He releases the peasant, latches in the lizard-man's arm, and then signals the peasant.

The peasant throws the switch.

The blade falls.

The lizard-man's arm separates.

The lizard-man HISSES, his forked tongue flickering. As he draws back, we see his arm rapidly regenerate.

Ralston hands the peasant the lizard man's arm and points him off screen.

We follow the peasant to a trash sorting center, past the "TRASH" and "RECYCLE" cans, where he deposits the lizard-man's arm into the "COMPOST" can.

When we return to Ralston, the lizard-man is latching his new arm into the next guillotine, the next peasant at the switch.

INT. CONTRABAND WAREHOUSE - DAY

Ralston takes inventory as he follows a tiny flying SUMO-FAIRY--top knot, wings, belly, diaper--down an aisle packed with seized contraband--weight loss pills, tax forms, a morning star.

The next aisle over, sumo-fairies hurry to restock the empty shelves via a skylight.

EXT. BOULDER BREAKING YARD - DAY

Ralston adjusts the cant of a newly planted mailbox marked "COMPLAINTS," and then draws back to admire it.

Dirty human peasants PADDING rocks with pool noodles pause to stare in confusion before returning to their futility.

INT. INHUMAN RESOURCES - DAY

"Inhuman Resources" can be read in reverse on the glass of the door in the background.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR, a reverse centaur: a black horse with a mohawk mane on his top half and human from the waist down, reclines in the chaise lounge.

Ralston sits opposite, listening intently, clipboard in lap.

RALSTON

This is a safe place, Herman the Decapitator. Let it all out.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

No matter how good I chop off the heads, it's always the same, monsieur. They say to me, "Reverse centaur, you are not one of us."

RALSTON

This didn't stop after my workplace inclusion seminar?

Herman the Decapitator NEIGHS.

Ralston pulls a pocket dictionary from his pant pocket.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Definitionally, I'm sorry to say, you're not a centaur--top half man, bottom half horse.

Herman the Decapitator SIGHS, lips PUTTERING like a horse's.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

But--

He removes a sheet of paper from his clipboard and SIGNS it.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Maybe our definition's wrong.

He slides the paper across the table.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

A certificate of centaur authenticity? C'est magnifique!

RALSTON

Now say it: I am a centaur.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Je suis un centaure.

RALSTON
Louder.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Je suis un centaure!

He stands and WHINNIES at the top of his lungs. As he marches proudly from the room, Ralston moves to a desk.

JESSAMINE slips through the open doorway, silent. She's girl-next-door gorgeous with short blonde curls and big blue eyes in a form-fitted nun's habit--tunic, scapular, cowl. She KNOCKS twice on the doorframe.

JESSAMINE
Overlord?

Ralston turns, GASPS, stands--too fast. His chair shoots out behind him, with his hips still under the table so that his forearms have to grip the desk for him to stand at a slant. His clipboard falls.

SLOW MOTION: Jessamine stops the chair from hitting the wall, catches the clipboard inches from the ground, and then steadies Ralston and helps him stand. END SLOW MOTION.

RALSTON
Jessamine!

His VOICE BREAKS. He COUGHS.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
I see nun-ja training is serving
you . . . beautifully.

She blushes, hiding it by pinning her cowl across her face like a ninja mask. She draws a rosary from her wide sleeve and performs nunchaku flourishes between prayer recitations.

JESSAMINE
Hail Mary. Hiya! Mother of grace.
Whicha! Blessed be the fruit of thy
womb. Hyu-hyu!

Ralston can't keep the what-a-woman smirk from his face.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
I always get the words wrong . . .

She unpins her cowl and returns her rosary to her sleeve.

RALSTON

But the moves look great! Have you
. . . taken your vows?

JESSAMINE

Those? No, not yet. At graduation.

RALSTON

Oh.

Long silence--he rubs his neck; she stares at her feet.

JESSAMINE

I wanted to thank you.

RALSTON

Me? You're welcome! What for?

JESSAMINE

The taxes you imposed on plunder to
fund our orphanage . . . perpetual
invasion creates so many--

RALSTON

That! Of course. I'm sure our hench-
goons rest easy knowing that, in
the likely event that something
should happen to them, their
offspring and/or litters will be
taken care of.

JESSAMINE

Still, I, we can't thank you
enough. I hope you'll stop by some
time to visit me. Us! To see what a
difference you've made.

They exchange shy affectionate stares.

INT. VILLA VILLAINY, RALSTON'S BED CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Ralston kneels in silk pajamas before his rainbow ant
terrarium. They scurry about: yellow, purple, teal--a perfect
harmonious community. He SIGHS.

MAUDE (O.S.)

An overlord should never kneel,
much less before ants. Your father,
may his hellfires burn brightly,
drank puppy's blood for breakfast.

RALSTON

Things must be hard for you.

He stands and rests a comforting hand on her shoulder.

The ferret GAGS.

MAUDE

They are, seeing you on the throne.

She cringes as she wipes his hand off.

RALSTON

I meant with father gone--I guess it's the same thing. Sometimes, I wonder if I'll ever measure up.

MAUDE

Oh, Ralston, I never wonder.

Ralston smirks, not getting it.

A BAT WITH AN EYE PATCH enters through the balcony curtains.

It EVAPORATES in a cloud of glitter, and then rematerializes as PEG-TOOTH: no eye patch, a hook-hand, trifold hat--he's dressed in the old red and black colors.

The ferret SHRIEKS, racing from the room.

RALSTON

Peg-tooth? I didn't know the vampires were in port.

PEG-TOOTH

Super Maude-1! You haven't aged a day! Let me feast my eyes on you.

He smiles. One of his fangs is a terraced wooden peg.

MAUDE

As long as it's just your eyes feasting, you pasty bloodsucking swashbuckler, you.

False-demur, she does a few quick strike-a-poses, FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY effects in between.

PEG-TOOTH

Isn't she fang-tastic, Ralston? I'm utterly hooked.

He holds up his hook hand; Maude CACKLES.

RALSTON

Where's your new uniform, captain?

MAUDE

Is that any way to treat a guest?
Look, we've brought you a gift.

Peg-tooth pulls a pack of shimmering crackers from his cloak.

PEG-TOOTH

Transmogrification saltines! One
changes your appearance; the other
changes it back.

RALSTON

Why would I want to do that?

MAUDE

For your internal audit, of course.

PEG-TOOTH

Surely you've read about secret
shoppers? Anonymous surveys?

RALSTON

They do, perhaps, produce more
accurate data.

PEG-TOOTH

You're only as good as your data.

RALSTON

Well, I'll certainly consider it.

MAUDE

Think, think, think. All you ever
do is think. Only a man of action
could fill your fathers greaves.

Ralston hesitantly takes the cracker and eats it.

Lime-green light reflects off Maude and Peg-tooth's faces as
a WHIRRING transformation occurs offscreen.

PEG-TOOTH

Shall I drain him?

He produces a crazy straw, pocketing the second cracker.

MAUDE

No. I've a hunch that back could be
put to better use. In Torture R&D.

They LAUGH menacingly, maniacally, overlong.

INT. TORTURE R&D, HOLDING - NIGHT

RALSTON'S P.O.V.

He blinks awake on the stone floor of a torchlit iron cage, hay strewn about, flies swarming a bucket.

He locks on ugly sandaled feet. Pan up to see TODDRICK, a glisteningly bald triclops wearing a patchwork cloak of human scalps: blonde, brown, red, black.

TODDRICK

Bottom of the evenin' to ye. Name's
Toddrick. Toddrick McBaldington.

He wears manacles and four pairs of finger cuffs.

RALSTON (O.S.)

Is that a poop bucket?

Toddrick nods.

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

Where am I?

TODDRICK

Torture R&D, a never-ending
nightmare where pain meets
innovation.

RALSTON (O.S.)

Well, at least my torment won't be
tired or derivative.

TODDRICK

Cheery outlook for a chubby lazy-
eyed hunchback.

ON FULL SCENE

Ralston is, in fact, a chubby lazy-eyed hunchback. His extended hump raises the back of his pajama top, turning it into a belly shirt.

He reaches his hands back to grope the mound of flesh.

RALSTON

I am a chubby lazy-eyed hunchback!
This is all my mother's doing!

Toddrick LAUGHS.

TODDRICK
Have to figure it's at least half
yer father's fault.

RALSTON
Where's my clipboard? This is going
in my report!

Toddrick LAUGHS harder.

TODDRICK
I was gonna' eat ye, Bumpy, but yer
a funny little guy.

RALSTON
Eat me? Wait, you're a . . . I'm
going to stand over here.

Ralston realizes he's accidentally saved his own life and nervously inches toward the farthest corner of the cage.

TIME LAPSE

Bored waiting: he presses his face between the bars; he lays on his back in an "L" with his feet propped up against the cell door--the whole time, Toddrick sits perfectly still.

Close on Ralston's sleeping face. A slow-moving strand of drool lowers until it splats on his nose and mouth.

He wakes, wiping his mouth with disgust, to find he's face-to-face with a WEREPOODLE, the steady HUFFS through its giant yellowed canines making Ralston's hair rise and fall.

Ralston WHIMPERS.

INT. TORTURE R&D, TORTURE STATION 1 - CONTINUOUS

The WerePoodle carries Ralston in its mouth by the waistband of his pajama bottoms, dropping him on a torture rack and fastening the leather wrist and ankle straps with its teeth.

Ralston glances nervously at the torture apparatuses neatly arrayed on the walls of the chamber, like tools in a garage.

As the WerePoodle exits, DR. TORTURE-MEISTER enters, a spindly woman with spikes on her nine-inch heels and a black leather corset over her knee-length doctor's overcoat.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Welcome to Torture Station 1. My
name is Dr. Torture-Meister. I'll
be torturing you today.

Ralston stares at the keyring on her belt loop as she examines the charts on his torture rack.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)
Oh! Signed by Queen Maude herself.

RALSTON
Queen?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
She filed to usurp Ralston
yesterday under Statute 9-10-11B.

She tests the door of an iron maiden. It SQUEAKS.

RALSTON
There is no such statute!

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
She just instated it.

She oils the iron maiden's hinge with an oil can.

RALSTON
Wouldn't it have had to be in place
beforehand?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Retroactive instatement.

When she tries the door again, it doesn't squeak.

RALSTON
That's corruption of the foulest
sort--corruption of logic!

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Yes, well, logic falls within the
purview of absolute power.

RALSTON
You can't just convert a fiefdom to
a monarchy. There are forms!

She moves to a desk, flipping back the cover to reveal three turntables, a skeletal hand between them.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
To approach illogic with logic is
illogical.

RALSTON
This is torture!

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Thank you. I don't get many
complements in my line of work.

She SNAPS the middle and ring fingers from the skeletal hand and uses them to plug her ears. She hits a switch and stones SLIDE back from the corners of the room, revealing speakers.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)

Testing: one, two.

She plays a track, BAGPIPES, and then stops it.

She plays another, A MARIACHI BAND, and then stops it.

She plays one more, YODELING, and then stops it.

Ralston squirms, confused.

She COUGHS, CRACKS her knuckles, and then works the table, bobbing with the rhythm. We discover that she's splicing the BAGPIPE, MARIACHI BAND, and YODELING tracks into BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY.

Ralston writhes in pain, jaw clenched, turning his head from side to side.

RALSTON

Make it stop! Please!

She loops the track and then moves to kneel before him.

He glances down to see her applying wax strips to his feet.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Not wax, anything but wax!

As she RIPS the strips, he SCREAMS.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

(shouting over music)

On a scale of one to ten, ten being
"kill me please," how would you
rate your current will to live?

INT. TORTURE R&D, HOLDING - NIGHT

The cell door CLANKS as the WerePoodle deposits Ralston.

Ralston hobbles to his corner on raw pink feet.

TODDRICK

You okay, Bumpy? Wow, they really got to you, huh?

RALSTON

I never understood "cruel and usual punishment" until this very moment.

TODDRICK

Tell me about it. I'm in here cuz some Scam-urai sold me these.

He pulls a braided length of red hair from beneath his cloak.

TODDRICK (CONT'D)

Not scalps at all, but dwarves beards! You can still smell the ale on 'em.

RALSTON

A clear violation of trust, not to mention fair trade agreement.

TODDRICK

I blacked out, I'm talkin' full blood frenzy--even attacked my Scalpaholics Anonymous sponsor.

RALSTON

Your . . . sponsor?

TODDRICK

She wears hats now.

RALSTON

I'm sure she understood the risks.

TODDRICK

We've tried every treatment: troll dolls, chia pets--nothing worked.

RALSTON

Have you considered hair loss formula?

TODDRICK

You think my scalp addiction has something to do with baldness?

RALSTON

Honestly, I don't know. But if there's even a chance you could lead a healthy normal life, don't you think you should try?

Toddrick tears up, but nods emphatically.

INT. TORTURE R&D, TORTURE STATION 1 - DAY

As the WerePoodle carries Ralston in, Ralston sees the skeletal hand's been left out on the corner of the desk.

When they pass it, Ralston lunges, SNAPPING the pinky off in his teeth and concealing it in his mouth.

The WerePoodle GROWLS and then shakes Ralston violently.

Not noticing the missing pinky bone, it sets him on the rack.

INT. TORTURE R&D, HOLDING - NIGHT

The cell door CLANKS as the WerePoodle deposits Ralston.

There's bald pink flesh where Ralston's eyebrows used to be.

When the WerePoodle's gone, Ralston spits the skeletal pinky into his hand.

TODDRICK

I see ye gave as good as ye got.

Ralston picks the lock on the cell door with the pinky bone.

TODDRICK (CONT'D)

What's this, now?

The lock CLICKS. The cell door swings open.

RALSTON

My father used to lock the library
to try and keep me from books.

He waves and then steps out. He begins to shut the cell door behind him, but decides to leave it open.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Never too late for a fresh start,
is it? Good luck to you, Toddrick.

Toddrick, taken aback, watches Ralston go.

HALLWAY

Ralston rushes past. After a moment, Toddrick follows.

TORTURE STATION 1

Ralston SNAPS the remaining finger and thumb from the skeletal hand and plugs his ears.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Toddrick?

The WerePoodle jets in, BARKING viciously. It leaps on Toddrick, pinning him to the ground.

Ralston hits the switch and the torture loop plays, BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH in BAGPIPE, YODELS, and MARIACHI.

The WerePoodle rolls off Toddrick and sprints from the chamber, YELPING.

As Dr. Torture-Meister enters, she stumbles, staggers, and then falls to a knee.

TORTURE-MEISTER

Ah! The pain! It's utterly debilitating! How wonderful!

Ralston takes her keyring, helps Toddrick to his feet, and then drags him from the chamber.

EXT. LANDFILL - NIGHT

From a distant hill, we see the dark shadow of the castle against the starry black of night.

Ralston and Toddrick crest the hill, ASTHMATIC, and collapse.

As they catch their breath, they begin . . . LAUGHING?

TODDRICK

So, uh, what now?

RALSTON

I could never imagine arriving at this. How can I possibly know how to proceed from it?

TODDRICK

Easy, we get your original body back. So, elective surgery? If the nose-kind's rhinoplasty, maybe you need camel-plasty?

He stands and then helps Ralston to his feet.

RALSTON

I didn't look that good before.

TODDRICK

Oh, well, I'm suddenly feeling very shallow. How about vengeance?

RALSTON

That never really made sense to me.

TODDRICK

Sense has nothing to do with it.

RALSTON

It does for me.

TODDRICK

Okay, so, what makes sense?

The sun rises as they descend a hill.

RALSTON

Maude--

TODDRICK

You can't mean that.

RALSTON

I wasn't finished.

TODDRICK

Oh, continue.

RALSTON

She'll ruin everything.

TODDRICK

So what do you want to do about it?

RALSTON

I'm not so much a do-er. You just asked what made sense.

TODDRICK

Right, well, I guess we better keep walking or, you know, they'll catch us, and that'll be bad.

RALSTON

I can agree with that.

They approach a rising column of smoke.

A battered JUBJUB, the one Maude pitched over the parapet, now in red and black, uses a pitchfork to toss pink and grey uniforms into a massive burn pile.

Ralston picks up a uniform and turns it in hand.

TODDRICK
I reckon you'll be needing a
squire. No offense.

RALSTON
None taken. To be honest, I
wouldn't know what to do with one.

TODDRICK
I think I prefer it that way.

Toddrick hot wires a rickshaw.

EXT. GUTTERSHERE - DAY

Toddrick tows a rickshaw full of uniforms with Ralston on top wearing one. They amble through quaint rural midlands.

A) A billboard reads: You are now entering GUTTERSHERE.
POPULATION: 221. The number is composed of rolling digits
which advance to 223 as they enter.

B) A roadside chain gang of DIRTY HUMAN PEASANTS sweat as
they shovel dirt, each into the next guy's hole. They're
supervised by an ANIMATE SHRUNKEN HEAD in aviator sunglasses
strapped to the back of a WERE-POODLE.

C) An OLD WOMAN on a porch rocking chair braids rope into a
noose with knitting needles and then tosses it into a wagon
full of nooses before beginning another.

D) A MERMAN stares at his wrist-sundial outside an old wooden
outhouse, knocking twice. A PEASANT rushes out, pulling up
his loin cloth, toilet paper stuck to his bare heel.

E) PEASANT CHILDREN form a long line that leads to a toll
booth with a gate arm operated by an ANIMATE SHRUNKEN HEAD.
When a child inserts a coin, the arm lifts, and then a SUMO
FAIRY stuffs them into a tightly overpacked schoolhouse.

F) As the rickshaw leaves Guttershere, it passes a vintage
propaganda billboard of Maude stylized as Rosie the Riveter
(blue shirt, red bandana, bicep flex). Her speech bubble
reads: BUY WAR STAMPS. STAMP OUT THE REBEL-SISTANCE.

Ralston takes it all in, seeing it for the first time.

EXT. OUTSIDE GUTTERSHERE - CONTINUOUS

Behind the billboard waits OFFICER BILL, a patrol centaur wearing sunglasses, a one-handed mini-crossbow on his hip.

He TROTS after the rickshaw.

OFFICER BILL
WHEE-OOO! WHEE-OOO! WHEE-OOO!

Toddrick steers the rickshaw to the side of the road.

Officer Bill approaches.

RALSTON
Is there a problem, mister sir?

OFFICER BILL
That's Officer Bill to you.

Toddrick SNEEZES.

Spooked, Officer Bill draws his mini-crossbow.

OFFICER BILL (CONT'D)
Whoa! Hands where I can see 'em,
both of ya'!

Ralston and Toddrick put their hands up, afraid.

After a beat, THWAK, Officer Bill looses a bolt into the center of Toddrick's chest.

TODDRICK
You shot me!

OFFICER BILL
Startled misfire--didn't know you
were gonna' sneeze!

He hurriedly works the hand crank on his mini-crossbow.

RALSTON
Is it fatal, do you think?

TODDRICK
Well, not yet it hasn't been, but
isn't my heart right there?

RALSTON
A little left of middle, I think--
my right, your left, that is.

TODDRICK
What's he reloading for?

OFFICER BILL
I saw you reaching for a, a weapon
. . . a halberd, maybe!

Finally finished cranking, he sets in a bolt.

TODDRICK
A halberd?

RALSTON
Think spear meets battle-ax.

TODDRICK
Do you chop or thrust with it?

RALSTON
Either way, it's not the sort of
thing one can easily mistake
seeing, a long-hafted polearm with
both an axe head and a spearpoint.
Similar to a voulge, really.

OFFICER BILL
I know what I thought I saw and
that's what it'll say in my report!

Panicked, he aims the mini-crossbow at Ralston.

TODDRICK
Well, our witness statements are
gonna' run contrary to--

THWAK, a second bolt hits Toddrick, just left of the first.

TODDRICK (CONT'D)
Well that one definitely hit heart.

RALSTON
A second misfire seems improbable.

OFFICER BILL
Well, now I have to kill you, don't
I? So that mine's the only story?

He begins turning the hand crank again, arm tiring.

TODDRICK
Alright! Enough's enough. Shoot me
twice, shame on you; shoot me
thrice--

In a flurry of movement, Toddrick slap-attaches white rectangles to Officer Bill's scalp, chest, and rear haunches--wax strips from Torture R&D.

OFFICER BILL

I'm charging you with resisting a wrongful shooting!

Another flurry: Toddrick rips the wax strips off, hair with.

Officer Bill YELPS in pain and then retreats, a bald rectangular patch on his hind quarters.

OFFICER BILL (CONT'D)

Ahh! Backup! Backup! Ahh!

TODDRICK

He's callin' for backup, you gotta' go. Find Rebel-sistance HQ in Townville. Tell 'em I sent ye. They'll take care of ye while ye decide what's what.

RALSTON

Aren't you coming?

TODDRICK

I'm done for, I think. Anyway, I've relapsed--no goin' back.

He takes a DEEP WHIFF of the scalp on his wax strip.

TODDRICK (CONT'D)

Do me a favor though?

He sits on the ground, laying his remaining wax strips in a row in front of him.

RALSTON

Sure, Toddrick. Anything.

TODDRICK

I've never been much a speech-er. When you remember this, could you imagine I said something cool?

He uses a nearby stick to apply wax to the strips.

RALSTON

What were you thinking, something uplifting or more sagacious?

TODDRICK

Can't have both, can I?

RALSTON

Well that only seems fair, this being your last stand and all.

TODDRICK

Right. Thanks, Bumpy.

Ralston starts off with the rickshaw, pauses.

RALSTON

Given who we are and what's happened, what do you think of this: don't split hairs when it comes to friendship.

TODDRICK

Mm. What else have you got?

RALSTON

Live for me? Earn this? I'll never let go?

TODDRICK

Let's go with the first one.

A few more steps. Another pause.

RALSTON

You know, it'd help me think of them as your last words if they were.

TODDRICK

Right, how'd it go? Uh, don't split hairs . . . what was it again?

RALSTON

When it comes to friendship.

TODDRICK

Yeah, that: don't split hairs when it comes to friendship.

Ralston wipes an almost-tear from the corner of his eye.

RALSTON

I won't, Toddrick. I won't.

Ralston waves before disappearing over a hill.

TODDRICK

Watches as a dozen patrol centaurs crest the hilltop before him, majestic, bearing mini-crossbows.

We hear the sound of HUFFING behind them.

Appearing last, on human legs, Herman the Decapitator BREATHES HEAVILY, wielding a halberd.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Backup has arrived.

RALSTON

Ralston waddles up to a road sign, TOWNVILLE: 3,520 cubits.

He SIGHS, wipes sweat from his brow.

WAX RIPS and PAINED WHINNIES echo distantly behind him.

And then they stop.

He hurries on, alone, rickshaw wheels SQUEAKING behind him.

EXT. TOWNVILLE - NIGHT

As Ralston limps within the town limits, he glances over his shoulder at the four remaining patrol centaurs, racing toward him, Herman the Decapitator trailing behind in Toddrick's patchwork scalp-cloak.

He hurries about, aimless, running SMACK into a sign: TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE. Fine print: FUNDED BY PLUNDER TAX.

RALSTON
Jessamine . . .

He RATTLES the front gate. It's locked. He hurries around the iron fencing to the

REAR GATE

As Ralston arrives, he spots Jessamine, cowl down, her hair held in a bun by chopsticks. She's wearing red stiletto heels, her nun's habit hiked mid-thigh on one side.

Thunderstruck, his panic vanishes as he imagines GLITTER DUST and passionate Yanni-esque SAXOPHONY.

SLOW MOTION: Jessamine subtly shifts her stance admiring her calf, shoe, and foot at different angles. END SLOW MOTION, GLITTER DUST, and SAXOPHONY.

Ralston unwittingly leans forward, puckering his lips, until his forehead CLANGS against the iron manor gate.

Jessamine startles and turns toward him.

JESSAMINE
What're you doing?

RALSTON
Me? Nothing! What're you doing?

JESSAMINE
Nothing also!

Embarrassed, she drops the hem of her habit.

RALSTON
Maybe it's the Golden Ratio, but
that's the best leg to ever wear a
shoe.

Jessamine flushes, angry. She pulls the chopsticks from her hair and then takes a fighting stance.

JESSAMINE
You'd better say your prayers,
creeper. And if you don't know any,
I could teach you some.

She crosses herself with the hand holding the chopsticks and then TAPS the tips together, twice.

RALSTON
I'm an agnostic.

She launches forward, thrusting a chopstick into each of his nostrils, clamping his septum between them.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
Ah! Oh! Ow! Ow!

JESSAMINE
Nun-jas are a package deal--I could
read you your last rights, then
make this your last breath.

RALSTON
(nasally)
No debate, you're the whole
package, Jessamine--you take my
breath away.

JESSAMINE
Wait, how do you know my name?

She lifts up on the chopsticks, forcing him onto his tiptoes.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
And why are you here?

RALSTON

To your first question, we've met before. To your second . . . oh no!

JESSAMINE

What?

RALSTON

I forgot I'm running for my life!
Herman the Decapitator--

JESSAMINE

You led him here? Half the shrunken heads in the fiefdom were born at the end of his halberd!

RALSTON

I didn't know where else to go. I was with Toddrick--

JESSAMINE

Toddrick McBaldington?

RALSTON

For a brief period, he was my non-consensual squire. Will you please take your chopsticks from my nostrils?

She does. She's about to wipe them off on her habit but decides to throw them away instead.

JESSAMINE

Toddrick was numbers one, two, and five on the fiefdom's most wanted list. He's in Torture R&D.

RALSTON

We broke out together. Wait, how is that possible?

JESSAMINE

No one breaks out of Torture R&D. How is that possible?

RALSTON

I'll tell you all about it later, but right now I need you to hide me until I can find the Rebel-sistance.

JESSAMINE

You're kidding, right? We are the Rebel-sistance.

INT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, HIDDEN ALCOVE C - NIGHT

Close on Jessamine through a narrow door crack.

JESSAMINE

Hide here, don't make a sound.

RALSTON

Be careful, Jesh--

She squishes his lips with her finger, then shuts the door.

SVEN (O.S.)

That's it, Sven. Work it. Work it.

Ralston spins.

The room's done up like a southern parlor: chandelier, fireplace, rustic antique furniture.

SVEN, an immaculately groomed Adonis in tights with long blonde hair and a pencil-thin mustache, paints a self-portrait, holding a hand mirror at the end of a selfie stick.

RALSTON

What are you--

SVEN

Just painting a quick selfie.

RALSTON

Sven Marcos? You killed my fa--

He catches himself, covering his mouth.

SVEN

Myfa? If that was his name, it sounds like I did him a favor.

He sets his mirror and paintbrush down.

SVEN (CONT'D)

Is this another revenge duel? Because, if it is, I want to stretch first--don't want to pull a hammy while I'm slaying you.

He unrolls a yoga mat and does a few lunges.

RALSTON

I don't want to fight you.

SVEN

Can't say I blame you--I wouldn't want to fight me either. So what do you want then, an autograph?

Sven switches to a rocker stretch--grabs his ankles, leg spread, and balances in a V-shape on his butt.

RALSTON

I'm in hiding.

SVEN

Not if I can see you.

RALSTON

It isn't you I'm hiding from.

SVEN

Ah, sometimes I forget there are other people in the world.

He switches to downward dog--nose down, butt in the air.

RALSTON

Four patrol centaurs led by--

SVEN

If you want me to kill them, it's a minimum of six before you get a bulk discount.

RALSTON

Please, don't. Violence just begets violence, a never ending cycle of--

SVEN

Job security--but, since you asked nicely, I won't kill them.

Sven switches to a hip raise--arms and shoulders flat, pelvis thrust skyward.

RALSTON

You're . . . a flexible mercenary.

SVEN

I prefer the term defense contractor. Specifically, ballerino.

RALSTON

Wait, are you here on orders from the Heroes' Union?

SVEN

Oh, run-of-the-mill insurrection
for insert worthy cause. You know,
freedom--rah. Let's see.

He pulls an origami crane from his shoe, unfolds it.

SVEN (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Top secret. Remove dictator.
Secure oil. Win hearts and minds.
Warmest regards, Commander Xander.
P.S. Burn after reading."

Ralston sinks into an equestrian loveseat, wide-eyed.

LOBBY

Herman the Decapitator enters, flanked by four patrol
centaurs who remain by the doors.

SNOW-MANUEL, an animate snowman wearing a colorful sombrero
and a western gunman poncho, attends the front desk.

SNOW-MANUEL

Welcome to the orphan superstore.
Me llamo Snow-Manuel. How may I
assist you?

Herman the Decapitator takes his time looking around: down
hallways, behind ornamental pottery.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I'm looking for someone.

SNOW-MANUEL

If you're here to claim an orphan,
have your tracking number ready,
por favor.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I don't have a tracking number.

SNOW-MANUEL

I hope you're not looking for a
sweatshop starter-package. We're
not that kind orphanage. Make your
own damned sneakers.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I don't see any orphans.

SNOW-MANUEL

We're more like a double-sided marketplace--orphan brokers, if you will, matching you across 27 dimensions of compatibility.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Middlemen.

He SNIFFS menacingly, approaching the desk.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR (CONT'D)

Something stinks.

They're standing nose-to-nose (carrot-to-snout).

SNOW-MANUEL

Perhaps it's because you're talking out of your ass.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Hee-haw. You must not be very attached to your head.

Jessamine enters in mock surprise.

JESSAMINE

Thou shalt not engage in fisticuffs in the lobby of an orphanage!

Herman the Decapitator and Snow-Manuel separate.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I have reason to believe--

SNOW-MANUEL

It's after hours--save your reasons and beliefs for your mare or your mother.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I'll require your full cooperation--

JESSAMINE

Respectfully, Mr. the Decapitator, we'll be happy to help any way we can, as soon as we see a warrant.

Herman the Decapitator snarls.

SNOW-MANUEL

Careful, caballo. Jessamine puts the "man hand" in "manhandle."

Close up on Jessamine's hand. SCREECHING HORROR FX.

Snow-Manuel pulls his poncho back, one branch-arm hovering over where a holster would be. Instead, he grips a snowball made of his own oblique.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Monsieur.

SNOW-MANUEL
Señor.

Long threatening stare before Herman the Decapitator leaves with his entourage.

Jessamine EXHALES her suppressed panic, BREATHING HEAVILY as she grips the side of the lobby desk for balance.

JESSAMINE
That was . . . That was--

SNOW-MANUEL
In the horse flesh. And he had
Toddrick's scalp-cloak on.

JESSAMINE
But I was only holding Toddrick's
place, until . . .

SNOW-MANUEL
Well, you're not a placeholder any
more, comandante.

JESSAMINE
I just, I need a minute. I'll be in
my room. Send the hunchback later.

He salutes. She staggers away.

JESSAMINE'S ROOM - LATER

Jessamine BRUSHES her hair before a vanity with the mirror removed, a small wooden cross in its place.

Two KNOCKS sound from her door.

JESSAMINE
Come in.

Ralston enters. Plain white walls. Mattress on the floor. The punching bag in the corner bleeds stuffing.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
So?

RALSTON
So.

JESSAMINE
You said you'd explain later. It's later. Explain.

RALSTON
Where to begin . . . Well, for one, I'm Ralston, the overlord.

She stops brushing. Stares angrily.

JESSAMINE
That's not funny. Ralston's gone.

RALSTON
He's not gone. He's here. He's me.

JESSAMINE
Haven't you read the news?

She hands him a paper.

RALSTON
(reading)
Overlord stoned to death by drunken crowd during karaoke performance.

JESSAMINE
He never could sing.

RALSTON
Are these tear drops on the page?

She snatches the paper back.

JESSAMINE
We once funded an aqueduct by putting a swear jar in the line at the DMV.

RALSTON
You knew him?

JESSAMINE
Does anyone know anyone?

RALSTON

If you liked him so much, why are you pretending to run an orphanage with the money he gave you?

JESSAMINE

I'm not pretending! We do everything we can for the orphans.

RALSTON

Like harboring rebels, mercenaries, and fugitive hunchbacks?

JESSAMINE

I grew up in this orphanage! So I can tell you firsthand, the best thing we can do for orphans is to stop making more.

RALSTON

I wish I had your certainty. About anything. Actually, I'm not even certain about that.

JESSAMINE

I can't believe Toddrick squired for someone like you. I don't.

RALSTON

"Don't split hairs when it comes to friendship." Those were his last words.

JESSAMINE

There's no way he came up with a hair pun, let alone on the spot.

RALSTON

Well, I came up with it for him.

She doesn't get it, doesn't want to get it.

JESSAMINE

I have an early morning. Rebel-sistance try-outs are tomorrow.

She ushers him into the hallway and begins closing the door.

RALSTON

Jessamine?

She stops.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
 You should wear heels all the time.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE - DAY

Jessamine and Snow-Manuel sit at a table beneath a hand-painted banner that reads: BAKE SALE.

Ralston approaches wearing a matching grey sweat suit.

SNOW-MANUEL
 You need directions or something?

RALSTON
 I'm looking for cookies, assuming that's the code phrase for "I'm here to join the Rebel-sistance."

JESSAMINE
 You can't just join.

SNOW-MANUEL
 There's a test.

RALSTON
 I'm good at tests.

SNOW-MANUEL
 Not this kind.

JESSAMINE
 Ralston, just go home. Wherever that is. Please?

Ralston nods and then starts to walk away but stops.

RALSTON
 I can't.

JESSAMINE
 What?

RALSTON
 I said I can't. And even if I could, I wouldn't. Not after what I've seen. So, do you have "cookies" or not?

Jessamine looks to Snow-Manuel. He shrugs.

OBSTACLE COURSE

A) Pan across monkey bars, climbing wall, rope swing, balance beam, trampoline, cargo net, tire run, rope traverse, and a zipline through fire.

Ralston bumbles: monkey bars, climbing wall, rope swing.

Jessamine, Snow-Manuel, and Sven form a judges' panel. They hold up score cards: 2, 0, "Boo."

B) There's a pull-curtain dressing room inside a walk-in closet lined with costumes.

Snow-Manuel enters the dressing room and then emerges wearing a red jacket with white t-shirt and pompadour wig. He brandishes a switch blade.

Jessamine enters and then emerges wearing a red bandana and a black leather jacket with a toothpick in her mouth. She lights a bra on fire.

Ralston enters and then emerges wearing fingerless gloves, a florid top hat, a bird-nest of rainbow-yarn dreads, and yellow eye shadow. He looks like a drag performer.

Jessamine and Snow-Manuel stare, speechless.

C) Ralston bumbles: balance beam, trampoline, cargo net.

Judges panel: Jessamine, a reluctant 0; Snow-Manuel holds up a 10 and then draws a negative sign; Sven files his nails.

D) Snow-Manuel, Jessamine, and Ralston space out along a brick wall, spraying graffiti tags.

Snow-Manuel's says, "Impeach."

Jessamine's says, "Equal pay for equal work."

Ralston's says, "Safety first."

E) Ralston bumbles: tire run, rope traverse, zipline.

Judges panel: Jessamine stares down, sullen; Snow-Manuel tosses his chair and leaves; Sven's asleep.

F) Ralston sneaks up on cows chewing cud, careful to avoid stepping in cow patties.

A sign says "NO TIPPING" inside a red slashed-through circle.

Ralston passes two cows, heading for a bull. Snow-Manuel and Jessamine try to warn him with hand signals.

Ralston tries and fails to tip the bull and is flung face-first into a cow patty.

RALSTON'S POV

Jessamine and Snow-Manuel hover above in disgust and pity.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
The sign says no, no tipping.
Double negative. It means tip. They
should hang it in a restaurant.

EXT. TRAINING YARD - DAY

Ralston watches from the bushes as the others train.

Snow-Manuel machine-guns snowballs at Sven.

SNOW-MANUEL
You really think that chico escaped
from Torture R&D?

We discover Sven's ballerino skills as he effortlessly dodges every snowball: pli , pirouette, tour en l'air.

SVEN
You don't pay me to think.

Jessamine twirls a smoking incense censor on a chain: dancing over it with a roundhouse kick, whirling it around her neck, whipping it straight forward like a martial arts master.

JESSAMINE
The Decapitator was after him.

SNOW-MANUEL
Pero Toddrick? Ello lived in a
wigwam made of actual wigs. No way
he squired for Se or Cow Patty.

JESSAMINE
I guess I was also hoping he'd be .
. . more. Still, Toddrick must have
seen something in him.

They finally stop when Snow-Manuel collapses, exhausted.

SNOW-MANUEL
Ay, chihuahua . . . yo no se,
se orita, but that hunchback
doesn't have a rebel bone in his
deformed little body.

He SIGHS.

Jessamine rests a hand on her hip and SIGHS.

Ralston SIGHS in the bushes, wounded by their disappointment.

Sven approaches Jessamine, puts his arm around her, SIGHS.

SVEN

I have a confession to make: I'm
having impure thoughts.

JESSAMINE

If God doesn't strike you down, I
will.

She shrugs his arm off.

SVEN

Think celibacy has something to do
with all that pent-up aggression?

Her man-hands ball into fists.

Sven backs away; Jessamine storms off.

Ralston emerges and chases after her.

STAIRS

He catches up to her.

JESSAMINE

No, Ralston.

RALSTON

Maybe, I'm so rebellious, I rebel
against rebellion. It's meta.

JESSAMINE

I'm sorry. There's no way I can
give you a passing grade.

RALSTON

Is this because I wouldn't throw
tea off a ship? I like tea! And
what does that even prove?

JESSAMINE

If I passed you, I'd be putting you
and other rebels in danger. Like
Toddrick. I just can't do that.

He stops as she continues on, looks down.

RALSTON

No.

JESSAMINE

Excuse me?

RALSTON

No--all rebellion's built on that one word. I refuse to be refused.

JESSAMINE

Counter-refusal denied.

RALSTON

How can you think there's one standard every rebel can be measured against? Rebels defy uniformity. I refute your denial of my refusal.

Jessamine takes a moment to ponder.

ROOF

One hand slaps a mop into another.

DRAW BACK

It's Jessamine who's given it to Ralston.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

You want me to be a rebel janitor?

JESSAMINE

Rebellion's a messy business.

The roof's lined with cages filled with ducks. Beneath them are piles of excrement, corn feed, and down feathers.

RALSTON

But I'm a radical thinker.

JESSAMINE

The messenger duck communication network is a vital part of the Rebel-sistance, allowing us to coordinate scattered rebel cells.

She ties a "Get Well Soon" scroll to a mallard's leg; it QUACKS and then FLUTTERS off.

Ralston sorts through a pile of similar scrolls.

RALSTON

Supply requisitions. Enemy troop movements. Policy memorandums! Wow!

JESSAMINE

Thank you. Pigeons are an obvious choice, but no one suspects a duck.

RALSTON

Do you have a filing system? Color-coded flags? Manilla folders?

JESSAMINE

Rebels don't do stationary.

RALSTON

You should have analysts, efficiency experts--

JESSAMINE

The trouble with a rebellion is it's full of rebels. You can't tell them what to do. They're rebels.

RALSTON

But a headquarters is supposed to be where the head is quartered-- that's "quartered" as in residing, not cut into four pieces.

JESSAMINE

Start with the ducks. If you want to file, do it on your own time.

Ralston stands at attention, mop as rifle, and salutes.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

I'm leaving on mission. Don't be yourself. Rather, imagine a self who's better than you and then be that self.

She leaves unceremoniously.

Ralston meets eyes with the closest duck. It squints and shudders as it SQUEEZES out a dump.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, COURTYARD - NIGHT

Dirty and dogged, Ralston DRAGS his feet, his mop completely brown. He sets it on a weapons rack between swords.

RALSTON

(sotto)

So, by replacing purchased
fertilizer with duck droppings, I
can reallocate the cost savings--

He arrives at a door and opens it, entering the

JANITOR'S CLOSET

Chaos: dusty cleaning implements lay broken and scattered
like the desolate remnants of a battlefield.

Close up on Ralston's face, which has become a contorted mask
of horror--he could handle everything, but this . . .

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Dirty soap? Dusty broom? I'll dirty
what I clean. It's too much.

He staggers two steps and then collapses on a dusty futon.

FADE TO BLACK.

NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE - ROOF-ISLAND IN A SEA OF BLACKNESS

Ralston mops duck droppings.

Instead of ducks, the cages are filled with animate shrunken
heads, a barbershop quartet in straw skimmer hats. They sing
to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

HEAD QUARTET

"Mop, mop, mop the duck droppings
all around."

As the first head finishes the first stanza, a second head
starts, beginning a round. This continues.

HEAD QUARTET (CONT'D)

"Terribly, terribly, terribly,
terribly, life'll make you scream."

Ralston hears a loud SMOOCH behind him, turns to see Sven and
Jessamine in each other's arms.

JESSAMINE

Oh, Sven! Tell me again how math is
useless and hunchbacks are
unlovable.

SVEN

Who knew the key to your chastity
belt was the improper English using
of verb tenses?

Jessamine SQUEALS with delight.

JESSAMINE

Let's have athletic coitus on
various obstacles Ralston failed to
surmount.

SVEN

I'll get the score cards!

They race off into the black holding hands and GIGGLING.

RALSTON

I hope stupidity isn't sexually
contagious . . .

MAUDE (O.S.)

Love certainly is.

He turns. Maude sits on a throne, dressed like Charla-mean.

Her ferret erupts from the bottom of the frame and HISSES.

Ralston jumps.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

A pity the hump didn't come with a
spine.

She BLOWS smoke into his face from a long-handled cigarette.

He COUGHS.

RALSTON

There is no risk-free level of
second-hand smoke exposure!

MAUDE

Then it's best for your health to
stay far from me.

RALSTON

How could you do this to me, your
own stepson?

MAUDE

What's the matter, can't solve for
x when why equals treachery?

CRASH. The ground shakes. Another CRASH. Shake. CRASH.

Peg-Tooth approaches riding a GIANT DUCK.

PEG-TOOTH

Hate to be a pain in the neck, but
I've brought you another gift.

He turns the duck so its tail feathers hover over Ralston.

RALSTON

Crap.

A shadow forms on his face. It grows as the object falls.

RALSTON'S POV

It's Herman the Decapitator falling from the duck's butt with his halberd raised.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I'll show you a head quartered!

INT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, JANITOR SHED - DAY

Ralston wakes with a GASP, cups his face in his hands.

RALSTON

I have neither the pluck nor the
aplomb for this.

GHOST OF TODDRICK (O.S.)

Maybe ye just need breakfast?

Ralston spreads his fingers to see a headless translucent version of Toddrick. His body holds his head over his hip like a basketball.

RALSTON

T-T-T-Toddrick?

GHOST OF TODDRICK

"Stutter" seems an inconsiderate
word for its meaning--so many "t"s.
There's an "s" in "lisp," three
"r"s in "rolling your 'r's," and
all three letters in "speech
therapist."

RALSTON

I'm, I'm hallucinating. Water, I
need water. Maybe an exorcist.

He ladles water from a bucket and frantically SLURPS.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Don't go getting pale on me, Bumpy--
the world isn't ready for an albino
hunchback.

RALSTON

So, Herman the Decapitator, he--

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Decapitation's a lot like scalping,
isn't it? Only you aim a bit lower.

Toddrick finger-combs Ralston's hair comfortingly.

RALSTON

My eyes are down here!

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Sorry, old habits. Looks like
you're having a rough go of it.

RALSTON

They said I wasn't rebel material.

He picks up things around the shed.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

If you accept that, they're right.

RALSTON

I wasn't overlord material either.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

You know, no one knows you're you,
so you can be any you, you want.

RALSTON

So, by being not-me, I become me?

GHOST OF TODDRICK

I don't know about that, but sure.
Never too late for a fresh start.

Ralston stands, heartened.

RALSTON

Then I'll be the best rebel janitor
the world has ever seen.

He dons yellow rubber gloves, shoe covers, hair net.

DANCE-CLEANING SLASH DUCK TRAINING MONTAGE

- A) Ralston does the "hey ho" while scrubbing a wall.
- B) He opens corn feed, is set upon by a swarm of ducks.
- C) He "makes it rain" urinal cakes into urinals.
- D) He ponders before penning a duck scroll and then smiles.
- E) He feather dusts while disco dancing.
- F) He sets a corn kernel on a duck's bill, motions "hold."
- G) He "cabbage patches" while wiping down tables.
- H) Ducks in a line set scrolls in bins: Inbox, Starred, Spam.
- I) He does the "spank that" while beating out a rug.
- J) Ducks line up to poop into a wooden bucket.
- K) Finished, he "dusts his shoulders off."

EXT. VAM-PIER - DAY

Six coffin-shaped ships float anchored at the docks.

Jessamine's head slowly rises from the water, wearing a red headband, a cross-shaped stake clenched between her teeth. Two other cowled nun-jas rise from the water behind her.

Grappling hooks LAND on the deck of the S.S. I-P-P-I and then SLIDE to the rail and SET. The nun-jas scurry up the ropes.

INT. S.S. I-P-P-I, GALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Coffins hang suspended between ropes, vam-pirate hammocks, two high in four rows that span the length of the galley.

Jessmine opens a coffin lid.

A vampire SNORES inside, wearing rejuvenating facial cream and cucumber slices over his eyes.

Jessamine drives her stake through his heart.

He POOFS into glitter, leaving only cucumber behind.

The two accompanying nun-jas follow suit, making their way down the line of swinging coffins.

A CHIRP. Jessamine spots Maude's ferret slinking from the room and follows into a

HALLWAY

The ferret turns and HISSES before darting into the

CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

As Jessamine enters, the ferret scurries up a leg--Maude's.

She has a flintlock pistol aimed at Jessamine's chest.

MAUDE

Any last words?

JESSAMINE

You'll never take me alive.

MAUDE

Hadn't planned to.

JESSAMINE

I didn't come alone.

Peg-Tooth enters behind her wearing a blood-speckled bib.

PEG-TOOTH

Neither of the others had that
virgin aftertaste--bloody shame.

He draws his cutlass.

JESSAMINE

I'm not some untrained peasant
bumpkin.

PEG-TOOTH

All my victims are rednecks by the
time I'm through.

JESSAMINE

I think you'll find that neither I
nor my blood are your type.

MAUDE

Stop playing with your food!

EXT. S.S. I-P-P-I - CONTINUOUS

The ship bobs in the wind. GUNFIRE off screen.

A messenger duck takes flight.

FADE TO WHITE.

EXT. TOWNVILLE - NIGHT

Ralston sprints, determination in his face, dragging his rickshaw. Snow-Manuel drinks from a wineskin in the back.

Messenger ducks fly in an inverted "V" formation overhead.

EXT. RENT-A-STEED - NIGHT

The torch sconces are lit on a small trailer office adjoined by a much larger barn. The sign reads: RENT-A-STEED.

We see a woman's silhouette through slatted window shades. There's a much shorter silhouette facing her.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

Can I interest you in scratch-ding incidental exterior minor coverage?

JESSAMINE (O.S.)

I'm kind of in a life-or-death pursuit situation here, so if I could just sign the vellum and rapidly be on my way, please.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

Sure, sure. But, given your dire and perilous circumstances, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention our steed-jacking liability insurance, personal injury and effects protection, or our collision or loss damage waiver.

JESSAMINE (O.S.)

Abraham, father of Issac, father of Jacob, father of Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin! Can't you tell I'm in hurry?

SALESMAN (O.S.)

Yes, ma'am--you're bleeding on the floor, but there's no need to take that genealogical tone with me. Insurance is your assurance against the probable possibilities brought on by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

JESSAMINE (O.S.)
 This is outrageous! And you're
 fortunate that I'm leaving.

Her shadow passes from the trailer-office followed by the
 salesman's.

Pan to the barn.

SALESMAN (O.S.)
 If your steed comes back with
 anything less than a full stomach,
 I'll have to charge you at an
 increased rate per feed bag.

We hear a CRASH, followed by Jessamine CLEARING her throat.

A beat later, she comes TROTTING out on the back of a
 CLANKING armored camel. As they pass, it reads "Hump-V" over
 the camel's rear bumper.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

Ralston and Snow-Manuel roll up, ducks overhead, to see
 Jessamine, her camel at a full GALLOP, trailed by a cloud of
 FLUTTERING bats--vam-pirates.

JESSAMINE
 Ralston?

RALSTON
 Jessamine!

JESSAMINE
 Where's Sven? I said bring back up.

RALSTON
 Trust me, I've got all the back
 you're going to need.

The bats land, transforming via glitter-cloud into a line of
 pale-faced vam-pirates with eye-liner, modeling as though for
 a rock band album cover.

Peg-Tooth lands in front.

PEG-TOOTH
 Tonight's menu features a delicious
 pairing of--

Pan to Ralston.

PEG-TOOTH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 --shoulder of mutton--

Pan to Jessamine.

PEG-TOOTH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 --and Bloody Marys--

Pan to Snow-Manuel.

PEG-TOOTH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 --on ice.

Back to Peg-Tooth.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
 Be sure to tip your waiters.

The vam-pirates charge.

Ralston WHISTLES.

OVERHEAD

Messenger ducks bomb the vam-pirates with water balloons.

DOWN BELOW

The impacts BURST balloons, SPLASHING vam-pirates and making them smoke and SIZZLE and SCREAM.

JESSAMINE
 Holy water balloons!

RALSTON
 I had them blessed by a mall Santa--
 wasn't sure if it would work.

SNOW-MANUEL
 Esta ho-ho-ho-ly water!

He MACHINE-GUNS snowballs at vam-pirates who break into allergic reactions: CHAIN-SNEEZING, GASPING, swelling, hives, and red irritated eyes.

JESSAMINE
 That smell--

Ralston tosses her an empty wine skin. She smells it.

RALSTON
 Garlic ice: infused with
 concentrated oil extract.

Jessamine charges in, taking out what few vam-pirates make it through the bombings and whittling snowball fire with her cross-stake.

Ralston mans the rickshaw. As messenger ducks land in a line, he feeds them corn-kernels and then resupplies them with holy-water balloons. They QUACK and FLUTTER off.

VAM-PIRATES
(various)
Argh! Aye! Aye-aye! My eye!

SIZZLE. Smoke. Snowballs. SPLASH. SNEEZE. QUACKS. Glitter.

PEG-TOOTH
Retreat! Retreat, you batty
bloodsuckers! We need aloe and anti-
histamine, stat!

He transforms into a bat, SCREECHES, and flies off. The others follow.

Jessamine cuts a heroic figure, standing alone in windblown swirl of glitter dust, broken bits of rainbow water balloons underfoot. Ducks pick at the battlefield as though crows.

JESSAMINE
Ralston . . . you did it.

RALSTON
We did it.

SNOW-MANUEL
Ole-e-e-e, ole, ole, ole!

JESSAMINE
I owe you an apology. I said the
most awful things--

RALSTON
Meh, what are a few stupid words
between friends?

Jessamine stares, imagining passionate Yanni-esque SAXOPHONY.

END SAXOPHONY abruptly as Snow-Manuel approaches. Jessamine pinches her nose and begins COUGHING.

SNOW-MANUEL
I'm going to have to scrub my
pores, do a juice cleanse, and wear
cologne by the gallon.

Ralston clamps his nose with a clothes pin and then hands Jessamine one; Snow-Mauel removes his carrot-nose.

JESSAMINE

Smiles, and then her eyes roll back and she feints.

RALSTON

Catches her. She's bleeding.

RALSTON

No. No, no, no, no, no.

She relaxes in his arms.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Please, no. Please . . .

EXT. JESSAMINE'S GRAVE - DAY

A headstone reads: JESSAMINE. The text below: LOVED STILL.

Long hold. A breeze STIRS the grass, ever so slightly.

The mound RUSTLES. Pause. RUSTLE. It COLLAPSES in as Jessamine crawls out.

JESSAMINE'S POV

A pale dirty hand is raised skyward, examined, turned. Twin punctures mar her outer forearm.

The sun has shifted from cheery yellow to oppressive red.

JESSMINE (O.S.)

Ugh, what the fork?

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE - DAY

A hooded figure strolls through a crowded yard.

CHANGE ANGLE

It's Jessamine. She wades through rebels garbed in pink and gray uniforms, some training, some conversing.

An animate shrunken head mans a booth labeled "DEFECTORS" with a long line in front of it.

A WerePoodle drags a sled stacked with vam-pirate coffins labeled "REBEL CONVERTS."

Jessamine stops a NUN-JA pushing a mower across the lawn.

JESSAMINE
Excuse me, but what're you doing?

NUN-JA
I don't care what you say. You
can't make me stop.

She keeps moving, forcing Jessamine to follow.

JESSAMINE
I don't understand.

The nun-ja slaps a scroll to Jessamine's chest and leaves.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
(reading)
"You are hereby forbidden from
being a groundskeeper at Rebel-
sistance HQ. Do not, under any
circumstances, for any reason
whatsoever, mow the grass and trim
the hedges daily. Do I make myself
clear? -Ralston"

The nun-ja returns, making a mower pass.

NUN-JA
No one tells me what to do.

Jessamine remembers:

JESSAMINE (V.O.)
The trouble with a rebellion is
it's full of rebels. You can't tell
them what to do. They're rebels.

The nun-ja returns on another mower pass.

JESSAMINE
Uh, keep up the good work--I mean,
you really showed them!

NUN-JA
Darned right I did.

JESSAMINE
(sotto)
Reverse psychology . . .

SIDE LAWN

A sign reads: POSITIVITY PROHIBITED.

A merman stands with a nun-ja.

MERMAN

Sister! You look fin-tastic.

NUN-JA

You're an artist, and body
sculpting if your art.

Jessamine walks past to the

REAR GATE

A sign reads: NO LITTERING.

There are bottles and cans everywhere.

Ralston fills a sack and passes it to a dwarf who throws it
into a yak-drawn wagon. A gnome hands Ralston a coin purse.

RALSTON

Hey, feel free to hang around.
Something about a gnome on the lawn
just makes me happy.

The gnome winks and shoots him finger-guns before helping the
dwarf fill sacks with recyclables.

JESSAMINE

Ralston?

Ralston freezes.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

It's me.

RALSTON

Huh, what? No, no it isn't, I mean,
I'm sure you're you, whoever that
is, but you can't be the you, you
look like because I . . . because.

JESSAMINE

I'm really me. Really.

RALSTON

Great, now pain and hope are
ruining my objectivity.

JESSAMINE

Please, this is hard for me too.

They're drawing attention.

She pulls her cloak in, takes his hand, and leads them into--

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shutting the door behind them, they find a narrow window-lit aisle between shelves. He's both horrified and thrilled by their proximity. She's too preoccupied to notice.

RALSTON

Oh! That's uh, hello--

JESSAMINE

This is good, I think.

RALSTON

How did you, how are you--

JESSAMINE

I should be happy, right? Right? Right? I'm not dead and things seem better than ever, like, a lot.

RALSTON

I'm really glad you're safe.

JESSAMINE

Just, did things have to get so much better without me? I mean, one short dirt nap and, was I holding things back?

RALSTON

That's not it at all. You can't be everything, and that's okay because you have others. Like me, and not just me, but others. Like me.

DEEP BREATH. She plants her forehead on his shoulder. He's comically unsure of what to do with his hands.

JESSAMINE

I think I saw a defector line?

RALSTON

Rebellion can feel a little negative sometimes, so I thought, hey, how about incentives? You know: nap pods, paternity leave, tuition assistance. We get a tax break for retirement contributions!

Distracted by his own explanation, he rests his arms on her shoulders--they're accidentally hugging.

JESSAMINE
I can't believe you did all this.

RALSTON
I don't think I would have if
anyone had believed in me.

JESSAMINE
Maybe you're a rebel after all.

A box FALLS a few aisles over. She creeps toward RUSTLING.

JESSAMINE'S POV

Between boxes, it looks like two women attacking a man.

REVEAL

It's Sven. The women are tearing at his clothes.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
Sven?

He freezes, guilty, and then ushers the girls away, spanking one as she skitters off, two colors of lipstick on his neck.

SVEN
Jennifer! I mean, Jessamine! You
look splendid. I used to only fancy
blondes, but I've come to see how
shallow I was. Now I enjoy hot-
bodied women of all hair colors.

She SLAPS him.

JESSAMINE
Where were you?

SVEN
Me? I was--where was I? I had
business elsewhere. Important
business of vital import.

JESSAMINE
It was a trap. I got captured. I
escaped. We fought. Ralston brought
ducks, and you . . . you!

SVEN
I was at your funeral. Lovely
event. Lots of women in need of
comfort and--

JESSAMINE

Fail me again, and I'll be at yours, only we won't be talking after. Understand? This is where you say "yes" and then get out of my sight.

SVEN

Yes.

Sven shoulders through Ralston as he leaves.

JESSAMINE

And you.

Ralston GULPS, looks around.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

Choose a title more suited to your role. I'm promoting you.

RALSTON

Are you okay? I've never seen you talk like that before.

JESSAMINE

I'm just tired. Thirsty, maybe.

RALSTON

Just, don't overdo it, okay? We just got you back.

He helps her balance as they stagger from the warehouse.

JESSAMINE

Why's our molotov supply so low?

RALSTON

About that--I know rebels love their molotovs, but in an effort to reduce our carbon footprint and conduct warfare more humanely--

JESSAMINE

We can talk about it later.

She separates, continuing alone. He stares after, concerned.

INT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, JESSAMINE'S ROOM - DAY

Jessamine hurries to the window and draws the shades shut.

She pulls her lip back, tests a finger against her new fangs.

Panicked, she kneels by her bedside, wrist rosary held in her hand, and MUTTERS inaudible prayers.

She pauses at a SIZZLING sound, looks down to see her rosary is burning her hand.

GHOST OF TODDRICK (O.S.)
That ain't bacon cooking.

JESSAMINE
Toddrick?

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Shorter than ye remember, I know.

JESSAMINE
But--

GHOST OF TODDRICK
I'm dead, yeah. Can we skip the whole are-you-real, I'm-real, prove-it, how, tell-me-something-only-you-would-know, you-don't-really-want-to-be-a-nunja-you-just-feel-obligated-and-secretly-wear-high-heels-because-there's-nothing-wrong-with-wanting-to-feel-sexy thing?

JESSAMINE
It really is you!

Overcome, she hurries to hug him, but passes through him, CRASHES into her vanity, and FALLS.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
It's the thought that counts. Looks like nun-hood doesn't agree with you these days?

He sets his head on the bed and then sits beside it.

JESSAMINE
I'll concede my rosary's been a bit scathing to the touch lately.

She plops down beside the head.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Mind if I see the, uh, hickey?

JESSAMINE
It's not a hickey, it's a combat injury!

She rolls her sleeve up to show him her vam-pirate bite.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Sometimes in a girl's life, her
body goes through changes--

JESSAMINE
I don't need a puberty pep-talk,
Toddrick--I'm fine . . . oh, who am
I kidding? I'm not fine. I . . . I
can't cry. My tear ducts--

GHOST OF TODDRICK
You can always find something to
smile or cry about. Being that
you've got swell new teeth and
broken tear ducts--

JESSAMINE
How will I mourn third world
problems? Global warming? The
burning hellfires that await
impenitent non-believers?

He "grips" her shoulders, tries in vain to shake her.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
That's violence against women!

GHOST OF TODDRICK
There's only one of you, so it's
violence against woman. Anyway, it
was symbolic; I knew it wouldn't
connect.

She advances; he backpedals, soothing her with hand motions.

JESSAMINE
Symbolic violence against woman,
then. Maybe pulverizing a
misogynist will make me feel
better.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Heated gender issues produce a
plethora of taboo double standards!

JESSAMINE
You're in a fight now, Toddrick,
whether you want to be or not.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

You're only going to hurt my
feelings. And maybe your hands and
feet.

She throws a rear sidekick which passes through him,
SHATTERING her chair against the wall.

JESSAMINE

Our father who art . . . Ooo, I
can't even remember the words!

She throws a one-two PUNCH that puts two holes in the wall.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Absent. Your capitol-"F" father art
absent, but your ghost-father
figure art standing right here.

His body moves around the room to get away, although there's
really no need, talking from his head on the bed.

JESSAMINE

I refuse to be mentored by the
ghost of a scalper! I don't even
believe in ghosts!

She dispenses a kata that SNAPS her bed post.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Liar, liar, granny panties on fire!
You're always on about the Holy
Ghost. Maybe I'd be holey enough
for ye if Herman was a firing
squad!

JESSAMINE

Death, un-death, and modest
undergarments are not laughing
matters!

Her flying spin kick COLLAPSES her dresser.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Why's yourr solution to everything
to suffer or sacrifice yourself?
Oh, right--the crucifixion is your
behavioral benchmark.

JESSAMINE

A moral trial is not the time for
sacrilege!

She collapses, BREATHING HEAVY, and grabs a piece of broken wood, an impromptu stake. She holds it to her chest.

He picks up his head and sets it on the floor across from her. Then his body leaves, giving them privacy.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

You're not the one on trial, here.
If you'd just open your mind, you
might see that being a vampire
alone might not make you evil.
Maybe you can be vam-pious? A nun-
feratu.

JESSAMINE

One cannot be an unholy creature in
a holy station.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

One's been through a lot and
shouldn't be so hard on oneself.
Perhaps, now, one may wear heels
with impunity, shamelessly purchase
lingerie, and pursue carnal love?

JESSAMINE

No, Ralston can never know!

She drops the impromptu stake.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Who said anything about Ralston?
Way to go, Bumpy!

She tries to smack him, playful, but HITS the bed frame beyond him.

GHOST OF TODDRICK (CONT'D)

Look, all I'm saying is your own
figurehead was raised from the dead
and He still had work to do after.

JESSAMINE

You're either a saint or a heretic.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Do I have to be one or the other?

Jessamine ponders the question.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, TRAINING YARD - DAY

Ralston peaks from the janitor's shed, wearing ill-fitting training gear. He checks that no one's around before sneaking toward a training dummy with his wooden sword.

He squares up with a dummy, takes a breath, and then swings. His arm is too short.

He takes a step closer and repeats--still too short.

Another step, another swing. This time he HITS it. It SPINS around and SMACKS him on the side of the head.

Ralston winces, rubbing his head.

He does some not-so-fancy FOOTWORK to juke out the dummy and then SMACKS it with his sword. This time, he ducks when it SPINS around, but it still HITS his hunchback, knocking him on his butt.

Spiteful, he throws his sword at the dummy and misses.

Sven approaches the training dummy doing a SLOW CLAP.

SVEN

Why don't you try fighting a dummy
who can defend himself?

He DRAWS his rapier.

RALSTON

What? No! I have a wooden sword.

SVEN

Then you use mine--

Sven flings his sword so that it WOBBLIES point-down in the ground, dangerously close to Ralston's crotch.

SVEN (CONT'D)

And I'll use yours.

He TOE-FLIPS the wooden sword into the air, spins, catches it, and then falls into stance.

Ralston stands and takes up Sven's sword.

RALSTON

What if I cut you?

Sven LAUGHS.

SVEN

En-core!

He SWATS the knuckles on Ralston's sword hand. Ralston's sword CLANGS onto the ground.

RALSTON

Ouch! Don't you mean "en garde?"

He retrieves his sword.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

"Encore" means your audience wants a repeat performance.

As if prompted, Sven repeats his knuckle strike.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

You said "encore," not me!

SVEN

No more words-ing.

He puts his sword and hands behind his back.

Ralston slashes, thrusts, backslashes.

Sven leans away, steps back, side steps.

SVEN (CONT'D)

As a new guy who no one's jealous of, you may not have heard how I deposed the last overlord.

He hops over a slash aimed across his shins.

RALSTON

Ralston?

SVEN

Not that pathetic weakling. His father, the fierce and wise one.

RALSTON

I'd rather--

SVEN

Unsure whether I could best him in a fair fight, I waited until he was weathered by wave after wave of angry peasant fodder.

Ralston attacks harder; Sven tries harder not to get hit.

SVEN (CONT'D)
 When, at last, he was tired,
 peppered with arrows, bloodied by
 sword slashes--the fool fought on
 the frontlines with his men, you
 see. Only then did I issue my
 challenge: single combat.

Ralston presses so hard Sven has to bring his arms around and
 use the wooden sword to PARRY and DEFLECT.

SVEN (CONT'D)
 I couldn't just outright execute
 him. I had to make an example.

Ralston charges Sven; Sven steps aside and TRIPS him.

Ralston FALLS facedown.

SVEN (CONT'D)
 So I poked and jabbed with rapier
 wit and witty rapier, let him crawl
 through the mud on his belly in
 front of his whole fiefdom--never
 could get him to beg. He bled out,
 too weak to lift his sword but
 trying nonetheless.

Ralston springs up, rushes Sven.

RALSTON
 (voice breaks)
 Stop talking about my father!

Now, Sven must not only PARRY but return strikes to stay
 alive: he STRIKES Ralston's arm and then his leg.

SVEN
 Your father?

Ralston presses on despite his injuries.

RALSTON
 You'll get what you deserve if I'm
 the one who has to give it to you.

Sven GUT-PUNCHES Ralston and then SWEEPS his legs out.

Ralston rises.

Sven levels Ralston, SMACKING the sword flat across his face.

SVEN

Keep playing pretend, building up your play fort, but the only way to win a war is by destroying your opponent.

Sven MIC-DROPS the wooden sword, recovers his, and leaves.

When he's gone, Ralston WEEPS.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, PARKING-LOT STABLE - NIGHT

Ralston sneak-limps to his rickshaw with a backpack.

Jessamine, now wearing a traveler's cloak, leads her armored camel by the reins.

RALSTON

Jessamine? What are you doing?

JESSAMINE

Ralston! Hello, I, what am I doing?
I, what are you doing?

RALSTON

Me? You! You were going to leave without saying goodbye.

JESSAMINE

It's not that I didn't want to-- wait, you were leaving too.

RALSTON

I wanted to say goodbye, but didn't know how. I guess we get to figure it out together.

Long beat while each waits for the other.

JESSAMINE

Have you ever been halfway through a hotdog at a baseball game when you realize it's Friday when good Catholics don't eat red meat?

RALSTON

I'm not really good at sports--

JESSAMINE

You can't finish the hotdog because now you know it's Friday, but you can't not finish the hotdog because it's a sin to waste food.

(MORE)

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

Before you know it, the baseball game's over, you don't know who won, and you didn't even enjoy yourself.

RALSTON

Whatever you mean, I believe in you. I've never known anyone better at bettering everything, or who looked better doing it.

JESSAMINE

I, thanks, Ralston. I, thanks. What about you? Can you say?

RALSTON

De-motivational speech circuit.

After a confused beat, Jessamine LAUGHS. Ralston joins her.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

What with the diminishing returns on systemic improvement . . . I can't just stay safe on sidelines.

Jessamine smirks, stares, and then kisses him on the cheek.

She heads to her armored camel. He watches after, holding a hand to his cheek as if to hold onto the kiss forever.

INT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, JESSAMINE'S ROOM - DAY

Snow-Manuel knocks, waits, peers inside.

SNOW-MANUEL

Jessamine?

JANITOR'S SHED

Snow-Manuel knocks, waits, peers inside.

SNOW-MANUEL (CONT'D)

Ralston?

HIDDEN ALCOVE C

Snow-Manuel knocks, waits, peers inside.

SNOW-MANUEL (CONT'D)

Sven?

EXT. VAM-PIER - NIGHT

Boots ECHO against the pier and stop before the S.S. I-P-P-I.

JESSAMINE
Peg-Tooth!

Vam-pirates appear on deck, along with Peg-tooth.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
I challenge you for captaincy of
the vam-pirate fleet.

Peg-tooth struts toward her: deck, gangplank, pier.

PEG-TOOTH
Crews be electing their own
captains, missy--pirate's code. You
could run for office, but you'd
have to be a vampire to do it.

Jessamine UNFASTENS her cloak and lets it FALL, revealing
that she's a vampire dressed as a pirate.

JESSAMINE
I am Nun-feratu, putting myself
forward for captaincy and
challenging you to a duel.

The vam-pirates let out a COLLECTIVE GASP.

PEG-TOOTH
Then I must accept.

JESSAMINE
Name your weapon.

She sets a sure hand on the sword at her side.

Peg-tooth pauses, smirks.

PEG-TOOTH
Rap battle.

The vam-pirates HOOT and HOLLER, CHEER and WHISTLE.

Jessamine's face sinks.

Peg-Tooth strips off his puffy shirt to reveal a wife-beater
and a gold chain. He twists his captain's hat off canter.

He leads the crew in a STOMP-CLAP to lay a beat.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
 Gimme' a chorus of "yo ho," just
 the baritones.

The baritones sing "YO HO" at interval.

Peg-Tooth winks at Jessamine and BLOWS her a kiss goodbye.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
 (proper and enunciated)
*You hear that "yo, ho," girl? They
 callin' for you. "P" to the "E" to
 the "G" to the "tooth," come on
 boys now raise the roof.*

He and the crew bob to the rhythm.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
*Yeah, I know we outside, but we
 always outside--the law, the walls
 of moral confinement in immoral
 refinement, yeah, a real fine-dine-
 ment that'll nurse the curse of our
 literal blood thirst. We're more or
 less moral-less, corsairs with
 coarse stares, a brood of brooding
 brutes, buff-toughs who can't get
 enough of the rough stuff.*

He flexes a bicep in Jessamine's face.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
*We loot that booty with aesthetic
 prosthetics n' beauty cosmetics.*

Vam-pirates in guy-liner point hook-hands and peg-legs at an overflowing treasure chest.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
*I got some amazing grace for your
 newfound fang-face. You a land-
 lubbin' lass who nun too funny. You
 a benign divine who think port's a
 dessert wine. You a bossy softie
 who think starboard serves coffee.*

He's in her face, vam-pirates reveling in his insults.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)
*Where your old threads, sister? The
 penguin suit suits you--wearin' the
 black n' white of ya worldview. A
 ship's sail ain't no bake sale,
 honey.*

(MORE)

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)

*Let's bench the wench n' suffer her
rage, 'less you wanna parley all
day about suff-r-age.*

He high fives crew members and gloats, sure of his victory.

Close up on Jessamine, frozen with fear.

RALSTON (V.O.)

You should wear heels all the time.

She EXHALES, shuts her eyes, and then opens them.

JESSAMINE

*Maybe you look at me and you don't
see the kind of avast-ye-matey you
prefer to see, but please--suspend
disbelief, cuz judgin' me makes you
guilty of the prejudice which you
accuse me. See, I just kicked a bad
habit, n' by habit I mean the nun's
habit that was oppressing me,
pressing me into a mess, you see. I
was uninformed about the you it
forms when you in uniform and offer
my apologies--honestly.*

The revelry dies down as the crew listens.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

*But, any man who say a lady can't
lead, forgets he leads a gang of
slaves that're freed--minorities:
Indian, Caribbean, Chinese. Yeah,
workin' as equals was piracy's
prequel to democracy, straight
Socrates--the sequel's not what
you'll reap from this debauchery.*

Some vam-pirates quiet, cast their eyes down in shame.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

*I'm listenin' fellas to the sounds
you make: your "sea"s, your "aye"s,
your "argh"s--letters which you
better believe misspell "sir," cuz
you kept down and kept dumb like
subservient scum, run down on
reruns of redrum and bedlam. Ya
drink rum to forget deeds ya
regret. N' I've heard the words you
haven't said; let's serve them
words they haven't read.*

(MORE)

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

*I got two rebel letters to teach
you: the first is an "f," the
second is a "u."*

Sad vam-pirates become uplifted.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

*Let's say it to the leaders who
betray you, who prey on you, who
use and abuse you to do to others
what they do to you! Tell them
regressive Pilates we progressive
pirates, takin' the high ground on
the high seas cuz it ain't blood
you suck when you down on your
knees.*

UPROARIOUS APPLAUSE. CHEERS. Heads nod.

Peg-tooth's rattled, seeing his crew react. He COUGHS and then counterattacks.

PEG-TOOTH

*We privateers, profiteers,
prophet's fears, not volunteers in
boutonnieres for this rival woman
to revile--must be on her cycle cuz
she crampin' up my style.*

He feigns stomach cramps.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)

*We gots to outfox this foxy
Goldilocks or be laughingstocks.
Gotta make this stowaway go away,
overboard, she's overstayed.
Otherwise isn't wise to compromise
'til we're compromised.
As for our moral decay, one
phrase'll dislodge her--it's a
black flag, so be jolly. Roger?*

He poses heroically, jolly Roger flag flapping behind him.

PEG-TOOTH (CONT'D)

*We're best, men, when we jestin',
placin' wild bets-'n totin' exotic
pets like parrots. But let's not
veer off or steer off the edge of
the map, a mishap chaps where I'll
share there be dragons, beware. A
woman as captain can't happen--
unless Polly want a kraken.*

CHEERS. He's "retaken the helm," so to speak.

Jessamine's climbed the rigging to the crow's nest.

JESSAMINE

A smear campaign's not a political platform--it's bad form that's become the new norm. I didn't hear a single stance on a single issue, just personal issues he issued in a way that diss-ed you--I take issue.

Vam-pirates scrutinize Peg-Tooth.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

His campaign crescendos in crass innuendo. His shallow leadership'll have you stranded, marooned, empty-handed on an island of ignorance. Your deficiency of decency was sufficient 'til recently--this question pay heed to: where will these concessions lead you?

Vam-pirates turn to one another.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

The answer? Haul anchor. The future lies in a new horizon. We can outlast the outcast status if we cast off the castoff antics, trade our scurvy for savvy, forge a new accord where we're all aboard, swords ashore, fightin' for the freedom of the fiefdom, we can defeat them with this note I've brought you--cast your votes for Nun-feratu.

SILENCE. And then MURMURS crop up, spread.

Peg-tooth glances about, defeated.

VAM-PIRATE #1

My own ignorance was far more dangerous than scurvy.

VAM-PIRATE #2

That's an interesting point you raise. Perhaps we should discuss it civilly to reach a consensus?

Peg-tooth draws his cutlass and rushes Jessamine's back.

Sensing this, Jessamine runs up the mast, flips around behind him, and then spins his head around.

PEG-TOOTH
Head-turner . . . pun.

Peg-Tooth dissolves into glitter, leaving his captain's hat and a saltine cracker--the one that changes Ralston back.

Jessamine dons the hat and tosses the cracker overboard.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Ralston takes to podium on an empty stage in a tailored suit, hundreds of hench-goons seated around him.

He deliberates. COUGHS. Freezes. The audience waits.

JESSAMINE (V.O.)
Maybe you're a rebel after all.

He EXHALES, shuts his eyes, and then opens them.

RALSTON
Is positivity always such a good thing? Take pregnancy, for instance.

Scandalized brow raises. Canted Werepoodle heads.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
What percent of failure occurs from misplaced confidence? By a show of hands, who here's run an opponent through only to find a surprised look on their face?

Reluctant hand raises. Cross non-participants.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
Positive visualization, best-selling secret or not, gave them fatal false assurance. Couldn't that have been you? I'll tell you, no mental attitude can un-stab you.

Deflated hench-goons toss down their weapons and remove the spiked collars from their WerePoodles.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Hench-goons sit in a circle of foldout chairs beneath a banner that reads: MYTHICAL CREATURE SUPPORT GROUP.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Self-help's an oxymoron. How can you help you? You already know everything you know. You're already capable of all you can do. You literally bring nothing else to a table you're already sitting at.

Hench-goons toss paperbacks into a waste bin in SLOW MOTION so that we can read their covers: PURPOSE-DRIVEN SUBSERVIENCE, 4.5 HABITS OF DELUDED TYPE-AS, LIAR'S GUIDE TO HYPERACTIVE ESCAPISM. END SLOW MOTION.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - DAY

A remote cabin surrounded by trees. Sign: COWARDS' RETREAT.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Maybe there are no right answers, just right questions. Like why should social benefit determine vice and virtue?

A twigs SNAPS in the woods; all heads turn in unison.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Some would say fear's a rational response. Don't those who encourage courage do so from a safe distance?

Nervous glances--fear's their acknowledgment.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

There's no such thing as a fair fight. Anyone who endorses one, does so because they have some advantage: strength, skill, equipment--something that makes things less than evenly matched. Tell me, what's fair about that?

Attendees flee into the woods.

EXT. BACKYARD BARBECUE - DAY

Hench-goons in lab coats clasp red Solo cups. Ralston mans a grill in an apron, flipping patties.

RALSTON

All possibilities are equally improbable as each is one of all near-impossibilities represented by the fraction one over infinity.

(MORE)

RALSTON (CONT'D)

So, if every common occurrence is nearly impossible, who's to say your wife isn't cheating on you? That you won't get struck by lightning? That Han shot first?

Attendees squeeze bottles of narcotic-condiments on their burgers: PERCO-SAUCE, OXYCODON-AISE, VICO-DILL RELISH.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Even the biggest events and celebrities of our time are footnotes enlarged by our minuscule perspectives. Given the vastness of time and the scope of history, can anyone really arrive upon personal significance? Must attention be paid?

A scientist HAMMERS a poster on his wooden fence, "The Rebel-sistance: A Cause for Rebels without One."

INT. SPEAKERS' PANEL - DAY

Projected on a screen: TORTURERS AND EXECUTIONERS EXPO.

Engraved plates sit atop desks in the front row: BIG PHARMA, INSURANCE AGENTS, BANKERS, TELEMARETERS.

Dr. Torture-Meister avidly takes notes behind the sign, "LESSER EVIL OF LITERAL TORTURE."

RALSTON

The bummer about intellect is that it takes intellect to know whether you have it, so that if you don't have it, you don't have what it takes to know you don't.

Nods from the audience, pensive looks.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

You hired me, a stranger, to come tell you some version of "You can do it!" But I don't know you. Or it. And maybe you can't. Did you need me to tell you that? Good feelings are not a fix--it's better to be better than to feel better.

Standing OVATION. Ushers pass out Rebel-sistance flyers.

INT. VILLA VILLAINY, MAUDE'S DELUXE WASHROOM - NIGHT

Maude luxuriates in a bubble bath sipping champagne.

Her ferret floats on its back, wearing goggles.

MAUDE

It's true, then, about Peg-tooth?

Herman the Decapitator holds one hand over his eyes.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Preliminary glitter autopsy shows that while the head twist was traumatic, it was the shame that killed him.

MAUDE

Sentimental fool, and with inconsiderate timing. This pandemic of disgusting anti-hope is turning hench-goons into free-thinking altruists by the gaggle.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

The hunchback rallies rebel-rabble in rubble-hovel huddles against us.

MAUDE

Only so far as his mediocrity doesn't offend theirs. The mob's fickle--you'll see.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

The snowman marches an army on Villa Villainy as we speak.

Maude tenses, SNAPPING the stem of her champagne flute.

The ferret SQUEAKS and hurriedly SUBMERGES.

MAUDE

I trust you can handle thwarting their plans?

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

I love the smell of facepalm in the morning.

EXT. VILLA VILLAINY, TENT ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Ralston reviews speaking notes by a breakfast campfire.

Hench-goons hurry about, arming and armoring themselves.

Ralston looks up, looks around. Then he sees them: the Rebel-sistance breaching the horizon, MARCHING in thunderous lockstep, dressed in pink and gray.

Elated, he fist pumps. When observed, he evolves the motion into shaking his fist at the approaching army.

CAMP OUTSKIRTS

Ralston jogs, hugging papers to his chest.

A paper slips away. He chases it to the tree line where he hears a hushed argument. He hides. Listens.

INSIDE TREELINE

Sven pleas with Maude, who has her arms crossed.

SVEN

What wrinkles?

Maude clenches her jaw. Hard stare.

SVEN (CONT'D)

What I mean is, I can't see your wrinkles--not because it's too dark to see them, but because they're barely there, if they're there.

MAUDE

When you speak, it makes me want to die. Shut up and kiss me.

She seizes him by the collar and pulls their faces together.

CAMP OUTSKIRTS

Ralston's jaw drops. He lets the wind takes all his papers.

INSIDE TREELINE

Sven pushes away, gasping for breath.

SVEN

After we've brought them to their knees, our love's foul taint will smother them to death.

MAUDE

That's anatomically descriptive.

The wind whips a page of Ralston's notes to Maude's feet.

She picks it up, reads it. Recognition dawns. She looks to
CAMP OUTSKIRTS

Ralston's gone.

INSIDE TREELINE

SVEN

Paper really does come from trees.

Maude CRUMPLES the page in her balled fist.

MAUDE

My ex-husband once stood between
our love. Now, his son--

SVEN

Say no more.

He marches off to her approval, stops, returns.

SVEN (CONT'D)

Actually, I think I missed
something. Say a little more.

BATTLEFIELD

REBEL-SISTANCE

The rebels halt in a long line with Snow-Manuel at the fore.

VARIOUS

(singing terribly)
Do you hear the angry people sing?
It is the music of something
something never slaves again--

SNOW-MANUEL

Callate! You're making me le
miserable, when you should make
like gold diggers on a shopping
spree and charge!

They rush forward.

HENCH-GOONS

Silent discipline: the hench-goons stand ready in red and
black, Maude and Herman the Decapitator at the fore.

Ralston eavesdrops at the rear.

MAUDE

Heads will fly--fire the nom bombs.

Catapults LAUNCH, loaded with animate shrunken heads.

HIGH IN THE SKY

The heads wear flight goggles, lips and cheeks WIND-WHIPPED.

FORE HEAD

Gentlemen, it's been an honor.

REBEL-SISTANCE

The heads hit: one bites into the shoulder of a Jub-Jub; one hits ground, lies in wait, and then bites a peasant's foot; one gets HOME-RUNNED by a merman's surf board; a WerePoodle chases one off screen, playing fetch.

HENCH-GOONS

MAUDE

If I'm late for my spa treatment,
I'm holding an execution lottery!

The hench-goons charge; forces COLLIDE.

PATROL CENTAURS

WHEE-OOO. WHEE-OOO.

They're dressed in riot gear, shields and batons, lead by Officer Bill who bears a jousting lance.

THE GHOST OF TODDRICK

Watches from safe remove, EATING popcorn.

SVEN

Ties a black bandana over his mouth and twirls into action.

NUN-JAS

March forward in choir formation, bearing candles and HUMMING Handel's "Messiah."

RALSTON

Grabs a torch. He sets two supply tents on fire in stride, and then kicks the wedge from beneath the wheel of a catapult, causing it to roll down hill.

SNOW-MANUEL

Machine-guns snowballs, a turret-marksman.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Suplexes a WerePoodle. He climbs a rock and then wrist-whirls a hand to each ear--crowd work--before a flying elbow drop.

SVEN

Catches an arrow and uses it to pick his teeth.

NUN-JAS

Speed toward Maude--one does a flip, the other a cartwheel. They land in front of her, weapons drawn.

MAUDE

For these and other fashion crimes,
I sentence you to death.

Fancy shooting, she FIRES a musket ball into each and then BLOWS on the smoking barrels of her flintlock pistols.

SHORE

As the sun sets, bats SWARM in from the sea, turning into vampires on the beach. They're led by Jessamine.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Sits atop a WerePoodle, drawing behind it a wagon bearing three giant gramophones. She HITS a switch and her TORTURE JAM plays causing bats to SPLASH into the sea.

CENTER FRAY

Jessamine KICKS a grounded animate shrunken head so that it LATCHES onto Officer Bill's neck. He runs away SCREAMING.

Sven, in disguise, locks eyes with her, standing over forty bodies. He beckons her with a challenging finger.

SHORE

Snow-Manuel's buried Dr. Torture-Meister and her WerePoodle up to their heads in snow. He turns off the TORTURE JAM.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR (O.S.)

Monsieur.

SNOW-MANUEL

Señor.

HENCH-GOON CAMP

Ralston sees Maude's ferret, chases it into the command tent, and corners it inside.

Seeing it has nowhere left to run, the ferret turns to Ralston, bares its teeth, and HISSES.

CENTER FRAY

Jessamine discus-hurls a collection plate at Sven, charging. Sven catches it and uses it as a shield to DEFLECT her blows.

SHORE

Snow-Manuel machine-guns snowballs at

Herman the Decapitator, who charges through dozens of hits and misses, unstoppable, halberd raised.

HECNHGOON CAMP

Ralston dives; the ferret dodges, circles, BITES his butt.

Ralston YELPS in pain.

CENTER FRAY

Sven bridges--back arched, hands and feet planted--and THRUSTS his rapier past Jessamine's guard into her thigh.

He whirls around, stands upright, his sword-spin CRACKING against Jessamine's block, staggering her back, amazement on her face. No one's this good, except--

JESSAMINE

Sven?

He removes his mask, tosses it aside.

SVEN

I lied. I didn't go to your funeral!

He plies, THRUSTING his sword into her shoulder.

He pirouettes, SLASHING her across the arm.

JESSAMINE

I know. I checked the guest list!

SHORE

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Winter's coming, snowflake!

He swings a haymaker at Snow-Manuel's head.

Snow-Manuel lifts his head above the blow.

SNOW-MANUEL

You'll never whinny this war, neigh-
sayer! I'll put you out to pasture!

HENCH-GOON CAMP

Ralston shows two open palms, a corn kernel in one. He puts the hands behind his back, moves them around, and then shows the ferret two closed fists.

The ferret sniffs both, chooses one.

Ralston opens it: empty. He slaps the ferret, puts his hands behind his back again, moves them around, and presents it two closed fists again.

CENTER FRAY

Combatants pause all around Sven and Jessamine, watching.

Jessamine transforms into a bat, tries to fly behind Sven.

Sven does a grand jete, batting the bat to the ground.

Jessamine reverts, clutching her ribs.

SHORE

Herman the Decapitator bites off the tip of Snow-Manuel's carrot-nose.

Snow-Manuel SCREAMS.

Herman the Decapitator tosses his halberd aside and pounces on Snow-Manuel, RIPPING him apart with his hands.

SNOW-MANUEL (CONT'D)

Viva la revolucion!

HENCH-GOON CAMP

The ferret, dizzied and black-eyed, stands before Ralston's closed fists. It trembles, refusing to choose.

CENTER FRAY

Maude strides forward, smug.

JESSAMINE

Maude . . . she's using you.

SVEN

Don't bring logic into this.

Sven hold's the point of his rapier beneath Jessamine's chin, looks to Maude for the command of execution.

SHORE

Herman the Decapitator lays on his back, making a snow angel in a pile of snow that was Snow-Manuel.

HENCH-GOON CAMP

It's empty--no ferret, no Ralston.

CENTER FRAY

MAUDE

I'd lend you a white flag, but I don't have one--they're tacky and too hard to keep clean.

She LAUGHS, paces--everyone else is still, silent.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

You think "revolution" means overthrow. Change. But it doesn't. "Revolution" just means one turn of the wheel. Full circle. No change.

All gathered turn sullen, cast their faces down--Rebel-sistance and hench-goon alike.

MAUDE (CONT'D)

(to all)

Nothing. Has. Changed. Nothing ever will. The many serve the few.

JESSAMINE

Never surrender! They may take our lives, but they'll never take our--

RALSTON

Fieeeeeeeef-doooooooooo-m!

All eyes turn towards Ralston. He's got Maude's ferret held hostage with a flintlock pistol.

JESSAMINE

Ralston?

MAUDE

Ralston?

SIDELINE

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Yeah, Bumpy! Whoo!

CENTER FRAY

RALSTON
If Sven moves a muscle, Maude, I'll
take the only thing in this world
your cold heart loves.

SVEN
Don't worry, he can't hurt me.

MAUDE
He's not talking about you, idiot.

JESSAMINE
The ferret . . .

SVEN
Never mind, kill her stupid pet.

MAUDE
Sven Marcos, I will shave you bald!

Ralston sees an opportunity to exploit dissension.

RALSTON
All her evil can be hard to be
around, huh Sven?

SVEN
It's like she's allergic to love.

The gathered forces GASP.

RALSTON
Even her ferret's less afraid of
this gun than Maude's temper.

The ferret nods, hesitantly.

Maude seizes a mini-crossbow from a nearby patrol centaur and
them aims it at Ralston.

MAUDE
Let the ferret go!

RALSTON
I bet father threw the duel against
Sven just to get away from you.

Maude SNARLS and then squeezes the trigger.

The bolt HITS the ferret, sends it flying off with a SQUEEL.

MAUDE
Nooooooooooooooooo!

She falls to her knees.

Sven lowers his rapier; Jessamine stands.

RALSTON
(to all)
You heard it from Maude. I am
Ralston, the overlord, transformed
by her treachery.

Jessamine shakes her head in disbelief.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
She and Sven are having a love
affair. Together, they conspired to
kill my father.

Herman the Decapitator and Dr. Torture-Meister exchange
glances. And then yuck faces.

RALSTON (CONT'D)
You've seen what she did to the
ferret, her beloved pet; what she
did to me, her own stepson. What
will she do to you if you continue
to follow her?

Sven sees the tide turning. He sweeps Maude up in his arms;
she's traumatized over killing her ferret.

Hench-goons bar his escape.

SVEN
Raise your hands if you want to die
in agonizing pain.

None do. A beat. They move aside.

Sven leaves with Maude.

Ralston approaches Jessamine, armies parting before him.

RALSTON
You're a vam-pirate.

JESSAMINE
You're the overlord.

RALSTON
I never lied.

JESSAMINE
That's not fair.

RALSTON
How could I have made you believe
me?

JESSAMINE
I don't know, but I wish you'd
tried.

RALSTON
And if I had, what would you have
done?

JESSAMINE
I guess we'll never know.

She draws her vampire cloak around her.

RALSTON
When you killed Peg-Tooth, did you
find a saltine cracker?

JESSAMINE
I tossed it overboard.

RALSTON
You did what? Please tell me you
didn't. It had the power to restore
my true form.

JESSAMINE
It seems restored to me.

Hurt, Ralston says nothing. As Jessamine leaves, the Rebel-
sistance follows.

Herman the Decapitator and Dr. Torture-Meister approach
Ralston and kneel to kiss a non-existent ring as Ralston
watches Jessamine go.

INT. VILLA VILLAINY, RALSTON'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

The portrait of Ralston's father hangs askew.

Herman the Decapitator piles his belongings into a shopping
cart: two headless mannikins, two carved pumpkins, a swimsuit
calendar with the models' heads cropped out.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
I thank thee, hunch-lord, for
letting me keep my job and head.

Ralston stares pensively at the portrait.

RALSTON
What if the word "enemy" is a
complete fabrication?

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Enemy? You need someone beheaded?

RALSTON
I'm posing a question: what if no
one needs beheading?

Herman LAUGHS before realizing Ralston's not joking.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
But hunch-lord, what would we do
with all the guillotines?

Ralston digs his CALCULATOR WATCH from the trash, puts it on.

RALSTON
True, death is our chief export,
but it creates as many problems as
it solves: revenge oaths, blood
feuds, dwindling tourism, guilt.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
I've lived my whole life by one
rule: behead or be beheaded.

RALSTON
I've seen both sides Herman. I've
come to believe that ignorance is
the only enemy.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
How do we behead ignorance?

RALSTON
How indeed. Have you ever
considered that you cut off heads
because you hate your own?

Herman the Decapitator glimpses himself in a shattered
mirror, averts his gaze.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Reverse centaur . . . permission to
speak freely, hunch-lord?

RALSTON

Granted, in perpetuity.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Toddrick was your friend. I killed him. Yet you haven't killed me.

RALSTON

We're friends too. The last thing Toddrick said to me was "Don't split hairs when it comes to friendship."

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

The last thing he said to me was "ouch." With just one word, he summed all the pain I've caused.

Ralston drags a step-stool to Herman the Decapitator, climbs it, and then sets a hand on each of his shoulders.

RALSTON

You're not just an extension of your halberd, Herman. Feel your feelings.

Herman the Decapitator leaves with his shopping cart.

Ralston adjusts his father's portrait to hang straight. He stares. Long beat. He removes it from the wall.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, TRAINING YARD - DAY

Jessamine ties a sandbag onto a training dummy, making it into a hunchback. She takes up a wooden sword, squares up.

JESSAMINE

Don't look at me like that. I said stop! How was I supposed to know about the cracker?

She swings but can't bring herself to connect.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)

So I didn't tell you I'd gone from a ninja slash nun to a ninja slash nun slash vampire slash pirate. There's a lot I haven't told you.

She tosses her sword down, and then balls up at the base of the hunchback-training-dummy, resting her head against it.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
I think you're doing it wrong.

He sets his head on the dummy's and then sits beside her.

JESSAMINE
I can't do it. I can't fight him.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
I'm betting that goes both ways.

JESSAMINE
I wish I could hear him say it.
Then, maybe I could say it.

The Ghost of Toddrick CLEARS his throat.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
(imitating Ralston)
I can't fight you, Jessamine.

She LAUGHS.

JESSAMINE
I can't fight you either. I used to
be sure of everything, but now I
see the world's too complicated to
be sure of anything. I guess you
really rubbed off on me.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
There's an image for you.

JESSAMINE
Toddrick!

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Sorry.
(resuming impersonation)
If we're going to question
everything, we may as well include
our base assumptions.

JESSAMINE
What? Translate.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Ask first questions, first. Why are
we fighting them? Is "we" even
different than "them?" What is a
question?

JESSAMINE
Unify them with confusing rhetoric?

GHOST OF TODDRICK

That's one way to put it, that way
being the wrong way, of course.

JESSAMINE

There's been so much suffering on
both sides that suffering has
become unifying. So, if the
disunity which brought suffering is
gone, why should we fight
ourselves?

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Good enough for me. Probably
everyone else too at this point. I
mean, how good of a reason does
anyone need not to fight?

JESSAMINE

I guess we'll see.

INT. INHUMAN RESOURCES - NIGHT

Ralston has his feet up on the desk in the dark, sipping two
fingers of milk on the rocks from a whiskey glass.

A shadow KNOCKS, visible in silhouette through the glass. Dr.
Torture-Meister enters, hair down, in notice-me torture-ware.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

I struck those sub-articles from
the books like you asked.

Hair toss--she hasn't had a lot of practice.

RALSTON

Thank you, doctor. Careful you
don't lose your glasses.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

These old things? Just for looks.
Pointless as waterboarding mermen.

She tucks them into the "V" of her blouse, a broach, but the
strength of her prescription makes one button look huge.

Ralston takes a big sip, leaving a milk moustache.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)

The way you torture yourself, I
have so much to learn.

RALSTON

Hm. I hadn't thought of it that way. And people say I overthink.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Pain's a strange phenomena, the body's way of telling the conscious mind that something's wrong. Emotionally, I wonder if pain isn't its way of telling us the heart is missing something.

She sits on the corner of his desk, suggestively.

RALSTON

You're talking about Jessamine?

He walks to the window, stares out; she rolls her eyes.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Her? She screams "drama" louder than a flayed banshee.

RALSTON

Something about her screams, but I wonder if the word isn't "phooey."

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Can you scream "phooey?"

RALSTON

We're not talking literal screaming.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

And phooey's a good thing?

RALSTON

The object of phooey? No. But phooey as a reaction to omni-absurdity? Perhaps it's the best word one can not scream.

She replaces her glasses, wipes a tear from her eye.

He turns to see her leaving.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

Did I say something wrong?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

No, that was, no. Just, maybe you're the worst overlord ever.

As she closes the door,

RALSTON
Doctor?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Yes?

RALSTON
Thank you.

INT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE, JESSAMINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A THUNDERSTRIKE wakes Jessamine. She breathes heavily, clutching the covers.

After she's calmed, a flash of lightning reveals Maude sitting at the vanity, hair a mess, mascara dried in streaks on her cheeks down to her smeared lipstick.

MAUDE
I tried to bring him back.

She pets her taxidermized ferret corpse.

JESSAMINE
Is that, please tell me that's not what I think it is?

MAUDE
My support animal, yes. People assume positive emotions are the only ones that need supporting.

JESSAMINE
I'm sorry for your loss, uh, thoughts and prayers and such.

She edges from bed, glances toward the door.

MAUDE
Maybe if you bit him--

JESSAMINE
No, nuh-uh, no way. Get that thing away from me.

Jessamine hurtles toward the door, feels for the knob.

Maude draws her flintlock pistol.

MAUDE

You're not going anywhere, dearie.
I'll have that throne, even if it
costs me your life.

EXT. TOWNVILLE ORPHANAGE - DAY

Hundreds of bruised and battered rebels, MUTTERING, gather
around a single central figure.

CHANGE ANGLE

It's Sven, now dressed in pink and grey.

SVEN

A handsome face is a face you can
trust because . . . symmetry.
That's it, don't listen to my
words, listen to my face.

He swings a pocket watch back and forth.

MERMAN

I can't read the time when you
swing it like that.

SVEN

It's time for a real rebellion,
that's what the time it is.

NUN-JA

Where's Jessamine?

SVEN

She's gone, like your rebel roots.
You lost the last battle because
you lost yourselves!

SUMO-FAIRY

Do words need meaning to have
depth?

SVEN

Enough of order and orders and
thinking thoughts. Chaos, real
chaos, is the real rebel way! Are
you real rebels?

MERMAN

Yes?

NUN-JA

Confusion makes me angry!

SUMO-FAIRY

My uneducated aggression could be
tempered by any humanistic attempt
at the even distribution of wealth!

SVEN

Rabble be roused! Mob mentali-tee
it up! Riot! Froth! Jaywalk!

They surge.

EXT. VILLA VILLAINY, RAMPARTS - NIGHT

From high, Ralston, Dr. Torture-Meister, and Herman the
Decapitator watch the approaching rebel stampede.

RALSTON

I didn't think she'd fight. Just
wishful thinking, I guess.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Hell hath no fury like a woman.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

Scorned--well, maybe your version's
better.

As the rebels close,

RALSTON

I think we're going to need a
bigger moat.

GROUND

Uncoordinated inefficiency ensues.

Sumo-fairies throw . . . eggs?

Mermen teepee the walls and trees.

WerePoodles piss on the gate.

RAMPARTS

A flaming paper bag lands before Ralston; he stomps it out.

RALSTON (CONT'D)

What's--ugh, it's poo! Flaming poo!

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

The troops aren't trained for this!

Ralston scrapes his shoe off on a stone.

COURTYARD

Within the walls, hench-goons throw down their weapons and then UNBAR the gate.

RAMPARTS

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Wait, aren't they on our side? Are
we on our side?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
The collective subconscious engages
us in semi-peaceful protest, hench-
goon and rebel alike.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Are you just saying words?

COURTYARD

Rebels pour in and gather before the hench-goons.

A moment of tense scrutiny.

And then, they exchange hugs, high-fives, and handshakes.

Vam-pirates roll out barrels of rum.

A nun-ja wires up a boom box.

They begin drinking, dancing, having a good time.

RAMPARTS

Ralston watches the peaceful partygoers.

RALSTON
They're tired too. And why
shouldn't they be?

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Because we'll kill them?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Then who would be left to do our
bidding? Who would we bid?

COURTYARD

Maude and Sven lead Jessamine through in chains.

MAUDE

Not what I had in mind when I said
"raiding party."

RAMPARTS

RALSTON

Jessamine!

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER

You're right, she does scream
"phooey."

RALSTON'S POV

As he gazes across the expanse of revelry at Jessamine, the path between them forms an obstacle course in his mind.

RALSTON

No, not an obstacle course.

Herman the Decapitator ties a rope around his waist, passes Ralston the other end, puts a hand on each of his shoulders.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Hunch-lord, you're not just an
extension of your calculator watch.
Feel your feelings.

Ralston nods, uses the rope to REPEL down the wall.

Landing, he RUNS arrhythmically on stiff little legs.

He TUMBLEWHEELS beneath a limbo bar, his hump knocking it into the air.

He CATCHS the limbo bar, uses it to POLE-VAULT over a WerePoodle SNIFFING another WerePoodle's butt.

Airborne, he grabs a paper lantern and ZIPLINES past sumo-fairies SPRAYING champagne over a hysteric dance mob.

He lands on a SURFBOARD held overhead by a merman in an above-ground pool and literally crowd surfs.

He grabs a wooden garden lattice overhead and SWINGS from rung to rung as party people VOLLEY a CHOMPING animate shrunken head across his path time and again.

At the end, he LATCHES onto a swinging piñata, narrowly missed by the blindfolded swings of SWORDS and SPEARS.

He STICKS the landing, arms formed into a "Y."

Maude bars the way to Jessamine, gun raised.

Behind Maude, Jessamine transforms into a bat, slipping her chains. She reforms and judo-chops the side of Maude's neck, knocking her unconscious.

RALSTON

I thought you were--

JESSAMINE

In distress? Just because a damsel doesn't wear shining armor doesn't mean she can't save herself.

RALSTON

I apologize for my chivalric condescension, I--

She grabs him. Big kiss. YANNI-ESQUE SAXOPHONY.

THE MOB

Mosh-pits them to the central courtyard where, they've also corralled Maude and Sven, forming a circle around them.

JESSAMINE

Looks like they want us to sort out their governance ourselves.

SVEN

Well, with bills to pay and beers to drink, who cares which geriatric chatterbox--

Maude silences him with a stare.

RALSTON

It's time, Maude--mom. Let's talk.

Maude nods, takes a DEEP BREATH.

MAUDE

Tell your father I say hello.

She SHOOTS Ralston.

The wind WHISTLES as it blows through Ralston's bullet hole.

He checks his pulse, panics.

RALSTON

My pulse is . . . zero.

He stares in disbelief before falling over DEAD.

The crowd stares in shocked SILENCE.

JESSAMINE
Ralston? Wait, no. Ralston!

She kneels, shakes him.

MAUDE
Bullseye? Bull's iris, more like.

As Jessamine stands, the crowd shrinks back.

Herman the Decapitator hands her his halberd.

Sven and Maude exchange glances.

MAUDE (CONT'D)
Stall her while I reload.

Sven raises his sword.

SVEN
En core!

As Sven and Jessamine rush into fatal final combat, hench-
goons and rebels lose interest and wander off.

SUMO-FAIRY
Can't say I'm surprised--civil
rights leaders are censorship-by-
bullet magnets.

Metal CLANKS in arrhythmic frenzy as the duel continues,
offscreen--we see none of it.

VAM-PIRATE
Now that he's dead, I have to say,
he had some pretty good ideas. And
I'm already forgetting his faults.

LIZARD-MAN
Maybe we should close schools on
his birthday or name a downtown
boulevard after him?

A WerePoodle carries an animate shrunken head in its mouth.

ANIMATE SHRUNKEN HEAD
Anyone for a late-night breakfast?

Head NODS. Agreement.

When the last are gone, Herman the Decapitator and the Ghost
of Toddrick remain, spectating the final battle.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
If Jessamine dies avenging Ralston,
do I re-revenge her?

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Ralston didn't want any venge-ing.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
He didn't want to die either.

A loud wooden CRASH off screen. They cover their eyes, peak,
uncover their eyes.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR (CONT'D)
Sorry I cut off your head, by the
way--I've been meaning to say.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Hey, no problem. I'm actually
thinking of buying a girl-dog and
naming her "Karma."

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Because karma's a bitch?

GHOST OF TODDRICK
That she is.

SVEN (O.S.)
Oh! Ah! Not the hair! Not the hair!

Herman the Decapitator and the Ghost of Toddrick wince.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
I taught her that.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Look at him run.

MAUDE (O.S.)
Just you and me, then.

JESSAMINE (O.S.)
Tell your ferret you say hello!

Switch to dull THUDS of fisticuffs.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
Oh, because the ferret's dead, plus
what Maude said to Ralston. Eh,
probably sounded cool in her head.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
She's under a lot of pressure.

A GUN SHOT. A body DROPS. SILENCE.

The Ghost of Toddrick and Herman the Decapitator stare, jaws dropped. Long beat.

SFX: DRAGGING.

Jessamine enters screen left, battered and mused, DRAGGING Ralston's corpse by the ankles.

GHOST OF TODDRICK (CONT'D)
Amazing! I'd have paid to see that.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
That was maybe the single greatest action sequence in the history of action or sequence.

Jessamine crumples, lays her head on Ralston's chest.

GHOST OF TODDRICK
Is that it, then?

CREDITS ROLL. SFX: SWEEPING MUSIC. Is the film over?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Sorry, I'm late--I had to grab a few things.

MUSIC SCREECHES TO A HALT. CREDITS REVERSE.

Dr. Torture-Meister screws neck-bolts into the sides of Ralston's neck. Her electrodes HUM on.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR
You can bring him back?

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
Generally not, as it cheapens the stakes of the narrative, but you sort of run the risk of that with fantasy.

The electrodes BEEP--full charge.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)
Clear!

She ZAPS Ralston. His back arches. Nothing.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)

Clear!

She ZAPS Ralston. His back arches. Close up: his eye opens.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER (CONT'D)

He's alive, exclamation point.

RALSTON

I am? I am!

GHOST OF TODDRICK

He's . . . Franken-hunch.

Herman the Decapitator tries to fist-bump him but it passes through.

Ralston struggles to his feet. He stares off screen.

RALSTON

Is that . . . Maude?

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

Sure is.

(pointing)

And that. And that. And that.

JESSAMINE

I forgot R-I-P was an acronym.

Jessamine grips Ralston and dips him--epic kiss.

CREDITS ROLL. SFX: SWEEPING MUSIC.

PAUSE MUSIC.

GHOST OF TODDRICK

Hey, can I be king?

Jessamine and Ralston exchange glances, shrug.

FREEZE on Ghost of Toddrick. Color bleeds to BLACK AND WHITE.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT: Upon Ralston's completion of the proper forms, the fiefdom became a monarchy, and Toddrick its ghost-king. Long may he reign.

IMAGE FADE. RESUME MUSIC. After a beat, PAUSE MUSIC.

HERMAN THE DECAPITATOR

How do I apply for a small business loan? Am I a minority?

FREEZE on Herman the Decapitator. BLACK AND WHITE.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT: Herman the Decapitator opened a deli.

NEXT TEXT: He cut party subs with multiple guillotines, winked when he called them "cold cuts," and marketed his own brand of horseradish.

IMAGE FADE. RESUME MUSIC. After a beat, PAUSE MUSIC.

DR. TORTURE-MEISTER
I bet there's money in the
resurrection business . . .

FREEZE on Dr. Torture-Meister. BLACK AND WHITE.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT: Dr. Torture-Meister retired from torture and visited the remains of Peg-Tooth and Snow-Manuel.

NEXT TEXT: They're still dead.

NEXT TEXT: Neck-bolts and electrodes don't work on glitter or puddles.

NEXT TEXT: Take that, low-stakes fantasy genre.

IMAGE FADE. RESUME MUSIC. After a beat, PAUSE MUSIC.

Elsewhere, Sven unwraps bandages from atop his head revealing an island of stitched flesh in a sea of skullet. He SIGHS.

FREEZE on Sven, BLACK AND WHITE.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT: Sven got hair plugs.

NEXT TEXT: He's back to looking great.

NEXT TEXT: But you can sort of tell.

IMAGE FADE. RESUME MUSIC. After a beat, PAUSE MUSIC.

Ralston FAKE-YAWNS to put his arm around Jessamine.

RALSTON
Can undead . . . you know?

JESSAMINE
Electro-stimulation and-or
exsanguination may be req--

Ralston's hand wanders.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
Ralston! We don't have ratings
approval for necrophilia.

Ralston moves to one knee, facing her, and produces a box as though he's going to propose.

Jessamine's eyes widen.

He opens the box. Inside: red high heels.

She leans in--passionate kiss.

They draw back, still in each others' arms.

JESSAMINE (CONT'D)
So, what now?

RALSTON
Now us.

JESSAMINE
Us?

RALSTON
The rest, we'll figure out. Maybe.

JESSAMINE
I'm good with maybe. The adventures
of Franken-hunch--

RALSTON
And Nun-feratu.

FREEZE, Color bleeds to BLACK AND WHITE.

SUPERIMPOSE TEXT: And they lived happily (sometimes) ever
(undead are immortal-ish) after. The end?

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE OUT.