

BLOOD & SMOKE

Pilot:

"No Shadows: What's Light?"

by

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Based on the book
Blood And Smoke:
A True Tale Of Mystery, Mayhem,
And The Birth Of The Indy 500

by Charles Leerhsen

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AUTO RACING - 1909

Not what you imagine.

No dashing young gents in their jaunty jalopies.

This is a horrifying steampunk *Rollerball*.

The cars are all engine: metal coffins on spoked wheels. The DRIVERS huddle in low bucket seats bolted to the iron girders of the chassis. Directly behind them, gallons of gasoline in exposed barrel-shaped tanks.

No windshields. No seat belts. Brakes are a work-in-progress.

The engine-cowlings are held shut with leather straps. Drive chains, suspension-bars and wheel-pinions all exposed. Serpentine exhaust pipes sprout from the sides, spewing smoke like they're driving on fire.

Now and then, they are.

Two men sit side-by-side in each car: the Driver and the "RM" -- a "Riding Mechanic" who checks the gauges and manually pumps fuel, oil and water into the engine.

But with no rearview mirrors, the RM's main task is to watch out for other cars --

-- looming up, fast and menacing, out of the smoke and dust.

Driving is brutal: wrenching the wheels to steer, yanking iron levers to shift. Smoking-hot oil sprays from the engines, spattering goggles, and the hammering machinery rattles vision into a blur.

Tire-flung gravel hurtles back at us from the cars ahead -- whistling past like bullets, tanging off the radiator grill, cracking the glass of goggles.

The pale narrow tires tend to heat up and explode when driven at more than seventy miles an hour.

Every one of these infernal machines is going more than seventy miles an hour.

EXT. INDIANA STATE FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

A field jammed with horses-and-carriages: that's how the citizens of Indianapolis came to the auto race.

The dirt horse-racing track is treacherous for automobiles, but the SPECTATORS lean on the wooden rail, close enough to touch the cars skidding around the turns.

These are Americans, between the Gilded Age and the Great War: confident, unafraid, poised to put their name on a whole century.

Boys in cloth caps and knickers.

Women in corsets, shirtwaists, giant feathered hats.

Men in ornate moustaches, greased-down hair, stiff collars.

Enjoying the roaring mechanized madness:

EXT. #17 CAR - THE SAME TIME

The #17 **DRIVER** has the lead.

(Drivers armor themselves in leather helmets, coats and gloves, cloth face-masks, scarves. During the race we only know them by their cars, colors and numbers.)

He's in a blood-red Locomobile, the muscle car of its time.

There's a clatter under the hood and his steering goes bad.

The engine noise is so ferocious that the RMs and Drivers can only communicate by hand signals. Struggling to keep control, the #17 Driver signals the #17 **RM** with a gloved hand: *check it out.*

His RM signals: *pull over to the pit.*

The #17 Driver points at the clattering engine.

The #17 RM grimaces -- then angrily climbs forward on to the cowling, clinging to whatever he can.

The Driver doesn't slow.

EXT. #3 CAR - CONTINUOUS

Behind the big red Locomobile, the #3 car is a green Simplex: fast but flimsy, no fenders, no side panels for the #3 **DRIVER** -- who sports a fluttering emerald-green scarf.

He warily drifts to the outside, eyes on --

-- the #17 RM clinging to the engine cowling as it skids around a turn.

EXT. #9 CAR - CONTINUOUS

Behind #3: the #9 car edges up -- a blue Wallis Mercury, aerodynamic for the times. Challenging for position.

But the **#9 DRIVER** is also no fool, keeping away from the impending disaster that is #17.

EXT. #17 CAR - CONTINUOUS

The #17 RM, struggling with a buckle, accidentally rips the cowling-strap off entirely.

Half the hood flaps up, caught by the wind, clanging and whipping.

#17 veers crazily, hood flailing in front of the Driver like a wounded tin animal -- the #17 RM ducking it, trying to hang on, helpless --

-- until the #17 Driver, one hand on the wheel, lunges forward, grabs the flapping metal --

-- and yanks it off the hinges, hurling it behind them.

INT. #3 CAR - CONTINUOUS

The hood comes flying out of the smoke, a bent metal bat out of hell --

-- clanking off the #3 car, which loses control --

-- cutting in front of the #9 --

-- which swerves expertly, dodging --

-- as #3 knocks down a section of fence, plunging into the infield --

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS TRACK - CONTINUOUS

The CROWD rushes forward with a gasp --

EXT. #9 CAR - CONTINUOUS

-- as the #9 Wallis pulls into the lead, passing the #17.

The #17 Driver grimly keeps his pedal to the floor, with the RM still desperately hanging on to the engine cowling.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS TRACK - CONTINUOUS

#3 isn't letting up, either. Rattling at top speed on the wrong side of the fence, cutting tire-grooves in the grass --

-- he smashes back through the fence, on to the track.

EXT. #9 CAR - CONTINUOUS

The #9 DRIVER and RM stare, astonished, as #3 emerges from the dust cloud, catching up on the outside.

The #3 Driver, his green scarf fluttering, turns and offers them a wild, giddy grin.

BANG!

#3's right front tire explodes.

As the rim digs into the dirt and the car flips --

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS TRACK - CONTINUOUS

-- a strange sound rises from the spectators: part screams, part gasps --

-- and part cheering.

The wreck of #3 rolls toward them out of the dust and smoke, stopping near the rail --

-- splashed with the blood of the #3 Driver, trapped by the steering column, now crushed and twisted in his seat like a broken doll.

As the smoke blows away, we see that the #3 RM was hurled out by the flip, into the middle of the dirt track.

Hopefully dead before the other cars ran him over.

The crowd swarms over the fence, on to the track -- risking their lives to get close to the wrecked machine and gawk at the corpses.

She flies backward against the side of his car --

-- but he's not done, stepping in to slam his other fist into her ribs, then again a cross to the face, beating her mercilessly --

-- until his own pit crew pulls him off.

By then her crew is arriving, wading into them, cursing --

-- as Louise's RM, **HENRY WALLIS**, kneels beside her. Despite the grime from the race, he is not like the other mechanics. Intelligent and soft, around 40.

HENRY

Damn fool move.

Hand pressed to a bloody lip, Louise looks past him at the two crews -- now shoving and yelling.

LOUISE

Sorry. Tell them to leave it go.

Henry turns. Wincing.

HENRY

How?

Louise and Henry watch as the pit crews get into an all-out brawl around them.

Except Clarence, still hanging back. Still pissed.

A day at the races.

INT. CARL'S STUDY - THE SAME TIME

Tock. Tock. Tock.

A silver pendulum swings behind the glass of a grandfather clock.

A studded leather chair, a mahogany desk strewn with ledgers and contracts, the stubs of noxious cheap cigars.

A housemaid is at work. Long hair pinned-up beneath a starched white cap; stiff black uniform, floor-length skirt. **HAZEL BRUNNER**, 19 years old.

She calmly sweeps up the peanut shells that litter the desk and floor as if a circus had been through here.

There is a rubber-banded roll of cash next to the overflowing ashtray: so thick Carl Fisher has to take it out of his pocket to sit, leaving it on dining tables and other people's desks for the duration of a meal or a meeting.

Hazel lifts the wad, wipes the desk, and sets the money back where it was.

As she goes to dust a row of photographs on the wall, we finally get a good look at her:

Exceptionally pretty, but afflicted with severe acne. Her face is patched with red swollen pustules.

She avoids looking at herself in the glass -- which means she also pays scant attention to the man in the pictures:

FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS: CARL GRAHAM FISHER

In front of his brand-new bicycle shop, 1891. 17 years old.

On an old-fashioned bicycle, the kind with a giant front wheel -- this one built as a publicity stunt, so tall he had to mount it from a second-story window.

Riding a bicycle on a tightrope between 12-story buildings in downtown Indianapolis (with plenty of safety-ropes.)

Driver in a barnstorming act, The Big Racing Four: "The World's Most Daring Automobile Racers."

Behind the wheel of a touring car as it lifts off -- in place of the basket of a giant hot-air balloon. Floating over Indianapolis in a car, 1908.

All we really need to glean from the photos:

Carl Graham Fisher loves racing machines.

And he's kind of insane.

INT. CARL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Hazel comes out of Carl's study, carrying her broom and dustpan, her basket of cleaning supplies.

Walks down the hallway. Knocks at the next door.

Waits. Goes in.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Hazel lets in some daylight, then turns to the massive Victorian canopy bed.

She pulls aside its purple drapery --

-- revealing **JANE WATTS**: naked, startled awake, her hair loose and wild. She is 15 years old.

HAZEL

Oh my goodness.

Hazel quickly turns away, letting the drapes fall shut --

-- almost bumping into **CARL GRAHAM FISHER**, stepping out of the bathroom, naked beneath his open robe.

CARL

Whoopsy-daisy.

Hazel turns away again -- now faced into a corner.

HAZEL

I'm very sorry. Sir.

Carl is 35. Once an athlete, now getting soft and pale after five years as a self-made millionaire. The non-stop cigars and whiskey, the steak-with-fried-potatoes three meals a day haven't helped. Tying his robe shut, polite:

CARL

Not your fault.
(to the bed drapery)
Jane: this is...?

HAZEL

Hazel.

CARL

Hazel. The new housemaid.
Apparently.
(to Hazel's back)
Jane is a...friend of mine.

Beat.

HAZEL

Apparently.

Carl blinks at Hazel's back, amused. Takes a pair of *pince-nez* glasses from his robe pocket and sets them on his nose. Appreciating the back of her neck, the luster of her upswept hair. Noting that beneath the corset and petticoats, she seems to have a delightful figure.

CARL

I'm sorry if we have made you uncomfortable, Hazel.

HAZEL

I'm not uncomfortable, sir. I'm just not sure what to do.

CARL

Well. Do what you want.

Hazel slowly turns. Her eyes meeting his.

Carl works to conceal his reaction to the acne. But she sees it. She always sees it.

CARL

Well...then. Back on track.

Carl gives her a formal smile.

CARL

Thank you, Hazel. That will be all.

Hazel looks down.

HAZEL

Yes sir.

She hurries out. Carl watches the door shut behind her.

CARL

That's a shame.

He heads back to the bathroom.

From behind the bed curtains:

JANE

What is happening, please?

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - DUSK

A horse-and-buggy clip-clops down a pleasant tree-lined street. It passes a milkman, delivering metal cans from a dairy's horse-drawn delivery-cart.

They're all startled by a rumbling motor, as Henry Wallis -- who rode as Louise's mechanic -- drives past in his luxurious six-passenger Wallis Jupiter: quilted leather seats, convertible top.

He's in a suit now, all cleaned-up. He parks in front of a sweet Queen-Anne home with wedding-cake woodwork on the wraparound porch and bay windows, a white picket fence.

Piano music drifts from an open window: Chopin, played with fervor, if not accuracy.

Henry gets out of the car, carrying the race trophy.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Henry is halfway in the front door when **MILLIE**, his 8-year-old daughter, slams into him with her hug:

DAUGHTER

Daddy-daddy-daddy-daddy! Didja win?
Didja?

Henry smiles over Millie at **ALICE WALLIS** -- his wife, 34, beautiful, old-fashioned, five months pregnant.

HENRY

Hail the conquering hero.

Alice comes to him as Millie dances away with the trophy.

HENRY

Now we can pay the grocer.

ALICE

For last month, yes.
(beat)
I'm just glad you're safe.

HENRY

Why wouldn't I be?

She smiles tenderly, running her fingers through his hair.

ALICE

You've got motor oil in your hair.

Shows him her grimy fingertips. Gently:

ALICE
You were in the car again.
(beat)
You promised, Henry.

He follows her into:

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

HENRY
I got carried away. But I couldn't
have been safer: Louise was driving.

There's no heat beneath her scolding or his protests; they
each know the other's right.

ALICE
Louise doesn't have a family.

HENRY
You should've seen it, Alice -- a
piece of Lydecker's car came off. I
swear to God, I didn't even really
grasp what it was yet, and she
already had us around it like it was
all part of the plan.

ALICE
Not really reassurance.

HENRY
If Oldfield could handle the Mercury
like Louise, I'd be singing you his
praises -- and the man is a walking
chimney.

ALICE
I'm not afraid you're in love with a
driver, darling.
(beat)
I know you're in love with the car.

He grins and kisses her, and she responds with true passion.
Then after, still gently:

ALICE
Why don't you tell me what else
happened.

He is always startled by how much she knows about him.
Which is something she knows about him.

ALICE
You know I'll read about it tomorrow.

Henry sighs. Reluctantly:

HENRY
Joe Hanover and his riding mechanic.
Blow-out.

Alice nods. Two dead. Now she knows. He watches her take it in. Her eyes on his.

HENRY
I'll stay in the pit. I promise.

She nods, knowing he'll try, and she's grateful.

From the parlor: another mistaken chord is followed by an angry clang and then the Chopin begins again. He looks at the hallway where the sound is coming from.

HENRY
And here?

Alice shrugs.

ALICE
Stormy.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

DANIEL WALLIS, 15 years old, plays an upright piano. His hair is a mess, his shirt has no collar, he's dark around the eyes in a tempestuous romantic way.

Henry appears in the doorway, watches him.

HENRY
Danny?

Daniel just pounds out the moody, ornate music.

HENRY
How long have you been practicing?

DANIEL
Listen. I've got this part.

He throws himself into a dramatic passage -- makes a mistake. Hammers out a correction. Starts again.

HENRY

Why don't you take a break?

Daniel shakes his head. Playing feverishly, until Henry gently comes over and takes his son's hands off the keys. Daniel leaps up, knocking over the piano bench, yanking his hands free -- enraged.

DANIEL

What are you DOING?! Do you have ANY idea what that is LIKE for me?!

HENRY

No. Explain it.

Daniel stares at his father, seething with teenage contempt. But also more: panic.

DANIEL

You're so smart, you explain it.

He stomps down the hall and slams his bedroom door behind him hard enough to knock a framed picture off the hallway wall, spraying shattered glass as it hits the floor.

Henry winces. Alice is watching. From their silence, we can tell this is not the first such explosion.

INT. CARL'S KITCHEN - DUSK

Big enough to serve a mansion. **MRS. WHEY**, the stocky middle-aged housekeeper, is sorting mail as Hazel puts on her coat to go home.

MRS. WHEY

Survived your first day, Hazel?

HAZEL

Yes, ma'am. Everyone has been very kind.

MRS. WHEY

Not too kind, I hope.

HAZEL

Ma'am?

Mrs. Whey sets aside her letters. Formally:

MRS. WHEY

Mr. Fisher is very young to be such a rich man. Some say he is a genius.

(MORE)

MRS. WHEY (CONT'D)

But that means he also has -- great appetites.

Beat. Hazel chooses discretion.

HAZEL

Yes. I saw all those peanut shells.

Beat. Kindly:

MRS. WHEY

You'll...understand when you're married.

(beat)

For now, if he gives you any nonsense -- you just tell him no, and come see me straight away.

Hazel nods, glad she has coat-buttons to busy herself with, since Mr. Fisher took one look at her face and chose not to give her any nonsense.

HAZEL

Of course.

Now that the ice is broken, though, Mrs. Whey does enjoy a good gossip:

MRS. WHEY

He knows the rules, we've had this out. It's hard enough to find good servants, and he won't hire colored. The man is just a great big child, really. Swat his hand away, and I'll set him right.

Hazel heads for the door.

HAZEL

Yes ma'am. I will.

MRS. WHEY

And don't you feel you've done anything wrong, when it happens. He's put his hands on every single girl we've hired.

Hazel falters in the doorway for just a second, with her back to Mrs. Whey. Then she goes out without a word.

EXT. CARL'S HOUSE - DUSK

Hazel walks down the driveway, alone.

It's a long way to the streetcar.

Grateful for the falling darkness.

INT. THE CHECKERED FLAG - EVENING

Race posters, clippings, photographs of drivers and cars decorate this working-class bar. It is crowded with DRIVERS, MECHANICS and AUTO-FACTORY WORKERS.

OLD MAN

In seven days, He brought forth the
heavens and the earth, and the land
and the sea, and every living
creature!

An OLD MAN has wandered in, hair in disarray, stains on his clothing, spittle spraying as he shouts.

OLD MAN

And not ever once did he say "Let
there be automo-cars!"

The crowd cheers him on, laughing:

DRIVER #1

He didn't bring forth trousers,
either. You want us to get quit of
those as well?

OLD MAN

I want you to get quit of your
demonic contraptions that belch out
the foul stench of Hades!

DRIVER #2

(to DRIVER #1)

I think that was you, Johnny -- you
had cabbage again, didn't you?

Clarence Tynes, the handsome young mechanic who was pissed-off in Henry's pit, steps in from the street. He takes off his cloth cap, staying by the doors until he locates:

Ernest Lydecker, at the bar. Drinking alone.

OLD MAN (O.S.)
Go ahead and laugh! But also
remember King Uzziah in Chronicles,
who devised cunning engines but was
unfaithful to the Lord!

The preaching and raucous laughter continue as background noise, as Clarence makes his way to the older driver.

But first he passes:

A shot-glass full of whiskey, untouched before an empty stool.

Next to it: a votive candle, a jar stuffed with money...and the #3 Driver's stained, torn green scarf.

The kid shakes it off, keeps going.

INT. THE CHECKERED FLAG - ERNEST - CONTINUOUS

Clarence approaches Ernest. Probably doesn't even realize he's got his cap in his hands. Or how much country is in his voice.

CLARENCE
I heard your mechanic up and quit.

ERNEST
(without looking over)
I heard your boss took your seat so
he could ride with a girl.

Clarence follows his glance across the crowded bar:

Louise Fitzhugh, playing darts, is the only woman. She wears high collars and floor-length skirts, but her style hints at modern times looming just beyond the Great War.

CLARENCE
He had no business doing that. I can
take a car apart and put it back
together again.

Ernest turns, finally, to take him in.

ERNEST
While it's running?

CLARENCE
Try me. I got sand.

ERNEST

Sand, huh?

Ernest mulls. Shakes his head, turns back to his drink.

ERNEST

All I see is hayseeds.

Clarence doesn't move. Even though they both know the older man can likely beat the shit out of him:

CLARENCE

Is that right. And where'd you come from, then -- The Duke of Floppydick's castle?

Ernest smiles slightly, but only pours himself another. Without looking at the kid:

ERNEST

You know McCarey's?
(when Clarence nods)
Thursday, noon.

Clarence nods. Backs away as if the bar is a throne.

INT. CHECKERED FLAG - SAM - CONTINUOUS

As Clarence turns to lose himself in the crowd, he brushes past:

SAM DELANEY, mid-twenties but he seems older. A city slicker: wing collar, tweed suit with a contrasting double-breasted vest, holding a reporter's notebook.

Sam gives the farm-boy a glance, but then goes back to observing the chaos around the crazy Old Man.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

-- against God and against nature!

Sam stands beside **RAY HARROUN**, 30, a driver for the Marmon Motor Car Company: slight and dapper, pencil moustache.

We will get to know Ray Harroun better by 1911.

OLD MAN

Man was not meant to strap himself into a fiendish engine and locomote with greater velocity than the horse!

Sam applauds mockingly, but murmurs to Ray:

SAM
Jesus, whatever you do, don't tell
him about the airplane.

Ray smiles, a graceful smile; but he is thoughtful and kind,
and he stays silent amid the jeers.

OLD MAN
Mock me if you will! But your new
machineries will bring each and every
one of you a terrible fiery end.

The laughter falters as The Old Man points a knobby finger
in a drifting arc.

OLD MAN
You'll die in your automobiles.

The Drivers, a superstitious bunch, go quiet.

OLD MAN
For your chariots are pulled by the
hounds of hell.

Painful silence.

Everyone, even the Old Man, a little shaken at the effect of
naming the darkness out loud.

ERNEST (O.S.)
You got that wrong, fella.

Ernest Lydecker pushes back his bar stool, gets to his feet.

ERNEST
We ride the hounds of hell. Right up
in the face of Mister Death. And he
does try to bite down on us -- but we
leave that old scarecrow choking on
our dust and spitting teeth.
(beat)
Because we're too damn fast.

Ernest heads out --

-- grabbing the memorial whiskey off the bar as he passes.

He downs it in one gulp and, without slowing, tosses the
empty shot-glass to Louise on his way to the doors.

Though unprepared, she catches it one-handed.

As Ernest slams out to the street.

INT. THE CHECKERED FLAG - LOUISE - CONTINUOUS

Louise is still looking at the empty shot glass in her hand when Sam comes over, notebook open, fountain-pen ready. Frowning at her bruised face:

SAM
When's your next bout, champ?

LOUISE
You oughta see the other guy.

Sam glances at the street doors.

SAM
Yeah. He's the kind of prick that gives pricks a bad name.

Louise nods, *what're you gonna do*. Following as she goes to set the glass back by the donation jar:

SAM
Poor Joe, huh?

LOUISE
Yeah. Poor Joe.

SAM
What do you think his last words were?

LOUISE
I was kind of busy just then, Sam.

SAM
No: what should I make 'em. I was thinking:
(dramatic)
"Tell my sweetheart I'll be home soon."

LOUISE
He was married and he had four kids.

SAM
Doesn't quite have the same flash.

LOUISE
No.
(thoughtful)
How about: "I wouldn't change a thing."

Sam nods, impressed. But then he can't help:

SAM
"...except maybe that tire."

Seeing Louise's look, he puts his palms up.

SAM
Don't hit me.

She smiles, against her better judgment. Which makes Sam smile.

SAM
Hey. No shadows: what's light?

LOUISE
I guess.

As Sam puts his notebook away:

SAM
Gotta skiddoo, anyway. I'll come up with something.

LOUISE
What's your hurry?

He looks at her, surprised -- watching her go pull her darts from the board. She's never been the flirting type before.

SAM
Are you that far from home?

LOUISE
Don't flatter yourself. We would have to be in China.
(beat)
I just can't sleep after I drive.
(offering darts)
Come on, I'll spot you ten points.
No one else will play. Because I win.

Sam considers it, then shakes his head.

SAM
Gotta get to church.

She frowns, watching him head for the doors. Calling after:

LOUISE

I never know how much of what you say
is true.

Turning back in the doorway, Sam just smiles.

LOUISE

Not really a great quality for a
reporter.

He gives a wink and goes out into the night.

EXT. THE CHECKERED FLAG - NIGHT

Sam comes out to the empty, closed-down street.

Stands on the sidewalk, taking in the night.

Looking down the street: a block away, in a row of darkened
brick storefronts, one is ablaze with electric lights.

EXT. BIJOU THEATER - SOON AFTER

He approaches the converted store. Rows of glowing, buzzing
bulbs. Florid gilded lettering: **BIJOU ELECTRIC THEATER -
Continuous Performances, Five Cents.**

Rows of colorful posters on sandwich signs for this week's
movies: *Those Awful Hats*, *A Drunkard's Reformation*, *A Corner
In Wheat*.

Sam gets out a nickel as he approaches the ticket booth.

INT. BIJOU THEATER - SOON AFTER

The interior is as spare as the exterior was garish. Rows
of kitchen chairs on a concrete floor. Brick walls painted
red. A player piano competes with the clatter of the hand-
cranked projector in the back.

A "one-reeler" (a ten-minute silent feature) flickers on a
sheet stretched across one wall: jerky over-acted pantomime
in pancake makeup.

But Sam barely glances at the screen as he takes a seat in
the back, surveying the audience in the unsteady light.

POOR AND WORKING-CLASS MEN AND WOMEN. Eating and drinking.
Talking in German, Polish, Italian. A couple making out. A
baby cries. Smoke curls in the shafts of flickering light.

The film rips and the screen glares white.

As they wait for the projectionist to glue the ends back together -- Sam meets the eyes of a WORKINGMAN.

Sam in his starched collar, fine suit, slicked hair; the Workingman in his shabby denim and unruly beard.

Strangers who know each other.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - NIGHT

The Workingman climbs a narrow stairway and disappears down an ill-lit corridor.

We stay on the stairwell to watch Sam follow, a moment later.

Sam slows, wary.

Rows of shabby numbered doors. No windows. Dim unsteady glow from a couple of gas fixtures. We can hear foreign voices through the walls, and almost smell the boiling cabbage and the poor sanitation.

But when he goes around a corner, he sees:

Down the hall, the Workingman waiting in the doorway to his apartment.

He steps back inside as Sam goes to him.

The door shuts behind them.

FADE OUT.

CLOSE ON: DIRT

Muddy earth, a few dead corn stalks.

One end of an iron rod digs down into it, making a furrow.

Inscribing a rough oval.

EXT. FARMER'S FIELDS - DAY

Carl Fisher squats, drawing with his engine-crank. In a suit, coat, hat.

His luxurious Stoddard-Dayton six-seater -- white, with black patent-leather upholstery -- is parked nearby.

He straightens, looking around.

320 acres of fallow farmland. In the distance, a line of telegraph poles along the railroad tracks into Indianapolis.

A buggy approaches on the dirt road, pulled by two horses.

As it gets closer, we see it's elegant, urban. So is the man who climbs out: **RANDOLPH GARVIN**: snowy-haired, 60, in an old-fashioned black suit. He takes in the rural venue for this meeting, not pleased.

GARVIN

Mr. Fisher, I take it.

CARL

Take it as fact, because it is.

Carl enthusiastically shakes Garvin's hand.

GARVIN

To what do I owe this pleasure?

CARL

Straight to the point. No nonsense.
Just right.

(nods)

I want to hire you, Mr. Garvin.

Garvin considers the younger man. Dropping his formal irony for direct contempt:

GARVIN

I don't know anything about automobiles. Or sales pranks.

CARL

"Pranks"?

GARVIN

You are the man who pushed a car off his showroom roof? And tied another to a balloon, flew it over the city?

CARL

Sold a lot of cars.

GARVIN

I'm sure. But I am a banker.

CARL
A banker without a bank.

Silence.

GARVIN
I made a mistake: owning First
Indiana in ought-seven, when the New
York Trusts tried to corner United
Copper and nearly brought down our
entire financial system.
(beat)
Perhaps you could have warned me,
before I founded my bank.
(beat)
It's a shame you were too busy
pissing in your diapers.

CARL
(nods, cheerful)
Exactly! I'm thirty five years old.
I never got past the sixth grade.
And I've made so much money off Prest-
O-Lite, I almost don't know what to
do with it.
(beat)
But I do have some ideas.

Garvin stares, silent. Unruffled, Carl pulls a folded
contract from his jacket and offers it.

CARL
Look it over. Financial advisor.
Seven hundred dollars a month.
That's more than you made as
President of First Indiana.

Garvin reluctantly takes it. Carl heads for his car.

CARL
Maybe you can keep me from pissing in
my diapers again. Though I guess so
far, I've pissed gold.
(startled, he grins)
Ha!

He turns, delighted, to Garvin -- who has no idea why Carl's
amused. Explaining brightly:

CARL
Everybody pisses gold.

From Garvin: the great stone face.

CARL

It's yellow.

Nothing. Carl shrugs, setting the crank into his engine.

GARVIN

Mr. Fisher.

CARL

Yes?

GARVIN

Why here?

Carl smiles. Gotcha. He looks out at the empty fields.

CARL

Because I'm going to turn this into
the Colosseum of our time.

Still proud, Carl bends and grunts, cranking his engine. It starts up with a clattering roar --

-- scaring the horses. As Garvin reins them in, Carl hustles to get behind the wheel.

He drives off, touching his hat brim, in a cloud of smoke.

CLOSE ON: A LEDGER, LIT BY A LAMP

Columns of numbers. A fountain pen nib inscribes a new entry.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alice Wallis is at the kitchen table, surrounded by ledgers, invoices, Wallis Motors check-registers.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Mother?

She looks up. Her son Daniel is in the doorway.

DANIEL

It's after midnight.

She smiles gently. He is dark and romantic and fifteen, but still a kid in his pajamas.

ALICE

Yes it is. What are you doing up?

DANIEL

A poem, in my head. Couldn't put it
to sleep.

He comes to sit.

DANIEL

Isn't there someone at the company
who could do this?

ALICE

I like being part of it.

(beat)

And that would take a salary from the
pit, or the shop floor.

He nods, surveying the open ledger.

DANIEL

An awful lot in the minus column.

Alice nods, grimacing slightly, eyes on the numbers. He
watches her.

DANIEL

He said the Comet's going to be the
fastest car in the world.

ALICE

I think it will.

Daniel considers this. His pregnant mother, the accounting
papers at the kitchen table.

DANIEL

We should sell the house.

(beat)

We don't need all these rooms. I
could share with Millie. Then we
wouldn't need a housekeeper. And I
don't have to go to Brooks, I can go
to the public school.

She smiles, melting. He's so earnest.

ALICE

We don't have to do all that quite
yet.

(beat)

But I'll tell him you offered, Danny.
It'll mean the world.

She puts her palm to his cheek, proud. Then leans to plant a kiss on his forehead.

ALICE

Go on to bed now.

Grateful, but shy -- he didn't say it for a reward -- Daniel gets up. Starts out but then turns in the dark doorway.

DANIEL

We can do it, Mother. We don't need all this. We'll have the Comet.

Alice watches her difficult, unpredictable child go off to bed. She doesn't know what to do with him so much of the time. But then there are moments like this.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - OMAHA - DAY

PREST-O-LITE HEADLAMP CO. - OMAHA: stencilled on a stack of crates, being rolled on a dolly toward a loading dock.

Edison's light-bulbs are too delicate for unpaved roads. Prest-O-Lite, headquartered in Indianapolis and co-owned by Carl Fisher, makes the gas-powered headlamps for almost every American automobile built in 1909.

A slight, bespectacled young man in filthy clothes steps around it and stops, letting his eyes adjust to the dim brick-walled factory interior.

His name is **ALFRED STEINMETZ**. In his mid-20s.

Alfred identifies the grimy shack-like office tucked into a corner and heads for it.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - OFFICE - SOON AFTER

A middle-aged **SHIFT BOSS**, in shirtsleeves, sits amid a fortress of crudely-built shelves crammed with papers, ledger-books, lock-boxes.

Alfred stands across the beat-up desk, cap in hand.

SHIFT BOSS

New York? The hell you doing in Omaha?

ALFRED

(shrugs)
Got on a train. Turned out it was
going here.

The Shift Boss looks him over. Enough said; this is not a
guy who had a ticket. This is the rods or the boxcars.

SHIFT BOSS

Ever worked an arc furnace? Or a
lathe, a grinder?

ALFRED

No. Sir.

The Shift Boss grimaces, sucking his teeth.

SHIFT BOSS

What the hell, you talk English. Got
Eye-ties, Hunkies and Polacks,
gibberish coming outta my ears.

He pulls a form off a shelf and sets it on the desk facing
Alfred, with a pen.

SHIFT BOSS

Scraper, hauler and maybe pipe-fit.
You don't come in Sunday, don't come
in Monday. Nine dollars a week,
gloves and apron come outta your
first week. You talk Wobbly or
Knights o' Labor, we break your legs
before we fire you.
(points to the paper)
Put your mark there.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - OFFICE - DAY

Alfred, in a leather apron and heavy work-gloves, rolls
pallets of crates through dim workrooms.

CARL (V.O.)

Nine years into the twentieth century,
gentlemen, America has invented the
telephone, the Victrola, the motion
picture, the safety razor, the vacuum
cleaner, the light bulb, the air
conditioner, the teabag...and the
Teddy bear.

All around him: grimy FACTORY WORKERS, manufacturing brass
cannisters and "charging" them with compressed gas.

CHILDREN work alongside the men.

CARL (V.O.)
Peary and Cook are racing to the
North Pole.

Eight-year-olds putting in a twelve-hour day among the industrial machinery, with no protective gear beyond their rough filthy clothing.

CARL (V.O.)
America is changing the world.

INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM - THE COLUMBIA CLUB - DAY

Carl Fisher, making a speech in a private dining room. Potted palms, heavily-brocaded drapery. Waiters in starched-bib shirt-fronts serve a seven-course lunch: oysters, shrimp cocktails, steaks.

CARL
And Indianapolis is changing America.
(beat)
Thirty-six auto companies already
here. And if anyone had any doubt,
this is going to tell them that we
are The Motor City.

He pulls the velvet cover off a table-sized model of:

CARL
The Speedway.

Three huge grandstand buildings, a three-story tower, twenty smaller grandstands, a club house, training quarters and garages -- all surrounding a banked oval racing track.

Carl surveys his own visionary ambition with awe:

CARL
The world's largest sporting venue.
With the first track built for auto
racing. And between races, a proving-
ground for auto-makers.
(beat)
Two and a half miles. Banked turns.
They'll run faster here than anywhere
-- ever.

He looks up at:

Three other Midwestern millionaires.

ARTHUR NEWBY sighs: 44 years old, unmarried, somewhat frail; worked his way up from office boy to owning the National Motor Vehicle Company.

NEWBY

How much?

CARL

A quarter of a million dollars.

ALLISON

Jesus, Carl.

JAMES ALLISON: 37, brilliant engineer, Fisher's partner in Prest-O-Lite and level-headed best friend.

CARL

Took your breath away, didn't it?

WHEELER

Well, it took something. Felt more like my wallet.

FRANK WHEELER: 45, a jovial former travelling salesman. Invested in a carburetor company, became a millionaire.

CARL

What are we going to do, Jew down the price?

(beat)

You pay what it takes to make history. Hell, half of what makes history is what you pay for it.

Carl grins -- flushed, drunk, alive. At twelve years old, he was a poor kid from a broken home, hawking newspapers and naughty postcards on trains.

Now he lifts his whiskey glass:

CARL

Too much, gentlemen. And then more.

Newby, Allison and Wheeler exchange amused, exasperated glances. Their class clown; their reckless, fearless idea man.

As they lift their glasses --

-- *an engine roars:*

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Henry Wallis, in a suit with the jacket off, reaches into a running motor with a wrench. Tightens a bolt.

Louise Fitzhugh, in driver's coveralls, hair tied back, is behind the wheel, eyes on him.

It's a blue Wallis Comet: his next-generation race-car -- smaller and lighter than the Mercury.

A support truck and Wallis' luxury roadster are parked nearby on this country road; three MECHANICS assist Henry.

As he signals Louise to shut off the engine, they see Clarence coming up the road, sweaty and dusty from a walk of several miles.

Henry doesn't stop working, but when Clarence gets close:

HENRY

You weren't there. We couldn't wait.

CLARENCE

I know. I'm only here to tell you I quit.

Henry looks up, baffled by the waste of time and effort. That pleases Clarence, who wanted his full attention. Launching into a carefully-rehearsed statement:

CLARENCE

I have my sights set on renown as a driver. I can't get that sitting in the pit. And half the time, sir, you take my seat. Which is not right.

HENRY

You've been talking to my wife.

The boy is taken aback. Henry sighs.

HENRY

Never mind. It's a fair point.

He wipes his grimy hand on a rag and holds it out.

HENRY

I wish you the best of luck.

Clarence shakes it. Looks at Louise, not sure what to do next. Then realizes awkwardly: leave.

CLARENCE

And you.

They watch him start back down the road.

HENRY

Clarence!

Clarence turns. Waits as Henry jogs over.

HENRY

I like you.

The young man nods, surprised and touched.

HENRY

You're not that good.

(beat)

So be careful.

Not sure how to be grateful for this, Clarence just nods again.

Henry nods too, and trots back to the Comet -- where Louise is watching the beautiful farm boy disappear alone down the rural road.

LOUISE

Kid's a crash waiting to happen.

HENRY

I know.

(beat)

And now you need a riding mechanic.

He looks at the empty seat beside her. Wrestling with it.

Louise, watching him, shakes her head.

LOUISE

Alice would never forgive me.

EXT. RURAL ROADS - SOON AFTER

Punishing, hammering engine noise --

-- the road ahead jittering and blurring, even worse than on a track --

-- dust and smoke mostly behind her, but the sun between the trees flaring in her goggles --

-- as Louise drives, alone.

EXT. FARM - CONTINUOUS

Chickens flap and pigs scurry, horses rear up --

-- as a FARMER runs to grab his shotgun out of the barn --

-- but by the time he's got it, the Comet has roared past,
leaving him choking in clouds of smoke --

EXT. WALLIS COMET - RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Louise's hands tremble, fighting to keep the wheel under
control --

-- the Comet brutally jolting and clattering on the rutted
dirt --

-- skidding into a straightaway -- standing on it --

EXT. RURAL ROAD - FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

-- the engine noise rising to a scream --

-- as the Comet tears down a ruler-straight road between
sunlit fields -- smoke and dust boiling up behind --

-- Louise coated with dirt and sweat, her muscles gone numb
from the pounding vibration --

EXT. RURAL ROAD - SOON AFTER

Henry listens. Eyes on the empty road.

The engine noise rising in the distance.

The cloud visible now. Getting closer. Louder -- LOUDER --

-- Louise thundering past, dust swirling around Henry --

-- as he checks the stopwatch in his hand.

The second-hand, now frozen.

Then running after the Comet as it slows, down the road.

Louise pulling off her dusty goggles --

-- and seeing it in his eyes. They don't say a word.
Filthy and grinning from ear to ear.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - DAY

Arc furnaces melt lime and coke into calcium carbide, which is crushed into a powder. In contact with water, this becomes highly-volatile acetylene.

Molten metal pouring into molds. Hammering, grinding, sparks and smoke.

Alfred Steinmetz takes a break from cutting pipe, sits on a crate. Pulls a notebook and the stub of a pencil from his overall pocket, starts to write.

Glancing at the FACTORY WORKERS on the shop floor, all alike in their rough clothes and grime.

Except the children.

Alfred watches **ELMER LOOMIS** carry scrap metal: 10 years old, wool knickers, knee-socks, one cheek swelled-out with chaw.

As he passes, the boy spits a jet of tobacco juice, which lands not far from Alfred's boot.

ALFRED

Hey.

Elmer dumps the metal in a bin, shrugs.

ELMER

I knew I wanna hit ya. I can nail a cockroach at five paces.

ALFRED

Ah. Well, it's good to have a skill in the modern workplace.

The kid frowns, not getting the joke but suspecting it's there. Defensive:

ELMER

They said I can't smoke.

ALFRED

Outrageous. How old are you?

ELMER

Ten.

ALFRED

And how long have you been working?

ELMER

Start six-thirty, like everyone else.

ALFRED

No: at what age?

ELMER

What're you, the tax man?

He heads back into the smoke and sparks to collect more scrap metal.

Alfred pockets the notebook and pencil.

EXT. COLUMBIA CLUB - DAY

Randolph Garvin, in his Dickensian black suit, stops his horse-and-buggy at the imposing front steps.

A doorman, uniformed like a Prussian general, comes to take the reins and help him down --

-- but Garvin hesitates, unfolding Carl Fisher's contract.

It's signed.

The snowy-haired banker considers it. Swallows his pride, folds the papers back up.

INT. COLUMBIA CLUB - LOBBY - DAY

Garvin stops on the marble floor, beneath the chandelier, contract in hand. Looks into the Club Bar.

He doesn't see Carl among the massive leather furniture and Republicans reading newspapers.

Then Garvin frowns, hearing cheers and hoots.

Heads toward the hubbub...

INT. COLUMBIA CLUB - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Wood panelling, portraits and oriental rugs.

A crowd surrounds Carl Fisher -- getting set for a foot-race against another BUSINESSMAN.

Cash is being collected for bets, exhortations and advice hollered out for the competitors.

Flushed with alcohol, already a bit dishevelled even before he's run, Carl watches his opponent neatly remove his suit jacket and hand it to a "second".

CARL

Down and back.

Then Carl turns around -- facing backwards.

CARL

Someone say "Ready, steady, go."

CARL'S "SECOND"

Ready -- steady -- go!

Two dozen of Indiana's richest men cheer as Carl takes off, running backwards --

-- amazingly fast --

-- getting ahead of the Businessman --

-- until Carl runs backwards into a console table set along the wall, holding a vase of flowers --

-- going sprawling as he smashes it into kindling.

The Businessman stops to see if Carl's hurt.

Laughing, clapping, the crowd hustles to help him up. Soaking wet and brushing cut flowers off himself, Carl calls to his opponent:

CARL

Ah, you didn't finish! We'll call it a draw.

INT. COLUMBIA CLUB - LOBBY - DAY

Randolph Garvin stays at the back of the crowd.

Turns without a word and heads out, grimly putting the folded contract back in his pocket.

INT. MCCAREY'S GARAGE - DAY

A grubby auto garage. Engine smoke swirls, caught in shafts of light from a dirty skylight, giving Ernest Lydecker's red Locomobile a holy grandeur.

The roaring engine goes silent, as Clarence shuts it off and leans into it -- working a ratchet-wrench, popping off the cylinder head, replacing the piston-pin bushing.

Ernest stands back, pocket-watch in hand.

Clarence flinches as his fingers, dancing among the smoking-hot engine parts, touch the metal -- but he keeps working, intent.

He locks the cylinder head back on, tightens it -- and turns, wiping his hands on a rag. Proud.

Ernest nods, putting the watch away.

ERNEST

I've seen faster.

Clarence stays still. Fighting back both the desire to hit him and the desire to cry.

CLARENCE

I just want to drive.

(grimaces)

I know: you drive. It's your car, I know that.

(beat)

I just mean...give me a chance. I'll do what it takes.

Ernest studies him.

ERNEST

You don't want to drive.

(beat)

You want to be a driver.

(beat)

Hear the cheers, see the big cities, live the high life, get yourself some tail.

Wounded by the truth, Clarence still meets Ernest's gaze.

CLARENCE

You don't know me.

The older man smiles slightly. Thoughtful.

ERNEST
Got a sweetheart back on the farm?

CLARENCE
What?

ERNEST
Little chickie waiting for you to get
done with all this and make her an
honest woman?

Clarence doesn't answer; not sure where this is going.

ERNEST
Mom and Pop?
(beat)
Anybody gonna come 'round with their
hand out if you buy it?

Ah. Okay.

CLARENCE
No. No one.

Ernest nods. Considering it, in silence.

Then he holds out a hand.

Clarence, startled, holds out his.

But Ernest doesn't shake it. He grips the wrist, pulls it
toward the Locomobile's exposed engine -- and presses
Clarence's palm against the hot metal.

We can hear the sizzle of burning flesh --

-- Clarence gasps and writhes, but Ernest's grip is like
iron, holding it there for a second --

-- then letting him go.

Shocked, Clarence staggers back -- turns and plunges his
hand into a bucket of cold dirty water.

Breathing raggedly, he stares at the older driver.

Ernest watches him. Ready for anything.

But the young riding mechanic doesn't move.

Silence.

ERNEST

There's no company. It's just me.
Twenty-five dollars a week, you pay
your own travel.

(beat)

We don't stop. I don't care if that
makes you a human hood ornament. I
have to piss, you hold the bottle.

Beat. Clarence nods.

INT. CARL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Hazel, in her uniform, comes down the luxurious hallway,
carrying her broom and dustpan, her basket of cleaning
supplies.

She knocks at Carl's bedroom door.

Waits. Preparing herself. Goes in.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

The purple drapery of the massive Victorian canopy has
already been pulled open.

The bed is messy, but empty.

The door to the bathroom is open, revealing Carl's robe on
the tile floor. His razor and shaving mug are by the sink,
a soapy mess.

Hazel takes it in for a moment.

A bit disappointed.

Then she starts to open the windows and air out the room.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - BATHROOM - SOON AFTER

Hazel kneels by the toilet, scrubbing.

INT. CARL'S STUDY - SOON AFTER

Carl draws several inch-thick stacks of cash, tied with
twine, from his office safe.

He shuts the safe and locks it.

We follow him as he carries the cash out to the hall --

INT. CARL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- where he almost collides with Hazel, carrying her basket and broom.

CARL
Good lord --

HAZEL
-- Oh God --

They stand looking at each other, a little breathless, collecting themselves.

Both acutely aware of her beauty...and her bumpy acne-reddened face.

HAZEL
I'm sorry.

CARL
My fault.

He steps back to let her pass.

She does, not looking at him.

He watches her go. Almost speaks. But he doesn't.

INT. CARL'S LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

LELAND MENZINGER sits amid the frou-frou turn-of-the-century furnishings: 40ish, the "Mayor's Special Assistant." A weasel in a suit.

He looks up as Jane Watts enters, immediately stands.

JANE
Oh. Excuse me. I left my work.

She indicates books, papers, pencil case on a table. He gestures: *go ahead*.

MENZINGER
Please. Just waiting for Mr. Fisher.

As he watches her collect them:

MENZINGER

What sort of work do you do?

JANE

Today? History and Algebra.

As Jane starts out with her schoolbooks -- she passes Carl, coming in with his stacks of cash.

CARL

Hello, sweetheart.

Carl gives Jane a quick kiss on the lips. When she's gone, he turns to Menzinger.

CARL

Menzinger, good. Here you go.

He holds out the bundles of money.

CARL

Please give the Mayor my best regards.

Beat. Menzinger takes them, uncomfortable.

MENZINGER

Do you have...something to carry it in?

Carl considers Menzinger. Sighs, looks around. Pulls a lace-trimmed satin runner off a nearby table, holds it out.

Menzinger reluctantly wraps the fancy cloth around the cash.

CARL

Next time, bring a bag.

The City Hall bag-man nods and takes his leave, with his ludicrous bundle.

It's hard to tell if Carl knows he has humiliated the man. It could be that he felt humiliated himself, and was too frantic fixing that to consider anyone else.

Carl, of course, doesn't think about it at all.

EXT. 400 NORTH CAPITOL BLVD - DAY

The first automobile dealership in the US: three stories of brick and giant display windows, showing off gleaming REOs and Stutzes and Marmons, Stoddard-Daytons and Premiers.

Randolph Garvin stands across the street, taking it in. The huge sign: **FISHER AUTOMOBILE COMPANY.**

CLOSE ON - THE SCALE MODEL OF THE SPEEDWAY

The oval track, dozens of buildings. Tiny cars, fences, trees.

Carl looms behind it all -- enormous, one eye shut.

INT. FISHER AUTO SHOWROOM - CARL'S OFFICE - DAY

He has rolled his desk chair up to study it at eye-level, adjusting to get different vistas.

His corner office is a mess, of course, drawings and plans for the Motor Speedway strewn all over.

He brightens, seeing Garvin in the doorway: dour, black-suited, contract in hand. Carl straightens up, indicating the giant model:

CARL

What do you think?

Garvin walks closer, looking down at it.

GARVIN

I think auto racing is a barbaric freak show, pandering to the worst in human nature.

Beat.

CARL

Is that a reason to stop, or a reason to do it?

Garvin tears the signed contract in half, and sets the pieces on the grassy infield of the model race track.

GARVIN

I despise what you sell.

Carl looks up at the old man. Amiably:

CARL

Horses shit in the street.

GARVIN

As they did in the time of Jefferson.
And Jesus Christ.

Carl nods. Enjoying this.

CARL

You know, they called me the
stupidest child in my school.
(beat)
Turned out I needed glasses.

He surveys his model. Intent, confidential:

CARL

The auto companies think racing is a
way to sell cars. And maybe it is.
But that's not why people go to the
races.
(beat)
They go to see men against machines.
Men inside machines.

His gaze shifts to the torn contract. Considers it.

CARL

Tell you what: let's double the
salary.

GARVIN

You're never going to take my
counsel.

CARL

What the hell does the compass care
if the man holding it goes north?

He watches Garvin wrestle with the urge to spit on the
money.

CARL

Don't be a fool. You're an old man
who lost a bank. You've got a
family.

Garvin gives Carl a long stare. Then he goes to the door.
But he can't leave. He exhales, looking down.

GARVIN

What is it you want from me?

Carl swivels in his chair, meditative.

CARL

I want you to love me.

Baffled silence. Garvin shakes his head, grave and righteous. And appalled.

Carl watches Garvin walk out of his office.

CARL

See you tomorrow.

He goes back to playing with his toys.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - DAY

Alfred Steinmetz climbs out of a shut-down furnace he has been scraping clean. Sweating and filthy, he mops his face with a rag.

Sees Elmer Loomis in the gloom again: ten years old, collecting metal scraps, chewing tobacco.

Alfred takes a penny from his pocket, tosses it. The boy turns at the bright-copper sound of the coin on the concrete floor.

ALFRED

Test of skill. Hit the penny, you can have it.

Elmer grins and spits -- right on the money. Triumphantly, he runs to collect his prize:

ELMER

Champion! Again?

ALFRED

Later. Don't want the foreman down on us.

ELMER

Yer on.

Alfred watches the boy walk off through a cavernous brick doorway, wiping the coin on his knickers.

INT. PREST-O-LITE FACTORY - OTHER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Elmer collects another load of scraps, WORKMEN raise a pallet of charged brass cannisters with a pulley.

The rope jams and the load shifts. A cannister slips out of the netting --

-- it clangs on the floor, knocking off a valve.

The boy stares, frozen, as it rolls toward him on the concrete, hissing.

WORKER

Hell.

INT. PRESTOLITE FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

Alfred turns --

-- as a ball of flame roars through the big industrial doorway, smothering the screams within.

Horrified, he starts toward the flaming doorway -- as more cannisters explode in the other room.

The WORKERS around him grab Alfred --

-- he's still fighting frantically to go in after the child as they drag him toward the loading docks.

CLOSE-UP - TWO PENNIES

Being passed from hand to well-manicured-hand.

One coin, slightly worn and darkened, features an Indian head in full feathered head-dress.

ALLISON (O.S.)

Everything has to change, I suppose.

The other -- brighter, brand-new -- features Lincoln.

CARL (O.S.)

They still add up to a dollar.

Carl's fingers take the Indian Head from Allison's palm.

INT. LERONDET'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Decorated in the New-York-society mode, also known as pretending-to-be-European-aristocrats: gilded mirrors, elaborate chandeliers, baroque furniture.

Any sense of class, though, is somewhat undercut by the MINSTREL BAND in black-face, performing "coon songs."

Carl Fisher and Jane Watts dine and drink with James Allison and his wife. Everyone is having a marvelous time. Carl talks to the old Indian Head penny in his hand:

CARL
Sorry, Chief. Out the with old.

He flips it at the Minstrel Band, then turns to pick up his whiskey glass.

CARL
(to Allison)
Oh, damn. I forgot to tell you:
Omaha. Departed the station, this
afternoon.

Jane frowns. Not sure what this means, but it clearly shakes Allison a bit.

ALLISON
How many on board?

CARL
Not sure yet. They think six.

Allison mulls it over, then raises his glass.

ALLISON
Omaha.

Carl clinks it.

CARL
Omaha.

Jane watches the men drink their whiskies. Thoughtful.

EXT. EAST SOUTH ST. - DAY

Sunday, noon. Near the City Gas Works, literally the wrong side of the tracks, where two hundred trains a day converge on Union Depot.

Hazel, in church clothes and carrying her Bible, walks past boarding houses, factories, saloons, cigar stores, a roller rink with a German band.

She finds a three-story brick building with white-painted ironwork, pink geraniums in window boxes.

Pulls the doorbell. Waits.

THADDEUS opens it: in his 40s, huge and intimidating, bald, in an undershirt with suspenders.

Looks Hazel over, uncertain what to make of her.

INT. MRS. GREENWOOD'S - CONTINUOUS

Hazel follows Thaddeus through a whorehouse on a Sunday morning.

PROSTITUTES eat breakfast, looking at the funny pages: *Buster Brown, Mutt & Jeff, Little Nemo In Dreamland.*

A HOUSEMAID in a shabby uniform sweeps the stairs.

Hazel meets her eyes as she passes.

INT. MRS. GREENWOOD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MRS. GREENWOOD looks up from paperwork: late 30s, African-American, a madam in a well-organized office.

Thaddeus shows Hazel in. She stands in awkward silence.

MRS. GREENWOOD

May I help you?

HAZEL

I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were
...a darkie.

Mrs. Greenwood is startled, Hazel sees that.

HAZEL

It's what we say.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Yes it is.

(beat)

Are you here to give me religious
instruction?

Hazel's turn to be startled, until she remembers she's holding the Bible.

HAZEL

Oh -- no. I came from church.

(beat)

I'm here...seeking employment.

(MORE)

HAZEL (CONT'D)

(beat)
As a whore.

Not where Mrs. Greenwood thought this was going. She gestures to a chair and watches Hazel sit.

MRS. GREENWOOD
Have you had experience?

HAZEL
Not being paid.
(beat)
My family owns a stable.

MRS. GREENWOOD
Then I expect most of our clientele would be a disappointment.

HAZEL
No, I'm sorry -- I just meant -- I have no...illusions. About the world. There have always been men around.

Hazel studies this woman across the desk, so impossibly other. But she came this far.

HAZEL
I've been -- doing it since I was fourteen. My first...beau...and I did it for almost a year.
(beat)
But he had me keep the pillow over my face.

Mrs. Greenwood can't help wincing. Hazel struggles with that, but refuses to quit.

HAZEL
I've done it a good deal since then. I like it. I know there is something wrong with me, but I do.

Silence.

MRS. GREENWOOD
You could marry.

Hazel grimaces. Indicates her face:

HAZEL
To a man who "puts up" with this so I'll keep his house? I get paid for
(MORE)

HAZEL (CONT'D)

to keep a house. And Mr. Fisher pays well.

(beat)

And then I have to give my wages to my father.

(beat)

But if I move out on my own? People will say I am already...what I want to be here.

Mrs. Greenwood frowns.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Mr. Carl Fisher?

Hazel nods. Silence.

HAZEL

The life that is possible for me, I cannot live.

(beat)

And I think I would be good at this.

Mrs. Greenwood nods. Takes some time, studying Hazel.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Once you give up your reputation, you are ruined forever.

HAZEL

You don't seem to mind.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Do not presume.

Beat.

HAZEL

Sorry.

Beat. Sympathetically:

MRS. GREENWOOD

No. I am.

(beat)

I charge ten dollars for an hour with my girls.

(beat)

They have to be pretty.

Beat.

HAZEL

Of course.

Mrs. Greenwood watches Hazel stand in silence.

Not trusting herself to say a polite goodbye, trying to get out before the tears arrive -- Hazel goes to the door but fumbles with the knob.

As she manages to get it open:

MRS. GREENWOOD

Can you come see me now and then,
without endangering your position?

Hazel turns. Uncertain what this means.

HAZEL

I have Sundays off.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Come next Sunday. Early, like this.

Hazel nods. Waiting for more.

MRS. GREENWOOD

Just come back.

Hazel nods again, hesitant -- and goes out.

INT. WALLIS MOTOR COMPANY - DAY

An auto factory before the assembly line:

Rows of half-assembled cars, up on sawhorses. Tools, parts and raw materials on racks and rolling carts, lined up along the walls. They turn out cars one at a time, by hand.

But it's Sunday morning and the place is silent.

Louise walks in through the big open garage doors, like she's coming home --

LOUISE

Morning, gentlemen --

-- but then she slows, seeing the Wallis Motors PIT CREW preparing to roll her blue Mercury out for a race.

They all stop what they're doing, looking at her. Silent.

LOUISE

What?

CLOSE ON:

AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION stationery, the engraved letterhead as elaborate as currency.

In Louise's hand, as she reads a formal, typed letter.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry sits behind his desk, watching her. Around them, half-glass walls look out at the silent factory.

HENRY

You just beat Lydecker. Joan Cuneo almost took DePalma in the fifty-mile at New Orleans.

She finishes it and looks up at him, stunned.

LOUISE

They're banning women from driving in races?

HENRY

Did you know, in Vermont, every car is required by law to have a person walk ahead of it carrying a red flag? In Iowa, you have to call ahead and warn every town you're coming, so you won't scare their horses.

(beat)

America already hates cars more than enough, without you behind the wheel.

LOUISE

I'm not asking to vote, for Christ's sake.

HENRY

Sure you are.

LOUISE

(sighs)

I know. But...not in the car.

Louise stands up, frustrated, furious. She wants to smash something, but it all belongs to her best friend.

So she turns to look out at the Comet: the new race-car is up on sawhorses, hood off, engine taken apart, still being tinkered-with.

HENRY

I'll lodge a formal protest.

LOUISE

That's it? That's how you fight?

HENRY

I don't have a husband on Wall Street, Louise.

She flinches, but takes it. Eyes on her car. In pain. Fighting tears.

LOUISE

Who the hell are they?! A bunch of men in some club somewhere? What do they know about driving?

HENRY

The same thing they know about everything. How to own it.

She turns to him.

LOUISE

Let's just race, Henry. Just take on anything with four wheels. You know we can beat them -- what are you afraid of?!

HENRY

The Model T.

Louise is truly confused.

LOUISE

It's a...crappy tin box.

HENRY

It's going to put us out of business.

(beat)

There are more than two hundred companies now, making cars by hand.

(beat)

How many do you think are going to survive?

She looks down. The letter is crumpled in her fist.

As he watches her half-heartedly try to smooth it out:

HENRY

You can still race today. And if I raise some more capital, we can bring the Comet to Europe.

(beat)

Or things will change.

She nods. Handing back the letter, meeting his eyes.

Any threat of tears gone now.

LOUISE

I'm not going to stop, you know.

Henry watches Louise walk out, heading for the Pit Crew and the Mercury.

HENRY

No. Stopping is not what you do.

EXT. INDIANA STATE FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

The horse-track we saw at the opening. Sunday afternoon.

Tents, bunting, pennants. A military band. SPECTATORS swarm around a dozen PIT CREWS pushing race cars into position.

JUDGES and TIMERS at heavy wooden tables: men in suits and hats settling down with their sheaves of papers and ledger-books, clocks and pocket-watches, pens and ink. It looks like someone left a Victorian office by the side of the track.

The band trumpet plays the horse-racing "Call To Post."

Sam Delaney, in a classic straw "boater," moves through the crowd, joking with DRIVERS, newspaper folded under his arm, notepad in hand.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - WALLIS PIT - SOON AFTER

Henry is watching Louise prep the Mercury.

Sam comes to stand beside him, offering the newspaper:

SAM

Hot off the presses.

As Henry unfolds it to a front-page story announcing --

SAM
The Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

-- with a photo of Carl & his Partners, and a pen-and-ink illustration of the oval track and grandstands.

SAM
Gotta hand it to Fisher. The man
knows how make news.
(beat)
Opening weekend: a three-hundred-mile
trophy race. And the trophy's worth
ten grand.

Henry frowns, troubled, reading about it.

HENRY
That's...a hundred twenty laps.

Sam nods. Eyes on him.

SAM
Everybody loves a smash-up.
(beat)
Three hundred miles pretty much
guarantees at least one.

Henry looks up at the reporter, shaken.

SAM
Care to comment?

Thoughtful beat. Kindly:

HENRY
You're a hyena, Sam. You feed on the
dead.

Handing back the newspaper, Henry walks away. To his back,
but not loud:

SAM
I just work at the zoo. Throwing
meat to the animals.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS TRACK - LYDECKER PIT - SOON AFTER

Clarence gives Ernest's red Locomobile a final engine check,
then buckles the hood shut with his bandaged hand.

Breathing in the carnival atmosphere. He's home.

As Clarence turns to set his tool box in the bed of Ernest's support truck, he stops dead.

One side of a nearby tent hasn't been properly tied to the pole. The canvas hangs crooked -- leaving a gap.

Inside, a DRIVER is changing. He's naked.

Clarence stares at the man's body.

The Driver, unaware, begins to pull on clothes.

Clarence struggles to let it go, averting his gaze --

-- to see Sam Delaney standing a few yards away. Sam can see the naked Driver, too.

Sam looks in Clarence's startled eyes.

Strangers who know each other.

Hastily pulling on his goggles, Clarence turns away, heading for the track.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - THE SAME TIME

Carl is in his big canopy bed, Jane lying with her head on his chest. Both naked. The purple velvet drapery closed around them, keeping the world out

But she's troubled. Carefully:

JANE
At dinner last night.

CARL
Mmmm?

JANE
You told Mr. Allison: "Omaha departed
the station."
(beat)
What did you mean?

He wasn't aware that she paid attention. Sighs. But she asked.

CARL
There was an accident. At one of our
factories, in Omaha.

JANE

"Six on board" is...six people dead?

She instantly regrets it -- as Carl slowly sits up, pulls open the drapes. Watching him rummage in the mess on the bedside table until he finds one of his cheap, nasty cigars.

Not angry. Trying to find the words.

CARL

People want headlamps on their cars.

(beat)

Headlamps burn gas.

He lights it, eyes on the flame, puffing, making it flare. That's how you get the smoke you crave. He exhales a plume of it.

CARL

Sometimes the gas blows up.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS TRACK - SOON AFTER

A dozen unmuffled engines roar to life -- merciless, disorganized noise: hammering artillery, clattering thunder, caged mechanical animals.

Smoke begins to billow and curl around the cars as the RMs pull out the cranks and toss them to Pit Crews, climbing into their seats beside the DRIVERS.

INT. LOCOMOBILE - THE SAME TIME

Ernest, deadly calm, glances at Clarence -- like his RM is an engine part that might fail.

Clarence, doing his job, doesn't notice.

INT. MARMON 32 - THE SAME TIME

Behind the wheel of his black Marmon 32, Ray Harroun looks at his hands. They're trembling.

He flexes them, tugs his gloves tighter.

INT. WALLIS MERCURY - THE SAME TIME

In the blue Wallis Mercury, Louise is checking the oil, fuel and water levels with her RM.

Focused, intent. Looking only ahead --

-- where the other cars are wreathed in smoke, trembling with pent-up fury, roaring, waiting on the green flag.

INT. CARL'S BEDROOM - THE SAME TIME

Carl sits on the edge of the bed, naked, smoking his foul cheap cigar -- staring at something no one else can see. Jane gently caresses his back.

CARL

No one understands.

(beat)

I do care.

(beat)

I just don't care for very long.

EXT. RACETRACK - THE SAME TIME

The DRIVERS are settling their goggles, tightening their leather helmets, wrapping their faces --

-- becoming the anonymous, mythic steampunk-gadiator figures we met at the start of the hour.

In their death machines.

Ahead, dim in the smoke --

-- a TOP-HATTED OFFICIAL whips down the green flag.

As the engines ROAR --

CUT TO BLACK



