

FAMOUS

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

THUD THUD THUD WHOOSH THUD

It's the SOUNDS of a BOXING MATCH as the CROWD CHEERS.

TITLE CARD: *Cicero, Illinois 1899*

THUDS pull us through darkness to...

CLOSE ON

Two middleweight fighters -20s, white, bruisers- give the crowd their money's worth as blood and sweat spatters.

PULL BACK TO

INT. FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

The ruckus crowd engulfs US as fighters rage center ring.

THUD THUMP WHOOSH THUD THUD -and blood slings.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Seven males -20s/30s, black, shirtless, all sizes- stand single file. Chins down. Eyes up.

Dark brown eyes seem to reflect life stories while each man's skin tone grows a shade darker than the previous.

Tension seems palpable as sweat trails foreheads. Necks. Chests.

One man's perched in the shadows at the room's rear.

JOE

Shadows obscure Joe's face as tattered boxing gloves drape his neck. In his early 30s, he's jacked.

Eyes closed, Joe leans back deeper into the shadows.

His breath steadies.

HEARTBEAT slows.

PITT (V.O.)

Some people are born fighters.
Skin's thicker. Bones stronger.
Their heart beats... different.

The splintered door swings open and CASEY -30s, white, double chin- wedges himself against it.

WOODY -40s, white- slithers into the room with a lit cigarette jutting forward from his crooked jaw.

Woody drops a box of ragged, boxing gloves at the feet of a stumpy-looking fighter about five feet tall.

WOODY
(to STUMPY; speaks
with impediment)
Put these on.

Stumpy lifts a tattered glove into the light.

STUMPY
They gots holes, suh.

WOODY
What do ya' expect? They're scraps. Tell ya' what, ya' win tonight and ya' might have enough money to buy your own.

Woody slinks from the room.

He leaves Fighters to scour the box for matching gloves.

A frail-looking SLIM eyeballs the now-empty box.

STUMPY
(to Slim)
Ya' can leave, ya know.

SLIM
I can't. I needs the money.

THUMP THUMP THUMP

CASEY (O.S.)
(through the door)
Line up, ya' bastards.

Now Fighters seem to explode with nervous energy.

Then all halt.

They crane their heads to...

Joe rises.

Light reveals a boyish face set atop massive shoulders.

Slim cowers as Joe steps over.

Joe extends his own gloves to Slim.

The pair swap knowing eyes as Slim snatches the gloves.

EXT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Casey peeks past a slatted-wood door and into...

SEEN THROUGH THE DOORWAY

The Main Room seats 300, but now it's standing room only as a three-foot-high wooden barrier forms a fight ring.

The ring's canvas is stained with blood while the walls in here are used to record bets for this circus.

BACK TO SCENE

PERRY -30s, white, spectacles- strides up carrying a plate of mash and chicken. He passes the plate to Casey.

PERRY

Remember, this ain't for you.

Perry peeks inside the Main Room while Casey spits in the mash. He uses a dirty finger to stir the spit and mash.

INT. FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

An earlier white fighter is floored by a left. He's down for the count.

DING DING. The crowd erupts as Referee hands the injured fighter off to Woody.

CLOSE ON

A door's sign reads: *WHITES ONLY*

PULL BACK TO

EXT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Woody aids the injured fighter and pushes his way inside.

This room's almost opulent in comparison to the storage room as Woody tables the dazed fighter.

WOODY

(to white fighters)

Let 'em be.

BLOCK-HEADED FIGHTER

(mocks Woody's
impediment)

Let 'em be.

White fighters cackle as Woody glares.

TRACK Woody as he bounds out and down the hall to...

EXT. STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Woody swipes the plate of food from Casey. Rips open the door to wide-eyed, black Fighters. Sniffs the food.

WOODY
Smells good, don't it Casey?

CASEY
All I smell is wet dog.

WOODY
That there's fear. Fear stinks.

Woody scans the black Fighters.

WOODY
Remember this, boys. All of life
is a fight. It's just a matter of
what you're fightin' for.

Eyes skinny, Joe's fixed on Woody's crooked jaw.

STUMPY
Suh, I only gots me one glove.

WOODY
You right or left-handed?

STUMPY
Suh?

WOODY
See... it don't matter if a dog is
right or left-handed. Now, all
y'all line up.

Perry and Casey blindfold Fighters while Stumpy sneaks a large, metal, fishing weight into his glove.

WOODY
Ya' mongrels ain't allowed to see
nothin' outside this room. Lose
your blindfold and ya' lose the
possibility of supper.

Blindfolded Fighters latch onto the Fighter's shoulders to their front.

Woody eyeballs Casey. Hands him the plate of food.

Woody leads Fighters out and down the hall, past the white fighters' locker room.

A white fighter slams the locker room door and startles blindfolded Fighters.

CLOSE ON

A spotlight illuminates the back of a long jacket capped by a top hat and the CROWD NOISE crescendos.

Soon the jacket and top hat whirl around to CHEERS.

This is RED DEVLIN -50s, white, well-oiled and well-heeled.

Megaphone to his bearded mouth, Red's the ringmaster.

RED
(heavy Irish accent)
Ladies and Gentlemen--

PULL BACK TO

INT. RED'S SALOON - FIGHT AREA - CONTINUOUS

The crowd hushes as all eyes peer through the haze.

RED
--Several years ago when I moved to Cicero, the first thing I asked myself is, how can I bring the excitement of Chicago to your tiny town? I'll be honest. I didn't think it could be done. Then something happened. You. The people of Cicero. You changed me. I must say in a very short time I've developed a very large crush on this beloved town and it's all because of you. Gone are the days you'll feel the need to venture into Chicago to sip brandy, gamble and enjoy the company of a sporting woman. Neither will you feel confined to your homes after a long day's work. All you'll need is to come to Red's Saloon. I am dedicated to providing all of you with first class entertainment, no matter what the cost. And tonight I present to you something special. A spectacle the likes of which many have heard, but never seen. An event reminiscent of the days of the Roman Gladiators.

The crowd CHEERS.

RED

A bout so brutal only savages dare
to compete. I present to you the
one... the only... Battle Royale.

Woody leads black Fighters in as CHEERS turn to BOOS.

It's almost too hard to watch as faces in the crowd spit.

Fighters cross the wooden barrier into the ring.

They line up in two rows of four and face one another.

Red paces the ring's center as he rallies the crowd.

LILY -20s, white, a prostitute and ring girl- paints
white numbers from 1 to 8 on black Fighters' chests.

RED

Let the betting begin.

Woody and Perry scrawl bets on the walls.

RED

Fighters, the rules are simple.
Last man standing wins. When the
bell rings, fight for your lives.

Red strides from the ring as the crowd seems eager.

After a tense beat...

DING -Shit goes crazy as blind punches launch into air.

Joe knocks out his opponent. Guides himself backwards
into a corner.

It's mayhem as Stumpy's lead fishing weight cracks jaws.

Joe hovers like a spider. Grazed, he lets his hands go.

Slim's attacked by three Fighters who bite and kick.

Littered with bodies, blood coats the canvas.

Now Stumpy and Joe are the last upright.

Joe points an ear forward as he leaves his corner.

Joe and Stumpy trip over bodies to locate one another.

The crowd noise deafens as Joe and Stumpy touch.

Joe fires a vicious hook, but his swing's high.

Stumpy rockets an uppercut into Joe's groin- THUD.

Joe collapses.

DING DING

Stumpy kneels in a shower of debris and coins.

Breath heavy, Joe crawls over.

He pulls his gloves from Slim's lifeless-looking hands.

Woody and Perry collect money while workers drag bodies.

Perry checks Slim's pulse as the crowd JEERS and CHEERS.

RED

What do you say folks? Now that's
what I call a show.

Perry leans into Red's ear while Red's eyes remain cold.

RED

Make sure to stop by our bar on
your way out. One of you lucky
gents may want the pleasure of
spending time with our beautiful
ring girl, Lily, or any one of her
fine coworkers. Thank you for
coming and good night.

TRACK Woody and Perry as they haul Slim's lifeless body.

They toss Slim's body out a back door like trash.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - SAME TIME

Head down, Joe's slumped while Stumpy devours the food.

STUMPY

I guess the best man won.

Joe glimpses the mash and smirks.

Woody and Casey parade in, beer mugs gripped.

Woody flips a Silver Dollar to...

STUMPY

That's it?

WOODY

Careful, boy. The house gets its
cut. Ain't no place in town a
coon can make that kind of money.
Now hurry up and get out.

(to Joe; sarcastic)

Ya' sure was somethin' tonight.

Woody pours beer over Joe's head. Steams away.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Lit by the moon, Joe's gloves are draped as he pulls himself onto a fence and the post snaps.

He scans the broken post.

Soon he heads toward a distant barn.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

It's got a structure built onto it and the door's locked.

Head on a swivel, Joe boosts himself onto a window ledge.

Up and onto the roof, he drops in through a hole.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Lit by a shaft of moonlight, a heavy bag hangs.

Joe spies out through the dirt-coated window.

He shifts to the heavy bag and throws a few combinations.

Soon he lays down and covers his body with hay.

EXT. BARN - SAME TIME

AN UNKNOWN POV

Peers through the dirt-coated window at Joe- DING.

INT. FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

The crowd ROARS as Joe floors the fighter to his front.

Joe shuffles and knocks out another opponent. Backs himself into a corner again.

He waits for his prey while faces in the crowd spew hate.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Joe rockets a vicious uppercut- DING.

- Joe fires a left hook- DING.

- Joe head butts an opponent- DING.

- Joe drops to his knees and raises a fist while coins, bodies and trash litter the ring.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Gloves shouldered, Joe eats only the chicken.

Woody bursts in. Flings a Silver Dollar at Joe's feet.

WOODY
(seems to ooze hate)
Hurry up.

Woody bounds out as Joe spits blood in the mash. Stirs.

Joe steps out and hands the plate over to Casey.

Casey spies around. Devours the mash as Joe smirks.

FADE TO BLACK.

CLOSE ON

A toy Ferris Wheel from the *1893 Chicago World's Fair*.

On either side are sepia-tone photos.

In one photo, a young girl -13, white- clings to mother.

Soon a white man's hand reaches into frame.

PULL BACK TO

INT. WEATHERED FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

GUS -50s/60s, white, peppery beard lines his gaunt jaw-
sneaks a flask from under the toy Ferris Wheel's table.

FOOTSTEPS startle Gus and he splashes his coffee.

He rushes to tuck the flask back and bumps the Ferris
Wheel.

He doesn't seem to notice the Ferris Wheel turn as he
scurries over to the dining table and lifts a newspaper.

GRACE -early 20s, white, apron over her dress- bounds in
and her eyes target the Ferris Wheel.

She spies Gus. Repositions the Ferris Wheel.

GUS
(scans the newspaper)
Sleep okay?

GRACE
Fine.

GUS
Thought I heard ya' walkin' around?

Grace spies through a window and cracks a smile.

SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW

Joe climbs from the barn. Falls.

He's up and runs off.

BACK TO SCENE

GUS

Gracie, now you know, I know
everythin' that goes on here.

GRACE

(tracks Joe; grins)
I know you do, Pa.
(to herself)
So do I.

INT. RED'S SALOON - FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

DING -A few fighters grab and wrestle.

One fighter finds his way into Joe's corner- WHAM.

A female patron pushes a fighter back into the chaos.

RED

(into the megaphone)
Careful, ma'am. It may take days
to get that tar off you.

The crowd CACKLES as Joe's success appears to anger Red.

RED

(shouts)
Woody.

Woody shoves his way over.

Red leans to Woody's ear.

Woody fights his way to Joe's corner.

Joe rains punches as Woody eyes Red for the signal.

Soon Red nods to the almost-salivating Woody.

Hidden in the melee, Woody jerks a club from his pants.
He cracks Joe over the head and Joe drops to the canvas.

Joe crawls while fighters kick him until he's out cold.

Now Red smirks as he eyes the limp Joe.

EXT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

A dazed-looking Joe climbs onto the roof.

He faints and falls through the roof's hole- CRASH.

INT. GUS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Gus bolts upright.

He clutches a lantern and a double barrel shotgun.
Stumbles into the living room to find Grace at the door.

GUS

Stay here.

GRACE

Pa, wait.

INT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Cloaked in darkness, Joe lay unconscious on a hay mound.

Shotgun and lantern to lead the way, Gus bursts in.
Drops the rusted lock and key.

GUS

Who's in here? Come out now.

At the heavy bag, the lantern reveals marks in the dirt.

Gus scrutinizes to see the marks are footprints.

Then a glint in the dirt catches Gus's focus.

A silver dollar. More silver dollars lead to Joe's
gloves. Then the unconscious Joe.

GUS

Hey, wake up. Ya' hear me?

Gus uses the gun barrel to nudge Joe.

GUS

Get up. Ya' can sleep this off
somewhere else.

Gus notes the swollen lump behind Joe's ear.

Soon he nabs a chain and locks Joe's ankle to a post.

He packs one of Joe's gloves with silver dollars. Grips
the shotgun and lantern. Stumbles away.

INT. GUS'S FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Grace paces as Gus strides in, boxing gloves in-hand.

GUS
Go back to bed.

GRACE
Pa?

GUS
We'll deal with this in the
mornin'.

GRACE
What happened?

GUS
(angered)
How long ya' known?

Her eyes dance.

GRACE
He's a fighter, Pa. He's been
here a little over a month. He
can really throw a punch.

GUS
(locks eyes with her)
How a man punches don't matter to
me no more.

He tosses her the gloves and she reacts to the weight.

She dumps silver dollars into her hand and her jaw drops.

INT. GUS'S BARN - DUSK

Under a blanket, a now head-bandaged Joe wakes.

In a nearby rocking chair, Gus sips coffee. Shotgun
rested across the chair's arms, his bare feet soak in a
bucket of steaming water.

GUS
Howdy.

Joe appears blurry-eyed and still out-of-sorts.

GUS
I don't know about you, but I
always enjoy a good soak after a
long day.

Now Joe's eyes locate the shotgun.

Joe scurries, but the chain stops him. He eases his hands upward.

JOE
Promise I'll be on my way if ya'
unlock this chain, suh.

Joe struggles to stand.

GUS
I ain't gonna shoot ya'.
(off the chain)
Besides, I don't think you're
goin' nowhere.

JOE
(spies out the
window)
What time is it?

GUS
Evenin'.

Gus raises Joe's gloves and Joe's eyes seem to ignite.

GUS
(off the gloves)
These have anythin' to do with
where you're tryin' to go?

JOE
Those are mine. I earned 'em.

GUS
And I earned this barn. Built it
and everythin' inside. Now how
long ya' been here?

JOE
Suh, I came here because I heard
ya' was the best.

GUS
How long?

JOE
About six weeks. Suh, I'm sorry.
I can pay ya' for the time.

Joe wobbles to stand.

GUS
Stubborn as a mule, ain't ya'?
Wherever ya' got to go, ya' ain't
gonna make it tonight.

Joe's hurt, but stands straight when Grace tiptoes in.

GRACE
(off Gus's feet)
The water heated out?

GUS
We're about done here anyway.

Joe appears embarrassed to be chained as...

GRACE
(off the chain)
Pa, ya' said ya' was gonna take
that off?

Hand on the shotgun, Gus considers Joe.

GUS
I want ya' to know, I love my
daughter more than anythin'. Ya'
understand?

The men trade knowing glances.

Soon Gus tosses Joe the key.

GUS
Sorry about treatin' ya' like
that. I didn't mean no harm.
Just can't be too sure these days.

Joe unlocks the chain. Tosses the key back.

GUS
Ya' can thank Grace here for the
blanket and bandages.

Grace glimpses Joe as she grips the bucket and Gus's mug.

GUS
(to Grace)
I'll be in shortly.

Grace seems like she doesn't want to leave.

GUS
(to Joe)
How about we start with an easy
question? What's your name?

JOE
Joe.

Now Gus's eyes order Grace out and she stomps away.

Gus uses the shotgun to help himself up.

JOE
All I want is my gloves. I wanna
fight. That's all, suh.

GUS
(off the gloves)
These are yours? Ya' earned 'em?

Joe sprouts a look, like this is a trick question.

JOE
Yessuh.

Gus spies Joe's head lump.

GUS
From the look of it, the cost of
these here gloves was too much.
Take it from me, what ya' need to
do is hang 'em up and move on
before this fight game kills ya'.

Joe appears crestfallen.

GUS
So... somebody told ya' I was the
best, huh?
(studies Joe)
Welp, they told ya' wrong. Feel
free to rest up, here in the barn.
I'll have Grace make ya' somethin'
or other to eat. I'll give ya'
your gloves tomorrow and ya' can
be on your way.

Gloves in-hand, Gus pivots toward the door as...

JOE
But, Suh, I just want--

GUS
--Name's Gus.

Joe's eyes trail Gus toward the house.

Soon Joe gathers his things.

A small bible. A pocket watch.

He ties everything up in a blood-stained handkerchief.

Then he touches the bandage behind his ear and winces.

CUT TO:

INT. GUS'S BARN - DAY

Gus examines the footprints beneath the heavy bag.

Soon something outside grabs his focus.

He rakes the prints.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Joe fumbles to steady a wood slat, the earlier broken post, a nail and a hammer all at once.

TACK TACK TACK TACK

He flashes the post a look, like it's not his best work.

He scans down the fence and considers endless decay.

Just then Grace glides up with a basket of eggs in-hand.

Joe startles and steps away.

JOE

Ma'am. I's just fixin' this post.
It broke on me. Just felt like I
needed to fix it before I go.

GRACE

Ya' leavin' us, Joe is it?

JOE

(appears confused)
Your Pa said for me to be leavin'
today.
(glimpses around)
Ya' sure ya' ought to be out here
with me? All by yourself?

GRACE

This is my farm. I'll go where I
please.

He keeps his distance as she eyes his bandage.

GRACE

Your head alright?

She reaches for the bandage as he pulls away.

GRACE

I won't hurt ya', ya' know.
(off his unease)
Don't ya' survive by fightin'?

JOE
I'm all for a fair fight, but
fightin' at Red's ain't fair.

He caresses the bandaged lump on his head.

JOE
Your Pa says maybe I should quit
fightin'.

GRACE
Ain't nothin' wrong with backin'
down once in a while.

JOE
(with force)
I don't back down. I fight.

She scrunches her face in thought.

GRACE
So, my Pa says ya' should quit?
(studies him)
Too bad. I watched a few fighters
train in our barn.

JOE
So you're who's been spyin' on me?

GRACE
Can't blame a woman for knowin'
what's goin' on in her barn.

They trade snickers.

After an awkward beat...

GRACE
Welp, if your quittin', then why
ya' still here?

JOE
I needs my gloves.

GRACE
Gloves?

JOE
And the money. Ain't never had
nobody and nothin' in my life.
Them gloves and that money's all I
got. Been on my own since I was a
kid. All I ever had to do was
look out for myself.

GRACE

Ya' ain't never had no one in your
life love ya'? Or ya' ain't never
loved nobody?

He shrugs, like he's unsure.

GRACE

That's sad. All ya' got's a pair
of raggedy gloves and a few coins.
It don't look like fighting's
payin' off. Maybe Pa was right?

They share the silence as he eyes the ground.

JOE

Reckon all I ever loved is my
gloves. Ya' can keep the money
for watchin' over me. Didn't
steal it. I won every penny.

GRACE

I'm sure ya' did. But ya' don't
own that money. You're so
worried. Seems to me that money
owns you.

JOE

Ya' don't understand.

She strides away.

JOE

Where ya' goin'?

GRACE

To see if I can get your gloves.
And your money. That's what ya'
want, right?

Looking panicked, he trails her toward the barn.

JOE

Your Pa gone to get the sheriff?

GRACE

No.

JOE

Why'd ya' patch me up anyway?

GRACE

Curious, I reckon.

JOE

What's that mean?

GRACE

It means, my Pa's like me. Better yet, I'm like him and I wanna know more. Same as you.

JOE

Can I just have my gloves?

GRACE

Ya' sure that's all ya' want?

Now he eyes the ground.

She continues toward the barn while he trails her.

GRACE

(off the barn)

I never saw my Pa fight. Just heard stories from mama. She died of the sickness several years back. I watched him turn to the bottle. He quit trainin' fighters. Locked off that part of the barn... and his life. Ain't opened it since. Not till ya' fell through the roof.

She swings open the barn's weathered doors and rusted hinges creak from years of neglect.

INT. GUS'S BARN - CONTINUOUS

GRACE

Mama used to tell me how she'd wake up in the middle of the night to an empty bed and see a lantern burnin' in this barn.

(points to the
earlier window)

She'd stand at that window for hours and watch him train. That's how I met ya'. Through that same window. I reckon I felt I owed ya' somethin' for givin' me those moments. Now I know exactly how she felt.

(appears to think)

But I saw somethin' else. In between workouts, when ya' was restin', I saw your mind wonder--

(asks herself)

Who put up this heavy bag?

She glimpses dust-coated, framed photos.

CLOSE ON

One less dusty photo features Grace, Gus and a grey-bearded black man.

BACK TO SCENE

GRACE

(asks herself)

Who're the men in these dusty ol' picture frames? Who trained here before me?

She locks eyes with him.

GRACE

Why else would ya' return to the same place every night, increasin' the odds of gettin' caught? Unless ya' wanna get caught?

Boxing gloves in-hand, Gus treads up. He scrutinizes Grace's proximity to Joe and slims his eyes.

GUS

Grace, I'm sure Joe's hungry. Why don't ya' make some breakfast?

GRACE

We're runnin' low on supplies.

GUS

Make a list. I'll go into town.

GRACE

With what money?

GUS

They'll extend my credit.

GRACE

Wouldn't it be easier to just get back to farmin'?

Gus fires a glare and she eases out the door.

GUS

(scans Joe)

Feelin' better, I see.

JOE

Yessuh.

GUS

Tell me about this fightin' ya' been doin'.

JOE

Suh?

GUS

Ya' been fightin' at Red's Saloon?

JOE

Yessuh.

GUS

Pardon me for askin', but Red
allows your kind to box in his
saloon?

JOE

Not really. Us colored boys are
more the entertainment between
fights.

GUS

So you're paid?

JOE

One silver dollar to the winner.

GUS

(off the heavy glove)
I take it ya' won a good bit.
(spies Joe's head
bandage)
What about that lump on your head?

JOE

Don't know. One second I's
throwin' punches, then the lights
went out. Felt like I'd been
kicked by a mule.

GUS

Is there a fight tonight?

JOE

Yessuh.

Gus appears to think. Extends Joe the gloves.

GUS

Was I wrong about ya' quittin'?

A confused look washes over Joe.

Soon he nabs his gloves. Appears to think as Gus
shuffles away.

Joe drapes his gloves over a post.

He glimpses around and his eyes seem to catch on...

THE EARLIER FRAMED PHOTO

It's of Grace, Gus and the grey-bearded black man.

BACK TO SCENE

Eyes glued, Joe eases to the photo. He studies the sepia-tone image as his eyes trace every line.

Soon the heavy bag seems like it calls to him.

He positions himself near the bag. Throws a punch- THUD - and his look says- *That felt good.*

He throws another punch- THUD. Two more- THUD THUD.

Soon he's right back into a full workout as his feet pick up steam and crisscross the dirt under the heavy bag.

THUD THUD THUD WHOOSH THUD

Eyes slim as his focus grows more intense by the punch.

Now lathered in sweat, he plows the heavy bag.

THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD POW

Out-of-breath, he scans blood on his knuckles.

Soon he snatches his gloves and bounds out.

INT. GUS'S FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Grace gazes out the window.

SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW

Joe disappears into the distance.

BACK TO SCENE

Her gaze shifts and she appears taken aback.

SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW

Gus leads a saddled horse he calls GHOST from the barn.

Gus climbs up and rides off.

BACK TO SCENE

A grin grows on Grace's face.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Gus rides toward Cicero as brick buildings are visible.

The night sky is made even darker as smoke rises from stacks and CITY SOUNDS fill the thick air.

Along Main Street...

Sidewalks are alive as Gus passes *The Grand Hotel*.

The General Store.

The Police Station.

A stream of well-dressed white men and women trickle along toward one, distant structure...

Red's Saloon.

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

Joe cuts onto the road. Makes his way toward Cicero's glow.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Joe's view of Cicero differs as he winds through darkness.

He's between buildings where prostitutes turn tricks and drunk men fistfight as shadowed figures lurk.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A broad-shouldered doorman welcomes patrons while a large sign next to the door reads: NO DOGS, NO NEGROES, NO MEXICANS

Gus ambles inside to customers who sip brandy and enjoy live music.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - REAR ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Joe creeps up. Eases past rough-looking white men.

Casey stops Joe at the door.

CASEY
Well, look who's back.
(scans Joe)
Turn around.

Casey scans as Joe pivots while nearby eyes seem to belie fear as each man studies Joe.

INT. FIGHT AREA - LATER

Looking intrigued, Gus scans around as...

Two, white, Heavyweight fighters trade blows with little defense. It's just who'll fall first.

A crushing right floors one fighter and the crowd erupts.

Soon Red bounds to center ring and greets the winner.

Meanwhile...

Woody wrangles a blindfolded Joe and five other black Fighters toward the ring.

As Fighters step into the ring, Red paces between them.

RED

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a treat for you tonight. You see this is no ordinary Battle Royale.

Gus peeks from behind the crowd.

RED

The six boys standing before you are special. Why are they special you're asking each other? It's because they're winners from past Battle Royales.

Two Fighters stumble into each other and go at it.

Gus grimaces at the action.

RED

Holy shit. These fighters are foaming at the mouth like rabid dogs. Somebody separate those two.

Woody and Perry bust up the fight while...

RED

Be careful folks. If you blink. If you simply bat an eyelash you may miss one of the most brutal, most destructive bouts this side of the Mason Dixon. These ruffian aren't just fighting for money or the fill of their bellies. They're fighting for their lives. So step right up and place your bets. Who will stand as others fall? Who will conquer them all in the Battle Royale?

Red strides from the ring. Climbs onto the barrel.

Ring Girl paints numbers as bets are made.

DING -This Royale is true chaos as fighters go berserk.

One fighter even gets bitten on the neck.

Gus appears like he can't stomach anymore. He slices his way through the crowd toward the saloon.

INT. RED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

ELLIE -40s, black, the House Madam- lounges as Woody places a thin stack of cash on the desktop next to Red.

WOODY

(to Red)

I think it's time we get some new girls around here.

ELLIE

What's that supposed to mean?

WOODY

It means look at the numbers. Your girls are tired. Half of 'em spend the day drinkin' and the others are miserable. No man wants to sleep with a depressed whore. I say we hire fresh meat.

ELLIE

Woody, ya' know our numbers dip every fight night.

(mocks Woody's
impediment)

All the girls agree, the only thing tired around here is you.

Woody rips out a pocketknife.

Ellie reveals a pistol tucked in her garter.

ELLIE

Is that all ya' got?

RED

Put that little thing away, Woody.

Ellie and Red cackle as Woody steams. Pockets the knife.

Soon a breathless Casey squeezes into the open doorway.

CASEY

Red. Ya' got a visitor.

INT. RED'S SALOON - NIGHT

At the bar, Gus sips from a mug.

Perry creeps to the bar's far end, out of sight from Gus.

PERRY
(to Bartender)
What's he drinkin'?

BARTENDER
Coffee.

PERRY
That's it? No chaser?

BARTENDER
Nope. Been sittin' quiet since
just after the Royale started.

Perry scrutinizes Gus. Eases toward him.

PERRY
Gus. Long time.

Gus just sips.

PERRY
Red wants to see you.

Gus sips again. Rises.

PERRY
After you.

AT RED'S OFFICE DOOR

CASEY
Gus.

GUS
Casey. Ya' lose weight?

CASEY
No.

GUS
I didn't think so. Just tryin' to
be polite.

Appearing confused, Casey opens the door.

Just as everyone does, Casey keeps his distance from Gus.

Now inside Red's office, Ellie smiles at Gus.

GUS

Ellie.

ELLIE

Stone. Been a long time since I
been with a man like you. Careful
Woody, Gus is always packin'.

Woody glares while Ellie cackles and saunters out.

RED

Gentleman. Welcome back Gus
Stone.

Red applauds as his men look on with scorn.

RED

It's good to see you, Gus. Let me
offer you a drink.

Like a slap in Gus's face, Red pours a whisky shot.

RED

Oh, that's right. You've turned
away from the bottle. Pity. It's
nearly cost you your farm, I hear.
Never too late to make a change, I
guess. But how much have you
changed Gus? The last time we met
you laid up three of my men for a
week.

(downs the shot)

They say you can't teach an old
dog new tricks, but I guess the
feel of your hands around those
cold cell bars can do wonders.

GUS

How's the jaw Woody?

Woody wipes drool and lunges.

WOODY

Ya' sumbitch.

RED

(juts out a hand)

Calm down, Woody. It's been a
long time since our last visit.
No reason to hold a grudge. I'm
sure we can all be civil.
Besides, there's obviously a
reason Gus decided to join us.

Gus considers a poster for Charles "BONECRUSHER" Townes.

GUS
(off the poster)
How's he doin'?

RED
Crusher's an eagle, soaring to the
mountaintop. And I'm gonna be
right by his side when he lands.
(studies Gus)
We have a fight in Chicago next
week. You should come see what
you helped create. This fight'll
surely place him in the top ten.

GUS
No thanks.

RED
No? So what then?
(snickers)
What could bring you through my
doors after so many years?

GUS
I came to see this spectacle
you're feedin' people. The
Royale.

RED
Interesting.
(sneers)
What do you think?

GUS
It's absurd. Not fit for dogs.

RED
I think most would agree there's
not much difference between the
Colored and dogs.

Red's men chuckle.

Woody cackles extra loud and seems to snag Gus's eye.

GUS
I found a visitor in my barn a
couple nights ago.

RED
Animal or rodent?

GUS
He was unconscious with a big lump
on his head. Told me he got it
from here.

RED

Gus, you had me worried. You simply have an infestation.

(chuckles)

If you like, I can send some boys over to remove the problem.

GUS

That won't be necessary.

RED

We've seen a number of monkeys roll around that ring lately. Trust me, you got the toughest gorilla of the bunch. Best to remove him now.

GUS

He mentioned he's won a number of matches. I was curious. Why bash him over the back of the head?

RED

(sounds annoyed with the question)

Because sometimes order must be restored. The field needs to be leveled. I can't have the entire house betting on a sure thing. Where's the profit in that?

GUS

So...

(thinks)

He's a proper boxer?

Red and his men burst into laughter.

After a beat...

RED

Gus, I think this heat has taken its toll on you. Calling that boy a proper boxer is like comparing a five year old to a grown man. Sure he's strong, but everyone knows niggers lack the intelligence needed to compete in the sport. However, with the right influence, those boys are capable of putting on a unique brand of entertainment.

With that, Red just smirks. A beat.

INT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Battered from the earlier fight, Joe works the heavy bag.

Soon...

He spies out the window. Slings the door open to find Grace.

JOE
Whatchu doin' out here? What if
your Pa sees ya'?

GRACE
Ain't nothin' wrong with two
people talkin'. Besides, I can
handle my Pa.

She steps inside while he seems like he can't throw
another punch as he keeps one eye on the door.

GRACE
I take it ya' don't like bein'
watched?

There's silence as she winds her way around.

She stops at the pocket watch and bible laid out on a hay
bale.

JOE
That was my daddy's pocket watch.
Best I can remember, he was a
Pullman Porter for the railroad.
Bible was mama's. I remember her
carryin' it with her everywhere
she went.

She flips the bible's pages.

GRACE
These are memories.
(grins)
My best memory of mama was when
she took me on the Ferris Wheel at
The World's Fair.

After a beat of thought...

She rests the bible next to the pocket watch. Makes her
way towards the heavy bag while Joe eases away.

GRACE
Ya' really should be restin', ya'
know.

JOE
I should be fightin' right now.

He rockets a couple punches into the bag- THUMP THUMP.

JOE
Do ya' even like boxin'?

GRACE
Yeah. But I like art better.

JOE
Huh. That's different.

GRACE
Is it? You're a talented fighter,
Joe. I knew it the first time I
saw you through the window. I
think a skilled fighter can be an
artist and an artist can be a very
dangerous man in the ring. He can
hurt people. So ya' must always
bring these into the ring--
(points to his gloves)
--as well as this.

She uses her index fingertip to touch his chest's heart
area, but he flinches. Shies away.

Soon she shifts her eyes to the earlier photo of her, Gus
and the grey-bearded black man.

GRACE
Pitt always said, if a man's gonna
box, his heart must be full.

JOE
Full of what?

GRACE
That's for you to decide.

Joe eases into a grin.

JOE
I'll remember that. Thank ya'.
And thank ya' for keepin' my
secret. It seems ya' held onto it
as long as ya' could. I just want
ya' to know, I'm grateful.

GRACE
You're welcome, Joe. Ya' better
get some rest. I'll leave ya' be.

She takes one, last look back at him, then steps out the
door and leaves him to contemplate.

INT. GUS'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Eyes closed, a stretched out Gus reaches for the empty space next to him.

He grimaces and appears to deflate.

Soon he pulls a shoe box from under the bed.

The box contains a flask tucked next to a stack of envelopes, return addressed to: *Bank of Cicero*

He swigs from the flask.

Then his eyes seem to crawl to a photo of his late wife.

He plops the flask back in the box.

Tucks the box back into its hiding spot.

Shifts his gaze to a nearby window.

SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW

A large tree in the distance.

EXT. THE TREE - DAY

Gus has a bouquet of wild flowers in-hand.

After a beat...

GUS

Mornin'. I brung ya' these.
They're sproutin' all over.

(beat)

Farming's tough lately. But ya'
know that.

(beat)

I just wanted ya' to know I been
thinkin' about ya'. I miss ya'.
Miss ya' everyday.

Hand-carved text on a wooden cross reads: *MAGGIE*

Soon Gus fixes on a distant something.

GUS'S POV

Joe uses a shovel to dig near the fence.

BACK TO SCENE

Gus appears like an idea hits him and he rests the flowers against the marker. Scurries toward the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Gus flings open the doors.

He hobbles to the heavy bag.

Careful not to disturb the dirt, he studies the prints.

He places his feet over Joe's prints. Punches the bag while his movements match Joe's.

Now Grace pokes her head into the doorway. Grins.

GRACE

Whatcha doin'?

Gus just stands quiet with a strange look plastered.

GRACE

What is it?

GUS

What do ya' think of Joe?

Grace appears confused.

GUS

How would ya' feel if I asked Joe to stay for a little while?

GRACE

(cracks a smile)

What're ya' waitin' for?

GUS

People'll talk.

GRACE

What'll they say ain't been said? Folks know who ya' are.

GUS

He wants to leave.

GRACE

If Joe wanted to leave, he'd've gone by now. There's a reason he came back here last night.

Grace swings her gaze out the door to the distant Joe.

Soon Gus eases over.

He trails her gaze as he appears to think.

EXT. GUS'S FENCE - DAY

Joe pries a post from the ground as Gus hobbles up.

GUS

Thought I told ya' to be leavin'.

JOE

(startles)

Yessuh. But if it's all the same to ya', I like to finish what I start.

GUS

You're lookin' a lot better.

JOE

I feel strong. Been sleepin' so long with one eye open. Can't remember the last time I had a true night's sleep.

(scans the fence)

I figure I could get these broken posts out the ground for ya'. If ya' want, I could stop by from time to time. Help ya' rebuild?

GUS

I been meanin' to get this done.

JOE

I looked around. Couldn't find no lumber. The fence'll be open till ya' can replace 'em.

GUS

Eh, nobody wanders this far outside of town anyway.

JOE

I did.

GUS

You did. We can go into town later for supplies. That way they'll be here when ya' come.

JOE

Sure. It's gonna be a lot of work. Ya' probably need to replace half ya' fence.

GUS

Now ya' know why I never started. Tons of things around this farm needs fixin'. Might as well start with this.

Gus shuffles toward the house.

After a few steps, Gus halts. Doesn't turn to Joe.

GUS
Seen ya' last night in Red's
Royale.

Now Joe halts. Eyes wide. A beat.

JOE
What'd ya' think?

GUS
Disgusting.

Gus hovers. Hobbles away as Joe seems stung.

EXT. BUSTLING CICERO STREET - DAY

On a wagon hitched to Ghost, Gus and Joe ride to stares.

Soon Gus stops the wagon at the General Store.

GUS
Stay here. I won't be long.

Gus hobbles into the store as Joe hops down. Stretches.
Strokes Ghost's mane.

In the passing crowd, MARY -40s, white, elegant-looking-
carries a bag of grocery items as she trips and falls.

JOE
Ma'am. Ya' okay?

Joe aids Mary to her feet as Ghost eats an apple.

JOE
Ghost stop it.

WOODY (O.S.)
Whatcha doin', boy?

Woody and Casey seem to appear from nowhere.

JOE
Nothin', suh.

WOODY
Who ya' think ya' are? I swear
you Colored don't know your place.
Take your hands off her.

JOE
I was just helpin' her up, suh.

WOODY

Don't make me out to be a fool. I
got a mind to call the Sheriff.

MARY

Oh, that's not necessary.

Now a crowd forms behind Woody and Casey.

WOODY

The hell it ain't. This Gus
Stone's horse? Did ya' touch
Grace like that?

JOE

What? No.

WOODY

Ya' think you're different because
ya' can throw a punch? Ya' don't
even got a name. Ya' ain't even a
person. You's a nigger and better
remember your place in this world.

GUS (O.S.)

Where's this place ya' speak of,
Woody?

Woody whips to find Gus gripping an axe and a box of
nails.

WOODY

Keep a leash on your pet, Stone.
Your nigger grabbed this woman.
Made her fall.

MARY

He certainly did not.

Gus passes the axe over to Joe.

GUS

I see. Don't worry folks. I'll
make sure Mary gets home safe.

Woody just eyeballs the axe...

GUS

Joe, load up Mary's things.

Joe packs away Mary's bags while Gus reaches for Mary's
hand and her face flushes as he helps her onto the wagon.

Joe hops up. They blend into the busy street.

ON WOODY AND CASEY

WOODY

(off Joe)

I hate that one most of all.

CASEY

Why's that?

WOODY

Because he thinks he's different
than the other coons. I can see
it in his eyes. We gotta tell Red
about this.

CASEY

About what? Red's on his way to
Chicago.

WOODY

Whatcha mean about what? All ya'
do is eat. Ya' never pay
attention. Didn't ya' see what
Stone was holdin'?

Casey appears confused.

WOODY

That's it. Let's find ya' some
food, so your brain can function.

EXT. GUS'S WAGON (MOVING) - DAY

Mary gazes from her porch as Gus and Joe pull away.

The only sound comes from the wheels and Ghost's hooves.

After a long beat...

GUS

Ya' okay?

JOE

I think I should be on my way.

GUS

Don't worry about what happened
back there.

(beat)

Joe, I want ya' to think about
somethin'. Ya' don't gotta answer
now... but I'm invitin' ya' to
stay at the farm with me and
Grace.

JOE

Ya' mean as a farmhand?

GUS
We can discuss all that later.
Just... just think about it.

Soon Joe glimpses around. Grows a confused look.

JOE
Where we goin'?

GUS
I want ya' to meet a friend of
mine. He lives down by the river.

JOE
Gonna be dark soon.

GUS
Don't worry. I think we'll get
there at the proper time.

CUT TO:

INT. SPORTS COMPLEX - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Leaned against the wall, a trench-coated REPORTER
scribbles in a notepad as people rush by.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Chicago*

THUD -the wall shakes and Reporter grimaces.

He creeps to a nearby door that's ajar- THUD.

SEEN THROUGH THE CRACKED OPEN DOOR

Red and Perry gaze toward the man making the THUDS.

With **BONECRUSHER** stitched across the shoulders, his
robe's hood hides his face, but it's clear he's a giant.

Bonecrusher warms up with punches to the back wall.

Several punches land with a TAP.

Then a right hand lands- BOOM -and the room quakes.

BACK TO SCENE

Reporter scampers down the hall while a MIXTURE OF
RAGTIME AND JAZZ transitions US to...

CLOSE ON

A battered sign reads: *Pitt's Sugar Shack*

PULL BACK TO

EXT. PITT'S - NIGHT

Built with scraps, this juke joint appears like a heavy rain might wash the whole structure into the river.

INT. PITT'S - CONTINUOUS

It's crowded with a small bar area while tables and chairs are scattered around a beer-coated dance floor.

The house band is made up of a wide-eyed KID on drums, a spry PIANIST at a beat up piano, a lanky GUITARIST and a SINGER with a voice that matches her ample body.

STOCKY BLACK MAN
(drunk; off Singer)
That's a whole lotta woman.

WIRY BLACK MAN
(drunk)
Sexy, too.

STOCKY BLACK MAN
A whole lotta sexy woman.

Stocky and Wiry sway as they vie for Singer's attention.

Joe and Gus amble inside to this celebration while Joe appears taken aback by the crowd's warmth.

Soon a HARMONICA takes over and the strange, new SOUND of DELTA BLUES fills the space as all eyes whip to...

PITT -50s/60s, black, wisps of grey in his beard- rises from the crowd as he makes the harmonica sing.

After a musical beat...

The band riffs to a crescendo of drum hits as the exhausted crowd seems to almost collapse.

Drunk patrons glad hand a sweat-drenched Pitt as he makes his way off the dance floor.

GUS (O.S.)
Who taught ya' to play that harp,
ol' man?

Pitt halts as memories seem to flood his eyes.

Then he whips to Gus and the two fall into one another.

PITT
It's good to see ya', ol' friend.
How's little Gracie?

GUS
She's a lady, like her mama.

Pitt hugs Gus again. Notes Joe.

GUS
(to Joe)
Meet Pitt. A dear friend.

Pitt and Joe shake hands.

JOE
Nice to meet ya', mister Pitt.
This place is great.

PITT
Ya' like it?

JOE
I do.

PITT
Welcome to the Sugar Shack.
(to Gus)
What brings ya' to my neck of the woods?

GUS
(off Joe)
My friend here's a boxer.

Now Pitt sprouts a curious look. Examines Joe.

GUS
Ain't actually seen him box just yet, but I think he's pretty good. All I seen was that Royale at Red's. I was hopin' ya' could set up a match.

Pitt continues his study of Joe. Appears crestfallen.

PITT
I'm afraid I can't help ya'. We don't have fights like we used to. Boys started goin' into town, tryin' to win money at Red's. Now, the Shack's just a party. Sorry ya' came all this way.

GUS
Hell it was worth the trip just to see ya'. It's been too long and for that I apologize. Joe here's been fightin' at Red's for a while now as well.

PITT

Wait... your name's Joe?

JOE

Yessuh.

PITT

Hell, why didn't ya' say so?

AT THE BAR - MINUTES LATER

Patrons drink as Pitt holds court with Gus and Joe.

PITT

When Red put word out he was lookin' for Colored fighters, it was excitin'. All the boys around here looked forward to steppin' into a white man's ring. Thought we had arrived. They especially wanted a shot to win a silver dollar, but nobody knew what they was gettin' into with that Battle Royale. All tried once. A lot went back many times over, till word got out about the kind of fights Red was puttin' our boys into. Then we lost a few.

GUS

What do ya' mean lost?

PITT

A few boys went to fight at Red's and wasn't never seen again. After a while, I hear tell of boys wantin' to fight again at the Shack. But they hung up their gloves because they got scared at the Royale. They spoke of a Colored fighter. Said he was born in the ring. They called him Joe. No one could tell me his last name. So I gave him one myself. What's your last name, Joe?

JOE

Jamison. Joe Jamison.

PITT

Welp, around here we call ya' Famous. That name echoes from this town to the next.

Pitt reaches over the bar for *The Colored American*, a single-page newspaper and one-sided. Extends it to Gus.

CLOSE ON THE PAPER

A headline reads: *WHO IS JOE FAMOUS?*

BACK TO SCENE

GUS

My God. How'd this happen?

PITT

Besides the black fighters, most of the stories about Joe come from whites who saw him fight. Stories get bigger every time they're told. I started to think they were all just stories.

GUS

He's real. Found him sleepin' in my barn.

Just then Pitt sprouts a grin as he glimpses around.

PITT

I'll be right back.

Joe watches as Pitt cruises up behind a mountain of a black man -30s, fists like sledgehammers- and his WIFE - late 20s, black, tiny.

Pitt mouths something to MOUNTAIN. Motions toward Joe.

JOE

Ya' didn't tell me ya' was lookin' for a fight.

GUS

And you didn't tell me you were famous.

JOE

I'm just sayin', it woulda been nice to know is all. Get my head right. Now what?

GUS

I reckon we do what everybody else came here to do.

JOE

Dance?

Pitt hustles back. Coils his arms around Joe and Gus.

PITT

Welp, I found ya' a fight.

Now in the dance floor's center, Wife points her finger in Mountain's face while he just rips off his shirt.

With that, the dance floor empties and reveals Mountain to Gus and Joe as the band crashes to a halt.

GUS
(off Mountain)
What the hell?

PITT
Ya' wanna see the kid fight?

GUS
I wanna see him fight, not be
eaten alive.

Gus whips to Joe who's got his eyes closed.

GUS
Joe? Joe?

Soon Joe opens his eyes.

GUS
Ya' ain't gotta do this.

JOE
Gloves?

PITT
No gloves. Bare knuckle.

GUS
Joe, we can leave.

JOE
It's fine. I already won.

GUS
How so?

JOE
Because I ain't wearin' a
blindfold.

Joe slides from his suspenders. Removes his shirt.

JOE
We doin' this here or ya' wanna
take it outside?

PITT
(off the dance floor)
Boxin' ain't nothin' but a dance,
son.

GUS
Question is, how well do you
dance?

Joe strides over.

He comes face-to-face with Mountain as Pitt trails.

PITT
These are the rules of the pit.
No kickin'. No bitin'. You'll
fight till one of ya' quits. I
call the winner and my word is
final. Understood?

Mountain appears like he ignores Wife's scowl as he and
Joe just step away from one another.

Soon Pitt motions to Pianist.

PITT
Fighters ready?

Pianist strikes the same note- DUH DUH DUH.

PITT
Fight.

Pianist scores the action as Mountain comes out with
heavy fists and fights with a reckless abandon.

Joe's forced to hold Mountain.

Joe works Mountain with jabs that frustrate.

Mountain stalks Joe.

Every time Joe stops, he hits Mountain with a jab.

With every punch, the crowd cheers for Joe as his
movements seem to frustrate Mountain.

MOUNTAIN
Stand still and fight.

Pianist strikes the note again- DUH DUH DUH.

Mountain hunkers with Pitt.

Gus leans into Joe's face as Joe's eyes shift to...

JOE'S POV

Mountain's distraught Wife, who's now in tears.

BACK TO SCENE

Gus trails Joe's gaze to teary-eyed Wife.

Pitt hurries to the dance floor's center.

PITT
Fighters ready?

Pianist strikes the note again- DUH DUH DUH.

Mountain comes out strong.

Soon Mountain tires and Joe picks him apart.

Now Joe's eyes seem snagged by Wife who wipes more tears.

Pitt trails Joe's gaze. Swaps a knowing look with Gus.

Soon Joe shoves Mountain away. Steps in with a low left.

Mountain counters with an overhand right and floors Joe.

Gus carries a look like he's found "The One" as Pitt stops the fight.

Mountain trails Wife as she storms off.

The crowd helps Joe to his feet while the band fires back up and all dance as Pitt makes his way to Gus.

PITT
Ya' see that?

GUS
Kid's got heart.

PITT
A big one. Maybe too big?

GUS
What'd ya' call him?

PITT
Famous.

GUS
Joe Famous. I like it.

AT THE BAR - LATER

The place is empty as Joe hunkers between Gus and Pitt.

JOE
How long ya' been friends?

PITT
Longer than he cares to admit.

Gus and Pitt exchange grins.

PITT

Long enough for him to help me
build this place.

GUS

I hammered the first nail.

PITT

Stop lyin'.

GUS

Ya' know it's true. We spent a
lotta time workin' on this place.

JOE

So what changed?

Both Pitt and Gus eye the floor.

JOE

Been a while since ya' seen each
other, right?

GUS

A lot changed after my wife died.

PITT

(changes the subject)
Who taught ya' how to throw a
punch, Joe?

JOE

No one. Got into lots of fights
as a kid. Reckon that happens. A
white man saw me fightin' and put
me and the guy in a ring. I put
on the gloves and just started
movin'. Can't explain it.

PITT

How'd that fight end?

JOE

I knocked out one of his teeth.
Fight's mostly over when ya'
change a man's smile.

All chuckle.

PITT

Ya' got talent, Famous.

Joe cracks a smile.

PITT

Gus, whatcha thinkin' over there?

GUS

Thinkin' about Grace.

(beat)

Joe's got talent, as much as I've ever seen, but I already knew that. Funny thing is, I think Grace knew before I did. I saw it in the dirt around that heavy bag, but I needed to see it up close.

(thinks)

I'm just wonderin' when she knew.

JOE

Knew what?

GUS

Joe, how'd ya' like to be a fighter?

JOE

I am a fighter, suh.

GUS

No son, you're a clown. Red throws ya' in the ring and it's nothin', but a show for a bunch of rednecks. I'm talkin' about becomin' a real fighter with me as your manager and trainer. No more fightin' in the streets. No more Battle Royale.

JOE

Most people won't even touch me. Why would ya' train me?

GUS

Because sometimes when you're given a gift, ya' don't ask how ya' got it. Ya' just find a way to use it. I see your gifts. I wanna help ya' use 'em.

The men trade knowing grins. A beat.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY (CHICAGO) - NIGHT

Red, Perry and the giant Bonecrusher make their way upstairs.

Reporter stumbles after the trio.

REPORTER

Crusher, the doctor says Collins is still unconscious.

Red pushes Perry and Bonecrusher to move on.

REPORTER

No comment on the man you nearly
killed?

Now Bonecrusher halts. He pivots around and his face
eases into the light.

He's ruggedly handsome with dark features capped off by
an air of supreme confidence.

BONECRUSHER

I did one thing wrong in that
fight. I sent him to the doctor.
I should've sent him to the
morgue.

PERRY

Let's go champ.

Perry urges Bonecrusher up the steps.

RED

(to Reporter)
How'd you find us?

REPORTER

I'm a reporter, Mr. Devlin. It's
my job.

(beat)

Crusher appeared to be toying with
Collins throughout the fight. Was
he trying to make a statement?

RED

Every fight is a statement. Ya'
see everyone hungers for blood,
but they don't want violence. The
crowd begs for knockouts, but they
also want a happy ending. We are
in the hurt business. There are
no happy endings.

EXT. GUS'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

With her back to US, Grace pulls garments from the
clothesline.

She folds them.

Places them in a basket.

Soon Gus and Joe rattle their way up in the wagon while
WE note Pitt hidden under a blanket.

Joe considers Grace. A beat.

JOE
Gus, I reckon I'd like to take ya'
up on your offer. To live here.

Gus notes Grace. Grins.

GUS
Ya' would, huh? Now go figure.

Gus chuckles as they halt at the farmhouse.

GUS
(loud)
Grace. I got someone who wants to
see ya.

With her back to Gus, Grace appears frozen.

GUS
What is it, Grace?

Gus hustles toward her.

Face trailed with tears, Grace eases around to Gus.

GUS
What is it?

Gus's eyes raise to...

CLOSE ON

A red-lettered notice is pinned to the front door.

BACK TO SCENE

Gus bounds over. Rips down the letter and scans it.
Meets eyes with the group.

INT. BANK OF CICERO - LOBBY - DAY

Grace is perched on a bench as Gus sync's his pocket
watch to a nearby grandfather clock.

MR. WINSTON -60s, white, bank manager-type- ushers a
couple from his office.

MR. WINSTON
(motions to Gus)
Mr. Stone? Right this way.

GUS
Mornin', sir.
(motions to Grace)
This is my daughter, Grace.

The trio move the discussion inside Mr. Winston's office.

MR. WINSTON

Nice to meet you, Grace. Nice to meet you both. Have a seat.

Gus and Grace drop into chairs facing Mr. Winston's desk.

MR. WINSTON

Now what can I do for you today?

Gus slides the earlier notice from his breast pocket.

GUS

We received this on our door and, sir, we'd like to know what it's gonna take to get us square.

Mr. Winston scans the notice. Turns to a desktop ledger.

GUS

I know we're a lil' behind. But I'm hopin' for a good season to get us back on track. We just need some time.

MR. WINSTON

Sadly I don't think that's going to be possible. Not all loans are the same and the way yours is written you are clearly delinquent.

GUS

I know Mr. Ross let us slide on a few things. He was a family friend. But I'm sure we can come to terms on some kind of payment.

MR. WINSTON

I'm sorry, I didn't know Mr. Ross. I wish I did. Everyone here speaks so highly of him.

GRACE

How did Mr. Ross die?

MR. WINSTON

I'm told it was a heart attack. Very sad.

(off the ledger)

I can see he tried to help a lot of folks in this town. But unfortunately, that help came at the expense of the bank. You're in default, Mr. Stone, and the bank's new owner has me under a lot of pressure myself. You've got thirty days to come up with the full amount.

Mr. Winston passes a bank statement to Gus.

GUS
Ain't there nothing ya' can do?
That farm's the only home Grace
has ever known.

MR. WINSTON
It's not up to me. You seem like
good people. I truly am sorry.

Grace snatches the statement. Scans it and eyes bulge.

Soon she glares at Gus. Bolts from the room.

MR. WINSTON
If you have any questions, I'm
here daily.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Pitt and Joe hover as Grace and Gus emerge.

PITT
What'd they say?

GRACE
(to Gus)
Ya' knew. Ya' knew we were behind
and said nothin'. Were ya' ever
gonna tell me?

PITT
What happened?

GRACE
We lost the farm.

GUS
We didn't lose the farm.

GRACE
Where'll we go? There's no way we
can come up with that kind of
money. Ten thousand dollars.

Grace launches the statement at Gus.

She rushes away and leaves the men slack-jawed.

INT. GUS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gus slides out the whisky flask. Appears to think.

INT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Pitt's perched on a hay bale as Joe paces.

PITT

Sit down, kid. Ya' ain't stopped movin' since we got back.

JOE

I can't. Feel like I gotta do somethin'. Just don't know what. Finally feel like I belong some place. Now it's gonna be taken away.

Joe blasts the heavy bag- THUD.

PITT

I can see why Gus likes ya'.

Pitt just studies Joe. A beat.

PITT

The fight to survive can lead to greatness, Joe. Problem is, you ain't sure just yet what great is. And you're just as stubborn as Gus. Ya' need a good woman to settle ya' down. Like Maggie did for him. Have a seat.

Joe flops next to Pitt.

PITT

Take a deep breath for me.
(off Joe's look)
Trust me. It helps.

Soon Joe breathes deep. Pushes it out as Pitt rises.

PITT

Again.

Another deeper breath. Longer exhale.

Pitt gazes around at the dust-coated photos on the walls. His eyes land on the earlier photo of him, Gus and Grace.

PITT

I met Gus in Jackson, Mississippi.

GUS (O.S.)

Tupelo.

Now in the doorway, Gus just grips the whisky flask.

PITT

He's right. It was Tupelo.

GUS

The first night we met, Pitt saved my life.

PITT

And he's been savin' mine every day since. That was over thirty years ago. Ya' think it's tough now? Imagine bein' a black man thirty years ago. I was workin' the fights. Tryin' to make money carryin' buckets of water to the ring. One night Gus is in the ring and his manager grabs me, says his boy needs me in his corner. I didn't know what was happenin', but I jumped at the chance because it was a front row invitation to see the Boston Strongboy.

JOE

Who?

GUS

John Sullivan. The bare-knuckle, heavyweight champ at the time.

PITT

Folks called him Strongboy. Said one day he got so upset in the field he knocked out his own mule. Sullivan was a tough sonuvabitch, but a lot of people thought he partied more than he trained and it was gonna catch up to him against this kid with dynamite in both hands.

Gus's eyes seem to light up with fight memories.

JOE

Ya' fought for the title?

Grace appears in the doorway and Gus pockets the flask.

GUS

Wasn't much of a fight.

Grace floats down into a seat next to Pitt.

PITT

The fix was in and everybody knew it... except us. Gus's manager spoiled the water I carried to his corner. By the beginnin' of the fourth round he was dead on his--

GUS

--I remember I could barely see. Actually I could see fine except there was three of everythin'. John got to beatin' on me pretty good. Then I lost my legs. Kept usin' the ropes to pull myself up. I knew I'd never get another shot at the title, so I grabbed him and whispered in his ear, "You're gonna have to kill me, Strongboy."

PITT

Gus got knocked down for the last time right in front of me. His eyes rolled back. He was gone, like Sullivan had knocked his soul out of his body. I threw in the towel. It wasn't my call, but I was all he had and I couldn't watch no more. Carryin' him back to the locker room, I saw there was a White's Only sign hangin'. But Gus wouldn't let go of me. I laid him down on the table and held his hand all night. We been friends ever since.

JOE

How'd Gus save your life?

PITT

I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, at the tail end of slavery. Seen death up close many times. Smelled it when the wind blowed. Ya' don't forget that smell. Seein' a body hangin' from a tree. I wondered if that'd be me some day. Black codes restricted former slaves from leaving the South. But Gus never let go. After the fight he told the Sheriff I traveled with him as his corner man. He brought me north. To Cicero... To freedom.

GUS

I taught him the fight game and helped him build the Shack. He saw what it could be from the start.

PITT

Fighters came from far and wide to fight at the Shack till Red opened his doors. Truth be told, if the Shack had doors, it'd be time to close 'em.

GUS
(considers Grace)
It's okay. Whatever happens,
we'll face it together.

Joe huffs and bolts upright. Paces.

PITT
Famous, sit down.

GRACE
Joe? Ya' okay?

GUS
Speak your mind, Joe.

JOE
I never had this. Never had a
place to go. People to talk to.
I never had a home. Now ya'
tellin' me it's over.

Joe unloads on the heavy bag- THUD.

GUS
There's nothin' we can do.

JOE
We can save this farm.

GUS
How?

JOE
I'm gonna fight for it.

GUS
No. I won't be part of that. No
more Battle Royale.

JOE
I'll never do that again. I'm
talkin' about ya' trainin' me.
Pitt can book the fights at the
Sugar Shack.

GUS
What makes ya' think people'll
come?

JOE
Pitt said I have a name that
echoes from this town to the next.
A lot of folks heard of Joe
Famous, but they ain't seen him
fight. For all they know, he
ain't nothin' but a tall tale.
Use the name and folks'll come.

GUS

I don't know. They ain't enough
time to train, let alone fight.

JOE

I'll do both at the same time.

PITT

It'll be a hell of a schedule, but
it could work.

GUS

Thank ya' both for wantin' to help
us, but I can't let ya' do this.
The number of fights. The number
of rounds. Joe'd have to fight
three or four times a week.

JOE

I can do it.

GUS

(to Pitt)

Ya' watched me almost die in the
ring. Are ya' willin' to help him
kill himself?

GRACE

He can do it. He can do it, Pa.
We just gotta help him.

Grace shuffles over to face Gus.

GRACE

(finger to Gus's
chest)

You gotta help him.

She spies the whisky flask tucked in his shirt pocket.

Now Gus appears to think. Trades glances with all.
Dumps out the whisky.

Soon Grace bounds toward the door.

GUS

Where ya' goin'?

GRACE

Somebody's gotta feed him. I
better scrounge up somethin'.
It's as important a job as any.
Y'all get to trainin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. BANK OF CICERO - DAY

Red stomps from inside. Meets up with Woody and Casey.

CASEY
Everythin' okay, boss?

RED
(through his teeth)
You'd think when you're the owner
of the bank people'll do as
they're told. How's your bank
managing skills, Casey?

CASEY
I couldn't manage a bank, boss.

RED
That's rhetorical, Casey.

CASEY
What's rhetorical, boss?

Red wags his head in frustration.

WOODY
Maybe Mr. Winston just don't
understand?

RED
That's not it. He's afraid. He
wants to follow a list of bank
rules I care nothing about. I
need whoever's at that bank to
understand my vision for this town
and be willing to do whatever it
takes to make it happen.

Now at the General Store, Woody's mind seems to quake.

WOODY
Oh, I forgot to tell ya'. While
y'all was in Chicago, Casey and me
ran into Gus Stone again. Here at
the general store. And the nigger
was with him.

RED
Why does that matter to me now?

WOODY
(impediment harsher)
Gus purchased an axe.

RED
(eyes slim)
You sure?

WOODY

Yep. Seen it with my own eyes.

RED

So... Gus found him a new champion?

CASEY

Champion?

RED

Boxer, Casey. Gus found him a new boxer. Joe.

Casey still appears confused.

RED

No matter. Gus may be the best trainer I've ever seen, but you still have to start with something. That boy is a talented Colored, but a Colored none-the-less. My focus now is on finding another challenger for Crusher. I'm afraid we might've scared off would-be contenders when he almost killed his last opponent.

WOODY

At least now he's ranked. Number eight heavyweight in the world.

RED

Ranking's don't mean nothing if nobody's willing to fight him, ya' dumbass. We need an opponent with a name people want to see.
(appears to think)
I need to send a telegram.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAWN

Joe races along a dirt road. He scampers through a wooded area till he comes upon Gus.

Axe in-hand, Gus unhooks a two-wheeled cart from Ghost.

GUS

How was the run?

Joe pukes while Gus seems to anticipate this reaction and is ready with a towel.

GUS

Probably not a good idea to eat all the food Grace piles on your plate before trainin'.

JOE
(glimpses around)
Why're we here?

GUS
This is where we start trainin'.

JOE
(off the puke)
I think that's where we started.

GUS
I been meanin' to clear these
trees out for some time.

Joe eyes the axe in Gus's hand.

JOE
But I'm a fighter. Ya' said so
yourself. Why we wastin' time
cuttin' trees?

GUS
I don't see trees. I see
opponents. This is where ya' find
your balance. Find your power.
Usually I'd have ya' haul these to
the mill and we'd work on buildin'
my fence for six months before
your first fight. But they ain't
no time for that.

JOE
But I got balance and power.

GUS
Really? Hit me.

JOE
I won't do that.

GUS
Afraid you'll hurt an old man?

JOE
No.

GUS
Then hit me. Hit me.

Joe swings toward Gus's shoulder.

Gus steps into the punch and causes Joe to step back.

GUS
If ya' got balance, why ya'
fallin' backwards?

Joe appears confused.

GUS

Joe, for this to work, I'm gonna need ya' to let go of what ya' taught yourself and let me show ya' a thing or two. It's fine for you to show me things, too. Every fighter's different. But we gotta learn together. Understand?

JOE

Yessuh.

GUS

This here's where ya' start every mornin'. I want ya' to clear all the trees in this area. Use the cart to take the logs to my farm.

Gus extends the axe as Joe appears hesitant. Clutches the handle.

GUS

I had the blacksmith sharpen it. He says now it'll cut through anythin'. Find your balance, Joe, and you'll find real power.

Gus mounts Ghost while Joe glances around.

JOE

How many fighters ya' brung here?

GUS

Besides you? One.

JOE

What'd he think?

GUS

Oh... he looked at me like you are now. His manager questioned my methods, too. Ended up firin' me. Maggie died right after.

JOE

I'm sorry. Was he any good?

GUS

He's good, but he's got an even better ring name.

JOE

What's that?

GUS

Bonecrusher.

Gus slaps Ghost's rear and the horse trots off.

Joe's eyes scrutinize Gus into the trees.

Then Joe's gaze drops to the axe handle in his hands.

After a beat...

He swings the axe, but his feet are too close together and he's knocked off balance.

He swings again with the same result.

Again and again he swings and stumbles.

Soon...

He blurts out a frustrated scream.

He strides to the tree and swings with all his might.

Out of breath, he releases the axe handle with the blade now buried in the tree.

He glimpses his hands as leaves fall.

Eyes follow a leaf to the ground where he notes his feet.

They're staggered.

With a look like he now understands, he goes to work.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Joe swings the axe from both sides of his body.
- Pitt meets with black farmers.
- Grace ties a boxing glove to one end of a bamboo stick.
- Gus shovels fresh sand into the heavy bag.
- Joe swings the axe at different angles.
- Joe gazes downward to his feet position.
- Pitt holds court with black parishioners at a church.
- Gus flashes Grace a look like- *Good job.*
- Joe saws a log into a fence post-length piece.
- Pitt hands out flyers as flyers whip away in the wind.
- Now in a clearing of stumps, Joe sinks the axe into a stump. He fights to pull the cart load of posts uphill.

INT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Pitt steadies the heavy bag as Joe stands ready.

GUS
Show me what ya' learned.

Joe assumes a position while Gus studies his stance.

GUS
Good. Stay there. Get used to
the feelin'. I gotta break ya'.

JOE
Break me, suh?

GUS
I got three rules for ya', Joe.
First rule, no more suh. From
this day forward ya' call me Gus.
Not suh. Not Mr. Stone. Second
rule, ya' look me in the eye when
doin' so. You're a man, and ya'
demand to be treated like a man,
nothin' less. I'm your manager
and trainer. You're my champion.
Third rule, when I say win, ya'
win. Ya' don't go down. Ya'
don't stop. Ya' punch till ya'
pass out. Hell, you don't die
unless I give ya' permission.
Understand?

JOE
Yessuh. I mean, Gus.

GUS
I promise ya' this, I'll never bet
against ya'. I will not put ya'
in some back room brawl or damn
nigger spectacle. The word
nigger, it bother you?

JOE
(eyes the ground)
Yes, Gus.

GUS
Look at me. I understand. It
bothers me, too, but we can't let
it bother us no more, because
we're gonna hear worse. Every
time ya' hear that word in the
ring or in the street I want ya'
to get stronger and stronger
because I'm not buildin' a black
champion. I'm buildin' a
champion. Period.

The only way to become world class
is to act world class and fight
world class.

(beat)

You're a good fighter, they ain't
no question about your talent.
But you're raw and untrained.

Joe throws a lazy jab and Gus grabs his wrist.

GUS

So I gotta break ya'. Break ya'
of bad habits.

Joe throws a right hook.

Gus repositions Joe's body as Pitt looks on.

GUS

Break ya' of bad form.

Joe throws a jab. Right cross and Gus catches the right.

GUS

I gotta break your mind. Ya'
gotta believe ya' can do what
others can't. Ya' gotta see the
world different, because ya' are
different. If ya' can believe
that, ya' might stand a chance in
your biggest fight.

JOE

What fight's that?

GUS

Life. Life's everyone's biggest
fight, Joe. And life hits hard.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Gus and Pitt relax under shade as Joe vomits.
- Pitt steadies the heavy bag as Joe works it.
- Gus studies every move as Grace gazes from the corner.

GUS

Ya' see, fightin' ain't much about
knowin' how to fight at all...

- The bank manager, Mr. Winston, gathers his briefcase.
- Woody winds a rope as Casey centers a chair under a lone light bulb.
- Red loads his pipe with tobacco.

- Joe runs while breakfast contents stain his shirt.
- More tree stumps dot the clearing as Joe sinks the axe. Loads the cart. Pulls it over the hill.
- In the barn, Joe jumps rope.

GUS
It's about will...

Joe tosses the rope and drops to the ground.

As Joe does sit-ups, Pitt drives the earlier bamboo rod with the boxing glove attached into Joe's stomach.

GUS
How far ya' willin' to go?

Joe pops upright. Jumps rope.

- Mr. Winston steps through a doorway and halts as Casey and Woody hover above the chair and rope.

Mr. Winston backs toward the door as Perry swings it closed.

Pipe to his mouth, Red nods to Woody.

- Now in the *Sugar Shack*, Joe, Gus and Pitt place a final post in the dance floor's fourth corner.
- Grace wraps a post with rope to form a ring.
- Joe pours sweat as he sets a post along Gus's fence.
- In the barn, Pitt takes notes while Joe shadowboxes as Gus circles Joe.

GUS
Ya' gotta be willin' to die, but
strong enough not to. Faster.

Joe fires off punches.

- Joe uses the axe to chop down a tree and chips fly.

GUS (V.O.)
Ya' gotta fight through the
darkness. Go.

- Woody beats the shit out of a bound Mr. Winston.
- Joe bolts into the distance as Gus looks on.

GUS
(shouts)
Faster.

- Pitt steadies while Joe pounds the heavy bag as Gus shouts in Joe's ear.

Grace just watches from a hay bale.

GUS
The body, kid. The body. Now,
knock his head off.

Appearing exhausted, Joe works his way up the bag.

GUS
Ya' gotta punch when ya' ain't got
nothin' left.

Gus pushes Joe to the breaking point.

GUS
Ya' can't stop. Ya' don't know
what it means to stop.

Grace flashes Pitt a concerned look as...

GUS
(shouts)
Win. Win.

Grace covers her open mouth with her hand. A beat.

GUS
Time.

Joe drops to the ground. Nothing left.

Gus looks to Pitt, who nods in approval.

Towel and water in-hand, Grace rushes to Joe's side.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GUS'S BARN - LOFT - NIGHT

Grace lounges on a hay mound as Joe's feet hang out the load doors.

JOE
How many times ya' sat here?

GRACE
Can't count. It's my favorite
place on the farm. Sittin' here,
lookin' at the sky. Hopin' for
magic.

JOE
Magic?

GRACE
Don't ya' believe in magic?
(off his shrug)
Ya' never know what ya' might see
in the night sky.

Both are silent. A beat.

JOE
Breeze feels good after a hot day.

GRACE
Tired?

JOE
Yeah.

GRACE
How stupid of me, I should let ya'
rest.

Seeming unsure, he latches onto her arm.

JOE
Stay... Please?

GRACE
Ya' sure?

JOE
Yes, ma'am.

Now there's a beat of awkward silence.

GRACE
Ya' know this barn's sacred to
him. Like a temple. He only lets
the best train in here and you're
the best I ever seen.

JOE
But didn't he train Crusher in
this barn, too?

She locks eyes with him.

GRACE
Like I said, you're the best. Ya'
got somehin'.

JOE
What's that?

GRACE
If I knew what it was I'd bottle
it up and sell it. Save the farm
and save ya' from gettin' beat
upside the head.

JOE

Ya' told your Pa I could do it.
Don't ya' believe it?

Caught in his gaze, her eyes scream- *Hell yes!*

Soon she notes a rolled sheet of paper in his hand.

GRACE

Whatcha got in your hand?

He unrolls a copy of *The Colored American*.

JOE

Pitt was tellin' me about this
boxer called The Black Terror. I
don't read good, but I understand
some of it. I like his picture.

GRACE

Let me see that.

(reads aloud)

Bill Richmond, born a slave on
Staten Island in 1763, battled his
way into London's high society
circles as a champion boxer.

JOE

Wow.

GRACE

(off the article)

It says in 1821 he participated in
the coronation of a British king.

(off the photo insert)

Look at those pants.

JOE

He dresses better than me and he's
got a better ring name.

GRACE

I like Famous.

JOE

I do too, but The Black Terror.
Who wants to fight that guy?

GRACE

Ya' got a point.

JOE

Ya' think they'll write about me?

GRACE

One day they will.

They lock eyes again.

GRACE
We can work on this. Improvin'
your readin', I mean.

JOE
I'd like that. Later. For now,
let's just enjoy sittin' here.

Soon a shooting star rockets across the night sky.

JOE
Ya' see that?

Now dozens of shooting stars trail the first.

GRACE
Magic.

INT. GUS'S BARN - DAY

Pitt steadies the heavy bag as Joe punches it.

PITT
Time. That's it for today kid.

JOE
It's still early.

PITT
Gus wants ya' to get some rest.
Have a seat. I'll take those
gloves off.

Joe rests on a hay bale as Pitt removes the gloves.

PITT
Lookin' good, Famous.
(off Joe's look)
What?

JOE
I'll never get used to that name.

PITT
Fits ya' just fine.

JOE
Why do ya' say that?

PITT
Because it's somethin' you'd never
call yourself. Gus told me once,
ya' ever heard the sayin', "All
the world's a stage"?

JOE
No. What's it mean?

PITT

It means, when you're in that ring, on that stage, you control the crowd. Famous is just the mask ya' wear. It gives ya' an identity when you're fightin'. Let the world fall in love with Joe Famous. You decide who falls in love with Joe Jamison.

Grace whirls in. Meets eyes with Joe as Pitt looks on.

GRACE

Supper's ready.

Pitt notes Grace bound off.

He eyes Joe while Joe appears to avoid eye contact.

PITT

Joe, I don't know a lot of things, but I do know a little. I'd like to pass one thing on to ya' if ya' wanna hear it.

Joe seems willing to listen.

PITT

Take it from me, it's best to keep some things a secret.

JOE

What do ya' mean?

PITT

In general. Whatever ya' value. Whomever ya' value, is best kept secret. Keep 'em close to your heart and only to yourself.

JOE

Why tell me this?

PITT

Because life happens. Believe me, the world is tough and if ya' show all your cards it's gotcha. Like an uppercut that puts ya' on your back. Save somethin' that's just for you. Understand?

Pitt eyes in Grace's direction.

PITT

Somethin' that makes ya' get back up when you're knocked down.

INT. GUS'S FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Gus, Grace, Pitt and Joe hold hands around the table.

GUS

Heavenly Father, we wanna thank ya' for this food, this farm and this family. We ask that ya' watch over Joe and keep him safe in the days to come. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

(as everyone eats)

Joe, after dinner I want ya' to stay off your feet for the rest of the day. Get to bed early. We got a long day tomorrow.

GRACE

I thought Joe's first fight wasn't till Monday?

GUS

We got Joe a fight in Chicago. A chance to get people talkin'.

GRACE

Chicago? Is that where ya' went earlier?

GUS

He's fightin' at Tony's. I was hopin' to find out somethin' about the fighters. Get an idea of who Joe might be facin'.

PITT

Chicago's a big place and Tony's made a name for himself in the Negro fight scene. Ya' ever heard of Jeremiah Jennette? Jack Johnson?

Grace wags her head.

PITT

Ya' will. Pretty good young fighters. Dangerous fighters.

GRACE

I thought the plan was to host all the fights at the Sugar Shack.

GUS

That's still the plan. But I agree with Pitt. If Joe can turn heads tomorrow night at Tony's, we won't have a problem sellin' fights at the Shack.

GRACE

I don't like it.

(to Gus)

Ya' told me fighters get killed at Tony's.

GUS

(stammers)

Welp, uh, that was a different style of boxing back then.

(as Grace glares)

I didn't find out anything about the fighters, but I was told they only hold these fights once a month. They're always on a Friday and Tony's crowd is both blacks and whites. It should be fine.

PITT

If you're fightin' at Tony's on a Friday night, ya' can hold your own with anybody.

GRACE

(to Gus)

I hope ya' know what you're doin'.

Soon a TRAIN WHISTLE beckons US over to...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

With Chicago in the distance, a train rumbles away.

Soon the caboose passes to reveal Gus and Pitt on the wagon.

Off to one side, Joe stretches his legs.

EXT. METAL-SIDED WAREHOUSE - DAY

Gus and Pitt are met by BOBBY -13, white, streetwise.

BOBBY

Stone?

GUS

Yep.

BOBBY

Name's Bobby. Tony told me to stick around and wait for you in case you needed any help.

GUS

Thank ya'. Where's Tony?

BOBBY

He took a few fighters to their housing for the night. We have fighters from as far as Texas fighting tonight. Big Fish is the in-house champion. He's fighting tonight as well.

GUS

How's Tony been?

BOBBY

Better now that you took this fight at the last minute.

GUS

Ain't seen Tony in years. Pitt actually suggested we book the fight.

BOBBY

(to Pitt)
I heard of you.

PITT

Whatcha heard?

BOBBY

You call your place the Sugar Shack. Never met a nigger who ran his own fights.

GUS

(angered)
Now Bobby, that language ain't--

Pitt shushes Gus and just shuffles away as Gus calms himself down. A beat.

GUS

What happened to the boy who was scheduled to fight?

BOBBY

He broke his hand a few days ago. Where's your fighter anyway?

Gus peers into the distance to Joe.

GUS

He wanted to stretch his legs. Been ridin' a while.

Joe lumbers up to the group.

JOE
Everything okay?

GUS
Fine. This here's Bobby. He
works for Tony. Bobby, this is
Joe Famous.

Joe extends his hand while Bobby just ignores him.

After an uncomfortable beat...

GUS
Bobby, why don't ya' show us where
Joe's gonna be fightin' tonight.

Bobby slides the large warehouse door open to reveal a
cavernous room filled with chairs and a ring.

Cotton bits litter the floor.

GUS
(off the cotton)
Looks like snow.

BOBBY
Takes a full day to set up and
tear down. We clear space to
build the ring and set chairs for
the fights. By this time
tomorrow, this room'll be full of
cotton again. We were never here.

The group saunters along an aisle toward the ring.

Joe jumps into the ring's center. Turns in circles.

PITT
Don't get used to fightin' in a
place like this, Famous.

GUS
No. Get used to it, Joe. In
fact, imagine it ten times bigger.

Just then TONY -late 60s, white, olive skin and shiny
black hair- struts to the ring.

TONY
Pitt and Gus. Been a long time.

GUS
Tony, how ya' doin'? Hell of a
place ya' got here.

TONY
(off Joe)
That your boy?

PITT

Tony. Joe. Joe Famous.

TONY

So he's the one, huh?

PITT

That's him.

GUS

Who we fightin'?

Tony motions for the men to follow him up the aisle.

TONY

The reason I wasn't clear about who your boy will be fighting is because... well I'm not sure myself. You see it comes down to the luck of the draw. Friday nights have turned into our most popular night because it's an eight man elimination night. We call it The Last Man Standing.

PITT

So if Joe continues to win, he could face three men tonight. How many rounds are the fights?

TONY

Ten.

GUS

Ya' expect this kid to possibly fight thirty rounds. No. No. I won't bust this kid up like that.

TONY

It could be three times the money.

GUS

It's not always about the money.

PITT

We should... head back, I think.

GUS

Joe, let's go.

Joe continues to shadowbox.

JOE

I came here to fight.

TONY

(sounds excited)
It's gonna be great. You'll see.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

BOOS ECHO as Gus and Pitt tend to Joe who's lathered in sweat and has a knot above one eye.

BIG FISH -early 30s, black, a brute- relaxes in the room's opposite corner.

Just then, Grace and Mary ease into the doorway.

GUS

Grace? Mary? What're you ladies
doin' here?

Gus and Mary trade glimpses.

GRACE

We came to see a fight. What's
goin' on? This place is a mad
house. How's Joe?

Grace's eyes locate Joe while he nods to her.

Gus and Pitt huddle in the doorway with Mary and Grace.
All talk under their breath.

PITT

The crowd ain't pleased with
tonight's fights.

GRACE

Why?

PITT

(snickers)
Two fights. Two first round
knockouts.

GRACE

Joe already fought twice?

Tony bursts through the doorway. Spies Big Fish.

TONY

(under his breath)
Gus, I need your help.

Tony notes Grace and tips his head.

TONY

Grace.
(to Gus)
I need your help.

GUS

Grace came all this way to see the
fights.

TONY

Gus. Listen to me.

GUS

Ya' wanna talk about the next fight? I already know who we're fightin'. I know more right now than I did walkin' into here. So what else is there to talk about?

TONY

(extends a hand to Mary)
I'm Tony. Ladies, let me help you to your seats.

Tony escorts Grace and Mary as Gus waits at the entrance.

Whites crowd the fight ring while blacks fill the rear.

The angry mob screams obscenities at Tony as he hurries the ladies to front row, corner seats.

Tony dodges hurled objects as he snakes his way to Gus.

TONY

You see? I know I haven't been completely honest with you, but if your boy out classes Fish in this next fight, this place is gonna implode. I'd be in your debt if he could carry him a few rounds.

GUS

A few rounds?

TONY

I'm thinking at least five.

GUS

You're sayin' Joe can't knock Fish out till the fifth?

TONY

I don't think it'll come to that. I'm saying look at the crowd. There's a lot of angry people out there, both white and black, and I don't want this to go south.

GUS

That's a lot to ask.

TONY

But I'm asking. You heard them, people think I fixed fights. It could get ugly for all of us.

Gus's eyes trail Tony's gaze to Grace and Mary.

TRACK Gus to the locker room where Pitt guards the door.

GUS
Everythin' okay?

PITT
Yep. What was that about?

GUS
Tony's afraid what the crowd'll do
with another early knockout.

PITT
What's that mean for us?

GUS
He wants Joe to carry Fish.

PITT
Fish is plenty good. He'll test
Joe. Reckon we got the buzz we
wanted. Whatcha wanna do?

Pitt and Gus nod as Big Fish struts from the room. Now
Pitt trails Gus into the locker room where Joe just rests
on a table.

GUS
Joe, I want ya' to listen up. I
promised the promoter the fight'll
go at least five rounds.

JOE
But--

GUS
--No buts. What's the third rule?

JOE
When you say win, I win. No
questions.

GUS
And I say you'll win after the
fifth round.

JOE
Yessuh.

Sweat-lathered Tony rushes into the room.

TONY
It's time. The bell will ring as
soon as your boy steps through the
ropes. Once the fight starts
maybe the crowd'll calm down.

Joe shuts his eyes as the offscreen CROWD ROARS.

INT. RINGSIDE - NIGHT

Grace and Mary are perched next to Joe's empty corner as Big Fish stands center ring. Hands raised.

From center ring...

TONY

Coming to the ring... Fighting out
of the great State of Illinois...
Following two surprising first
round upsets this evening...
Ladies and gentleman, here he is
for the final fight of the night,
Joe Famous.

The arena quakes as patrons boo.

At the first sight of Joe, the crowd becomes hostile.

RINGSIDE

Joe's eyes meet Grace's nervous gaze.

Then the moment is disrupted by a ROUND-FACED WHITE WOMAN seated next to Grace.

ROUND-FACED WOMAN

Get in the ring, nigger.

The outburst startles Grace and rockets Joe up the steps.

ROUND-FACED WOMAN

(to Grace; now sweet
as pie)

Sorry, darlin'. Didn't mean to
yell in your ear.

Joe steps through the ropes- DING.

GRACE'S POV

- Joe and Big Fish battle center ring.
- Faces in the crowd are like rabid dogs.
- A man shouts the word "gorilla."

ROUND-FACED WOMAN

(screams)
Get that nigger.

- At the house's rear, black patrons appear fearful.

- Big Fish lands a hard right to Joe's ear- DING.

Joe shakes off the blow. Strides toward his corner where he locks eyes with Grace as he drops onto his stool.

Pitt rubs Joe's back as Gus hovers near Joe's ear.

JOE'S POV

A teary-eyed Grace is encircled by hate and vitriol.

GUS (O.S.)

He wants ya' on the ropes to kill
your body. Stay off the ropes.
Don't let him close to ya'. Keep
him away with your jab, but don't
open up. Stay tight. Hands up.
Remember we gotta make it last
Joe. Joe, ya' listenin'?

BACK TO SCENE

REFEREE

Ten seconds.

Joe rises as Pitt and Gus step from the ring.

GUS

Work the jab. Ya' hear me?

DING -with one last look at Grace, Joe eases forward.
Hands at his sides.

Big Fish appears confused. Lowers his guard.

Just then, the WORLD SLOWS WAY DOWN as Joe lunges. He
launches a right cross and smashes Big Fish in the mouth.

Now missing his front teeth, Big Fish hits the canvas as
the WORLD SPEEDS BACK UP.

Big Fish appears comatose as blood leaks from his mouth.

Referee counts Big Fish out as Joe digs Big Fish's teeth
from his own glove and the teeth drop to the canvas.

Bobby appears in awe as the crowd goes berserk.

PITT

Let's get the hell outta here.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Grace appears shaken.

Joe drapes an arm around her shoulder as Tony barges in.

TONY

What the hell happened out there?
I thought we had a deal?

Tony eyeballs Joe's arm around Grace.

TONY

I see what's going on here.
Pretty damn clear to me.

(to Gus)

The only question is why haven't
you put a stop to this disgrace?

GUS

Choose your next words with
caution. Pretty sure I got one
good fight left in me.

Bobby bursts through the doorway.

BOBBY

It's time to go.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Our gang hustles while Joe disguises himself with Pitt's
hat and coat as Bobby leads them away.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Our gang pops from the building's shadowed rear door to
find their horse and wagon.

GUS

Come with us, kid. We'll get ya'
home.

BOBBY

I'll be fine. Let's go.

They all make a run for the wagon where Grace and Gus
jump up front as Pitt hops in the back.

PITT

What about the money?

GUS

We got what we wanted.

As Joe boards the wagon, Bobby latches onto him.

BOBBY

Famous... I... I never seen
anything like that before. Just
wanna say good luck to ya'.

Bobby extends his hand toward Joe.

Joe shakes Bobby's hand. Jumps in the wagon. Tips his
cap toward Bobby as the wagon disappears into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. RED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Red inspects a long-legged RING GIRL as Woody stomps in.

WOODY

Boss, it's--

RED

--Finally. Let the show begin.

TRACK Red as he struts down the corridor, trailed by Woody and Ring Girl.

They burst into the fight area to find it's almost empty.

RED

(sounds angered)

What is this? Where are all the customers?

WOODY

Word is everybody's at the Shack.

Woody extends an earlier flyer to Red.

RED

(scans the flyer)

Is that so? Why don't you pay your old girlfriend a visit.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

It's standing room only as Joe knocks out a fighter.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Joe backs up a hard charging opponent with a jab.
- At the general store, Grace picks out a chocolate bar.
- Now in the barn, Joe jumps rope as Gus and Pitt watch. Shadowboxing leads back into the ring for the next fight.
- Joe moves in-and-out of the way of punches. Knockout.
- The crowd rockets to their feet. Half celebrate. Others trash tickets.
- A joyous-looking Pitt and Grace collect winnings.
- Gus stuffs his mattress with cash.
- It's dawn as Joe trots along a dirt road.
- Back in the ring, Joe throws hooks at a new opponent.

- Deep in the crowd, a hidden Woody glares toward Grace.
- Joe's axe swing matches his left hook. He sinks the axe into a tree stump. Strides off.
- Joe's cleared a field of stumps. Near the middle, the axe rests deep in a stump.
- Grace strides along the street. Exchanges smiles.

Her eyes seem to snag on a dress in a window. She admires the dress and a suit. Steps into the store.

EXT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Suit and dress in-hand, Grace comes face-to-face with...

WOODY

Howdy, Grace. Been a long time.

GRACE

I done said all I need, Woody.

She bolts along the sidewalk as Woody trails to catch up.

WOODY

I miss what we had, Grace.

GRACE

We didn't have nothin'.

WOODY

That ain't true. When Gus was trainin' Crusher, I was at your farm most every day. I don't believe ya' didn't feel nothin'.

GRACE

I did. I felt like my father and I were sheep that opened our door to wolves. I used to hate Red for takin' Crusher away. First my father lost his champion in the ring. Then he lost his champion in life. It all nearly killed him. But now I see, Red saved us because no matter how much Crusher would have grown under my father, he would have stayed the same. Just like Red--

(points to Woody's
heart area)

--Just like you.

Grace stomps away. Drops a copy of *The Colored American*.

Woody scoops the paper. Scans it.

WOODY

(enraged; shouts)
This is what ya' become? Nothin'
more than a nigger lover. Tell
your boy to stay away from Red's
and stay away from me or he's
gonna end up swingin' from a tree.
Run home. Play with your monkey.

Woody balls up the paper. Tosses it and steams away.

Soon Grace traces back. Nabs the crumpled paper.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

The fight's brutal as Joe gets hit with illegal elbows.

After several head butts from his opponent, Joe floors
him- DING.

Gus and Pitt shoulder a bloodied Joe.

Joe peeks toward Grace as she cheers.

INT. GUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Dressed in the suit, Joe ascends the ladder to the loft.

Lit by a lantern, Grace wears her new dress as she rests
on a hay bale.

Next to her is a bowl of fruit and the chocolate bar.

She examines his suit as he reclines next to her.

She hands him the wrinkled copy of *The Colored American*.

He appears to read as they enjoy the fruit and chocolate.

INT. RED'S SALOON - DAY

A front page headline reads *THE CHAMP'S A REAL SPORT*
alongside a photo of heavyweight champ James J. Jeffries.

NEWSPAPER GUY

Jeffries is gonna be champ awhile.

COFFEE GUY

I don't know. Jim's as tough as
they come, but it's hard to stay
on top. Look at Sullivan.

NEWSPAPER GUY

But Jeffries is in his prime. I
shook his hand once.

He's like a grizzly. Almost broke my arm. Name me one fighter ya' think could whip him today?

COFFEE GUY

Big Texas White. Even Bonecrusher could give him a run for his money. Hell, I saw a Colored boy last night. Now he was somethin'.

In the background, a third man hides behind an open newspaper.

NEWSPAPER GUY

Are ya' sayin' ya' think a nigger can beat the heavyweight champ?

COFFEE GUY

I'm sayin' readin' about a good fighter is different than seein' one up close. And this Joe Famous looked plenty capable to me.

NEWSPAPER GUY

You been sippin' too much. These underground fights are fun, but Coloreds are too dumb to compete with a fighter like Jeffries or Crusher. No coon'll ever be Heavyweight Champ of the World.

COFFEE GUY

Famous is fightin' again tonight, down by the river. It's the best game in town. Ya' wanna join me?

NEWSPAPER GUY

I got a lil' money burnin' a hole in my pocket.

The man in the background lowers his newspaper. Red.

INT. GUS'S KITCHEN - DAY

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Grace opens the door to find a distraught-looking Joe gripping his boxing gloves.

GRACE

What's wrong?

JOE

My gloves.

His gloves are tattered and coming apart.

JOE

Can ya' help me? I tried to
stitch 'em back together, but this
stuff keeps fallin' out.

She examines the gloves.

GRACE

Not sure I can fix 'em. Daddy's
got some you're welcome to use.

JOE

(angered)
I need my gloves. Understand?

He whips toward the door. Catches his elbow against the
toy Ferris Wheel and knocks it to the wood floor.

The moment seems to freeze as she appears shocked.

After a beat...

She drops to one knee and gathers pieces.

Crestfallen, he drops to one knee next to her.

JOE

Grace... I'm so sorry.

GRACE

(off the gloves)
Don't worry. They'll be ready.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

It's standing room only, filled with blacks and whites.

Backed by the band, Pitt plays harmonica as Grace twirls.

Soon Pitt glides his way through the mass.

Joe and JEREMIAH JENNETTE -20, black- hover in opposite
corners as Pitt hops the ropes, harmonica wailing.

The music crashes to a halt and the crowd roars.

PITT

Thank ya' for joinin' us this
evenin' at the Sugar Shack. Not
in my wildest dreams did I think
I'd see a crowd like this again.

(beat)

Fightin' out of New Jersey, he's
one of the best young fighters the
Sugar Shack has ever seen. Please
welcome Jeremiah Jennette.

Cheers crescendo again as Pitt looks to Joe.

PITT

And now, a man that needs no introduction in these parts. He's wowed ya' with his skills night after night and he's here to do it again. This is gonna be a good one y'all. Please give it up for your very own, Joe Famous.

Fans cheer as a smile cracks Joe's face.

Joe and Jeremiah meet center ring where Pitt appears to instruct the men.

JEREMIAH

(to Joe; jokes)

Be easy on me. I gotta fight with Jack tomorrow night.

They swap grins. Bump gloves. Return to their corners.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

Four, white-hooded horsemen ride up. Burning torches in-hand, they surround the structure.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

The crowd seems eager for action as...

DING -the fighters move toward center ring.

DRUNK WOMAN

(screams)

Fire.

Nobody reacts as our fighters exchange blows.

DRUNK WOMAN

Everybody get out. The Shack's on fire.

People scream as flames now lick the walls and ceiling.

Grace seems confused as a wave of fans trample her.

From the ring, Joe scans the chaos.

TRACK Joe as he makes his way across chairs to a window.

He shatters the glass with an overhand right. Ushers fans outside to safety.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

It's chaos as fans pour out to find a burning cross.
Pitt and Gus choke smoke as Jeremiah and Joe rush up.

GUS
Where's Grace?

The men's eyes light up as Joe rips off his gloves.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

Joe dances through flames and burning debris.

He locates an unconscious Grace, but can't get to her through the flames.

After a beat of struggle...

Boxing gloves still on, Jeremiah's now next to Joe.

Jeremiah and a barehanded Joe lift a flaming beam.

Jeremiah holds up the beam as Joe scurries to Grace.

Joe carries her out.

Jeremiah drops the beam. Rushes outside.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - NIGHT

Joe lowers Grace at the feet of Pitt and Gus.

Grace is limp as Gus wipes soot from her face.

Soon Grace chokes back to life.

Joe rises. Eyes locked on the horsemen.

Pitt takes in his life's work as it burns.

INT. GUS'S KITCHEN - DAWN

GRACE
What are we gonna do now?

GUS
Nothin'. The Shack's gone.

GRACE
(to Pitt)
I'm so sorry.

GUS

We only needed a couple more fights to pay off the loan. We came so close. There's just no way now. We only got three days.

Pitt raises his head. Eyes like fire.

PITT

There is a way.

GUS

Not without a place to fight.

PITT

I know where we'll fight. What do ya' say Joe? Ya' got any fight left in ya'?

Joe considers his own, burned hands.

GRACE

What about those men?

PITT

Those men'll never know where Joe's fightin' again.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. RED'S OFFICE - DAY

Red scans a town map as a disheveled Woody barges in.

RED

I want to be at the bank when it opens. I'm tired of these people getting in my way.

WOODY

Yessuh.

RED

And clean yourself up.

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

A human-filled circle's been cut in the corn stalks.

Joe and a new opponent fight in the circle.

Joe's uppercut knocks his opponent into the corn stalks.

Money's exchanged. Everyone disappears into the corn.

INT. TRAIN BOXCAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

Pitt referees as Joe and another fighter trade punches.

Torch-holding fans fill both doorways. They jostle back-and-forth to get a better view.

Joe loses his footing and almost falls from the boxcar.

Joe's opponent moves to take advantage of the slip as Pitt grabs Joe's arm and pulls him back inside.

After a few tough shots...

Joe finishes the fight.

Gus bear hugs a gassed-looking Joe.

GUS
I got ya'. I got ya'. Thank ya',
Joe. Let's go home.

INT. BANK OF CICERO - MR. WINSTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Still healing from the earlier beating, Mr. Winston's bandaged hand fumbles through his ledger- KNOCK KNOCK.

FRUMPY SECRETARY pokes her head in.

FRUMPY SECRETARY
Sir, we have a problem. Mr. Stone
and his daughter are in the lobby.
They have the full payment for
their farm.

MR. WINSTON
I see.

FRUMPY SECRETARY
What would you like me to tell
them?

MR. WINSTON
Give me a moment. I'll see them.

Frumpy Secretary closes the door.

Mr. Winston gathers himself. Opens his door and fake smiles to Gus and Grace.

MR. WINSTON
Hello, Mr. Stone. Ms. Stone.
Come in. Have a seat.

Gus spies Mr. Winston's face wounds and bandaged hand.

Gus dumps cash from a pillowcase onto the desk.

MR. WINSTON

Wow. How'd you ever come up with this kind of money so quickly?

GRACE

We had a lot of help.

GUS

But we got a problem. Your teller out front won't accept this money. Said my deed's already changed hands. Now how is that possible when I'm here on time with my payment in full?

MR. WINSTON

Mr. Stone, I'm sorry to inform you, but your deed, um, changed hands as you say, at twelve-O-one A-M this morning.

GUS

To who?

MR. WINSTON

All I can tell you is one of the banks benefactors took over.

GUS

But ya' told us we had till today. I don't understand.

MR. WINSTON

Please, leave me--

Gus rockets across the desk. Rips Mr. Winston from his chair and cocks a fist.

GUS

Who stole my farm gawd dammit?

GRACE

Daddy please.

MR. WINSTON

Yes. Please, Mr. Stone.

Gus studies Mr. Winston. He notes his wounds and his cowering posture. Releases his grip.

GUS

I know who stole my farm. The same man who stole your honesty.

Almost in tears, Mr. Winston flops to his chair.

Eyes like fire, Gus storms out with Grace in tow.

INT. RED'S SALOON - DAY

Woody, Casey and Perry sip coffee as Gus bursts in.

WOODY
Ya' lost, Stone?

The group cackles as a right cross from Gus floors Woody.

GUS
Where is he?

CASEY
Calm down, Stone.

GUS
Where?

PERRY
Red wants Crusher to make an
appearance at tonight's fights.
He went to Chicago to pick him up.

GUS
I'll be back.

Gus storms out as Perry checks on Woody.

CASEY
(off Woody)
Ya' think Gus broke his jaw again?

INT. RED'S SALOON - FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

Surrounded by a withered, disappointed-looking crowd, two
white fighters grab at each other- DING.

Red hustles to center ring.

RED
What an exciting fight folks.
These two fought their hearts out--

PUDGY FAN
(yells)
--Bullshit.

The crowd boos as Red's jaw tightens.

RED
But as you know, there's only one
way to win in this ring and that's
by knockout. So this bout is a
draw.

Torn bet slips litter the floor.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Gus, Pitt and Joe blast past the sign as Casey does little to stop them.

INT. RED'S SALOON - FIGHT AREA - SAME TIME

RED

Ladies and gentlemen, I know you're upset, but please remain calm. I have something special for you this evening. Back, after nearly a year away. Back, to remind us that not only will he be the heavyweight champion of the world and as champion, he will always be a Son of Cicero. Please give a warm welcome to Charles Bonecrusher Townes.

Boos become cheers as Crusher struts to the ring. Hops the ropes. Waves to the crowd, arm latched around Red.

RED

Now that's more like it. For those interested, Crusher will be signing autographs at the bar after tonight's fights.

Crusher gives one last wave and bounds away.

RED

Coming to the ring, one of my favorite events of the evening. Straight from the blackest part of the jungle. Negroes are here once again to entertain. Be the first to place your bet on which bastard can survive the Battle Royale.

In the fight area's rear, blindfolded black fighters shuffle forward to reveal Gus, Pitt and Joe.

Casey, Perry and Woody rush Gus, Pitt and Joe.

PERRY

You niggers better leave. I said get out.

Red spies from the ring.

RED

(off Gus; megaphone)
Wait, I see we have some visitors. Woody, Perry, don't be so rude. Welcome our guests. I don't want them to miss the show.

Red's gang backs away.

RED
Ladies and gentlemen, the Battle
Royale.

Red steps from the ring and flashes Woody a look.

Woody eyeballs Gus as Red mounts the barrel- DING.

The fighters go at it, but the action's slow.

Fans yell and throw objects.

Red appears angered with the lack of action.

RED
(to the fans)
Gents, get closer to the ring.
Let's help this action along.
Woody, why don't you start?

As a fighter crawls away, Woody kicks him in the ribs.

Woody urges the crowd to join in and it's chaos.

A rocketed potato knocks out a fighter.

Red and Woody scan the bedlam to find no Gus.

INT. RED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Red's flanked by minions as Gus, Pitt and Joe are led in.

RED
Gentlemen, welcome. Did you enjoy
the show?
(to Joe)
What do you say, boy? Do you miss
being in that ring?

GUS
Why?

RED
Rules must be obeyed. There are
consequences to your actions.

GUS
Why my farm, Red?

RED
Oh, that little old thing. I was
simply helping out an old friend
by investing in the future. There
will be plenty of room in the new
Cicero for you, Gus.

GUS

Ya' stole it from me.

RED

I bought it fair and legal.

GUS

What could ya' want? That land
ain't got no value to you.

RED

People of this town, you have such
small minds. You could never see
the big picture. Your farm is
only the first of many. I will
own more farms and more land.

GUS

For what?

Red appears to think. Bolts to his feet.

He lifts the cover from an easel. Reveals architectural
drawings for an outdoor arena.

GUS

(off the drawings)

What is this?

RED

The future. An outdoor arena that
will rival any in the nation. We
will build and this town will
grow. Thousands upon thousands
will flock here to see the
greatest fighters in the world.
We will be the mecca of boxing and
Bonecrusher will be our champion.

GUS

What about the people of this
town? You'd steal the land from
under their feet?

RED

The Negro has no say and the
whites... well, a few eggs must be
broken to make an omelette. The
people of this town must learn to
grow and adapt. I will turn this
place into a metropolis... like
Chicago.

Red sneers as he covers the drawings.

RED

Now go. Collect your things.
I've been more than accommodating
giving you a month to vacate the
property. Even with your blatant
disrespect of my establishment.

Pitt and Joe back their way out the door as Gus halts.

GUS

I know why ya' brought Crusher
home.

RED

What's that?

GUS

Bonecrusher. I know why ya'
brought him here. Ya' need him to
fill seats. I guess ya' was
hopin' for a bigger crowd tonight.

With that, Red appears stung.

GUS

And I'll tell ya' somethin' else.
How do ya' expect Crusher to
become World Heavyweight Champion
when he ain't even the best
fighter in this town?

Gus eases out and leaves Red slack-jawed.

EXT. GUS'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Grace hovers near the window as Gus and the guys arrive.

She bolts outside and hugs Gus. Steals a look at Joe as
he and Pitt retire to the barn.

INT. GUS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In bed, Gus just grips Maggie's photo to his chest.

INT. RED'S SALOON - FIGHT AREA - NIGHT

With the place now deserted, Red scans around.

Soon he ambles to his office. Locks the door. Uncovers
the plans for his new arena.

He steps back to take in his vision for the future.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. THE TREE - DAWN

Gus swaps old flowers with new on Maggie's grave.

GUS

Mornin'. I brung ya' these. I
thought about ya' all night and
figured I should come visit.

(thinks)

I... I wanna apologize for the man
I was before ya' died. I wasn't
the man ya' married and for that
I'm truly sorry. I never knew
what love was till I lost ya'.
God I wish ya' was here right now.
You'd know what to do.

The moment's interrupted by a horse-mounted Red.

RED

You're up early.

GUS

Couldn't sleep.

RED

Neither could I.

GUS

I'd think last night was your
deepest sleep in some time. The
realization of your dream.

RED

I would've thought the same, but
something you said bothered me.
Stuck with me all night.

GUS

What's that?

RED

Stone, you're the smartest boxing
man I know. I've heard it before,
but to finally hear it from you...

(beat)

Do you really believe your Negro
can compete with Crusher?

GUS

He can more than compete.

RED

(chuckles)

Blasphemy.

GUS

It's not blasphemy if it's true.

Red's gaze seems to trace the horizon.

RED
Let's test your theory. One week
from today, we'll see if your Joe
is really famous or just average.

GUS
I made a promise to Joe, I'd never
sign him up for a fixed fight.

RED
No one will interfere. I swear
it. And if your Negro beats
Crusher... you get your farm
back. Free and clear.

Joe and Grace ease up as Gus swaps eyes with Joe.

GUS
It's not my decision to make.

Joe locks eyes with Red and nods.

RED
Good. I must go and get things
ready. An event like this will
surely bring the whole town out.
(to Joe)
I expect your best.

GUS
Why take this risk?

RED
I'm a sportsman.
(off Gus's chuckle)
Because I don't think your boy
stands a chance.
(scans Joe)
Hell, Crusher might even kill him.

Red switches his gaze to Grace. A beat. Rides off.

JOE
(to Gus)
I'll meet ya' in the barn.

GUS
No. I put ya' through hell these
last weeks. Ya' need your rest.

JOE
What about Crusher?

GUS
Since day one, I been trainin' ya'
to fight Crusher. You're ready.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Coated in sweat, Joe hammers a nail in the fence.
- Red supervises men as they remodel the fight ring.
- Pitt preaches to blacks gathered around a porch.
- A white family waves as Gus rides off in his wagon.
- Pitt speaks to black field hands.
- Gus rides toward a house on a hill.
- Joe shadowboxes in the barn.
- Grace peers through the barn's window.

EXT. CICERO'S MAIN STREET - DAY

Woody, Casey and prostitutes distribute flyers that show a drawing of Crusher grabbing a monkey by the neck.

Perry holds up wagons in the street.

PERRY

Local hero fights in Cicero.
Don't miss the rare chance to see
Charles Bonecrusher Townes in an
exhibition for the ages.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - DAY

A miniature ring on a platform rests near the entrance.

EXT. GUS'S FENCE - DUSK

Joe hammers the last nail in the fence. It's done.

Gus, Pitt and Grace stroll up.

GUS

Fence sure looks nice, Joe.

Joe uses a handkerchief to wipe sweat.

Grace nabs the handkerchief and dabs sweat from his eyes.

Gus and Pitt note the moment.

Pitt signals Gus and the pair stride off.

JOE

Got the feelin' ya' was avoidin'
me this week.

GRACE

Maybe we was avoidin' each other?
(beat)
How ya' feel?

JOE

I don't feel nothin'. Don't know
what I'm supposed to feel.

GRACE

I don't understand.

JOE

All my life I been fightin'
because my daddy didn't fight.
He'd say "Don't fight the white
man, Joe." When I was nine, white
men came. They took him and mommy
and daddy didn't fight.

(sounds anguished)

But what am I fightin' for? My
race? My freedom? Am I fightin'
for this farm? The first place
I've felt comfortable laying my
head down.

(beat)

Am I fightin' for love?

Eyes now wet, she pivots away.

JOE

I don't want ya' there tomorrow.

Tears-welled, she eyes the ground.

JOE

Whatever happens, I'd feel better
knowin' ya' was here. Safe.

With that, she whips to face him.

GRACE

You're a good man, Joe. I came
here to beg ya', to plead with ya'
not to fight. But I can't because
ya' got every reason to get in
that ring and I ain't got one
reason to stop ya'. But I'm
afraid, Joe. I'm afraid he'll
hurt ya'.

(sounds fearful)

You've heard the stories. I'm
afraid ya' won't walk out of the
ring.

He wipes a tear from her cheek.

GRACE

But what scares me even more is,
you'll beat Crusher.

(beat)

What'll this town do if ya' best
their hero?

He pulls her to him.

JOE

It's okay. I'll tell ya' a
secret. I'm scared, too.

(beat)

The world outside the ring ain't
changin' anytime soon. Maybe it's
time to change the world inside
the ring?

EXT. CICERO'S MAIN STREET - NIGHT

It overflows as sellers line the sidewalk with goods.

A wall of fans leads to...

EXT. RED'S SALOON - SAME TIME

A large crowd surrounding the saloon is divided by color.

Whites outnumber blacks who're designated to a smaller
section.

EXT./INT. BARBER SHOP - SAME TIME

Crusher sits tall surrounded by Red and the gang.

All look on as Perry forces gloves onto Crusher's massive
hands.

BARBER -50s, white- hovers at the door, eyes fixed out
the window.

BARBER

Look at the people in the street.
What a fine event you've created,
Red. You've outdone yourself this
time. I think I'll head on over
and get my seat.

RED

You've got one of the best seats
in the house, my friend. Thanks
for letting us use your shop.
This way everyone gets a good look
at the future Heavyweight Champion
of the World.

Fans cruise past the window, eyes glued to Crusher.

BARBER

My pleasure.

(to Crusher)

Good luck to you, Champ. Not that you'll need it.

BONECRUSHER

I'll be sure to give you a show.

That is if the boy don't run away.

All chuckle.

RED

If that happens, we got a bucket of yellow paint. We'll paint a stripe right down his back.

Now all cackle as Barber steps outside.

RED

Where are we?

PERRY

That's it. How do they feel?

BONECRUSHER

Like I can bend steel.

Crusher slams his gloved fists together- BAM.

INT. COVERED WAGON - SAME TIME

Pitt checks Joe's gloves as Gus looks on.

GUS

Looks good, Pitt.

(to Joe)

If I ain't said it, I wanna say it now.

JOE

What's that?

GUS

Thank ya'.

Joe cracks a smile.

GUS

(to Pitt)

Thanks, friend.

Joe's ears perk as DISTANT HAND CLAPS transition US to...

EXT. BARBER SHOP - SAME TIME

Trailed by Red and the gang, Crusher steps outside to the clapping crowd. He appears like he feeds off the ruckus crowd's energy. To the hand claps' rhythm, Crusher struts along Main Street with Red and the gang in tow.

EXT. COVERED WAGON - SAME TIME

The distant HAND CLAPS seem to weigh on Pitt and Gus as they pull back the wagon's cover.

Eyes closed, Joe's motionless.

PITT

Joe.

CLAP CLAP CLAP

PITT

Joe... it's time.

CLAP CLAP CLAP -Joe doesn't move.

PITT

(with force)

Joe.

Atmosphere now electric, Joe bounds from the wagon.

Joe seems to feed off the adversity he now faces as the trio make their way toward a bitter reception.

Joe's stare is straight, like he wants to see everything as HAND CLAPS pull him through BOOS along Main Street.

Now closer to Red's, Joe sprouts a pleased look.

It's Joe's black and white fans seen earlier. Whites tip their caps to Gus as Mary waves.

Joe, Gus and Pitt stop opposite Red and Crusher.

Crowd noise is at a fever pitch as Red steps out.

RED

Ladies and gentleman, thank you
all for joining us this evening
for what we hope is at least a
competitive exhibition.

(snickers)

Unfortunately my establishment is
unable to hold such vast numbers
of fans. Rest assured, it's
something I plan to rectify.

Gus scans the crowd.

RED
 (points to the
 miniature ring)
 Those of you who remain outside
 may watch the play in the ring
 we've provided.

Behind the miniature ring is a crow's nest with a bird's-eye view straight into the real fight area.

In the crow's nest is a man dressed like a parody version of Red, megaphone and all.

RED
 Now with no further delay, this
 beast hails from parts unknown.
 Many of you have heard of this
 animal and I'm here to tell you
 the rumors are true. Why I've
 seen this monster lay waste to
 many of his own kind. Well
 tonight he faces a real man. A
 God-fearing man and the only
 question that remains is will he
 stand and fight or turn and show
 us the yellow stripe down his
 back. Ladies and gentleman, odds
 are after tonight he'll be famous
 for something besides his name.
 (loud)
 Joe Famous.

Only the blacks and whites in the Colored section cheer
 as boos from Crusher's white fans drown them out.

As Joe steps forward, a black, little person climbs into
 the miniature ring. He's PARODY JOE.

The crowd laughs as Parody Joe circles the small ring.

RED
 And now, I give you a Son of
 Cicero who needs no introduction.
 This devastating puncher has been
 undefeated since he stepped out of
 his mother's womb and is currently
 ranked number eight in the World.
 He's a crippler, a punisher, he's
 Charles Bonecrusher Townes.

The crowd goes wild as Crusher raises gloved hands.

At the same time a strapping young man climbs into the
 miniature ring. It's clear he's PARODY CRUSHER.

RED
 (to the crowd)
 Enjoy the show.

Knowing eyes locked with Gus, Red slides a folded paper from his breast pocket where WE SEE the word "DEED."

Red smirks as he tucks away the deed.

Gus zeroes in on Red's breast pocket and glares as Red leads Crusher into the saloon.

Woody halts Joe, Pitt and Gus at the door.

WOODY

Ya' know the rules here.

(off Joe)

He's fightin'...

(off Pitt)

But this nigger has to wait here.

GUS

Then we don't fight.

Woody glimpses the crowd. Steps aside.

INT. FIGHT AREA - RING - DUSK

Crusher hovers center ring as Joe strides to him.

REFEREE

This is an unlimited fight.

Unlimited knockdowns, unlimited rounds, the bell can save you.

The fight is over when one of you is knocked out or quits.

Joe extends his gloves toward Crusher, who doesn't react.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - SAME TIME

PARODY RED spies into the fight ring.

PARODY RED

(into the megaphone;

mimics the real Red)

The fighters meet center ring.

Famous extends gloves. Ah,

Crusher refuses. Returns to his corner.

In the miniature ring, Parody Joe and Parody Crusher mimic the real boxers' actions.

INT. RING - JOE'S CORNER - SAME TIME

Joe scans the room. Gazes down to Gus and Pitt.

JOE

Gus, whatever it takes, keep me goin'. Don't let it stop, no matter what.

The crowd's electric as- DING.

Joe and Crusher rocket to center ring like two titans.

Joe hits Crusher with an array of punches.

Joe's speed dominates, but Crusher appears to wait.

In the final seconds, Crusher grabs Joe to slow him down.

As Referee breaks them apart...

Crusher lands a blow to the ribs and drops Joe.

As Joe stands- DING.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Joe and Crusher beat on each other.
- Crusher's power appears to weigh on Joe.
- From the crowd's nest outside...

PARODY RED

(into megaphone)

Boom. Crusher lands another blow to the ribs and Famous goes down again.

- Parody Joe and Parody Crusher play out the action.
- Crusher tires as he chases Joe around the ring.
- Crusher bites Joe's shoulder as Referee breaks them apart.
- Crusher's power seems to take over.
- Crusher attacks Joe's ribs and kidneys.
- One last blow and Joe spits blood as he drops.
- Parody Crusher raises his gloves as Parody Joe lay flat out for the crowd's amusement.

INT. FIGHT AREA - SAME TIME

The crowd cheers at the apparent knockout as Referee counts "seven"- DING.

Gus and Pitt drag Joe's limp body to his corner.

Pitt removes bloodied cotton from Joe's mouth.

JOE

Gus.

Gus pulls Joe's forehead to his own.

GUS

Son, close your eyes. It's time.
Ya' hear me? It's time. Ya' go
out there and ya' win. Not
because I'm tellin' ya' to, not
for the farm, not for anybody
here. Ya' go out there and win
for this.

Gus taps Joe's chest.

GUS

Your heart is full, son. It's
full of love. Nobody'd put
themselves through this hell
without the love of another. Pitt
loves ya'. Grace loves ya'. I
love ya', son. Now win. Win.

Joe's eyes open. He rises.

REFEREE

Seconds out.

DING -Crusher stomps out. Rockets heavy shots.

But Joe's a different beast now as he fires punches.

Joe's found a spark and imposes his will.

Crusher wilts from the attack.

In an instant...

The air both inside and outside the building seems to
change as Red's confidence fades.

Crusher's power display was impressive, but Joe's speed
and precision dissect Crusher- DING.

CLOSE ON CRUSHER'S BATTERED FACE

Swollen eyes consider Joe.

BACK TO SCENE

From her seat, Ring Girl erases **27**. Writes **28**. Struts
the slate around the ring- DING

After some blows back-and-forth...

The crowd seems to deflate as Crusher goes down many times.

Crusher rises to absorb more pain.

DING -Ring Girl struts the slate again- **29.**

Crusher and Joe exchange glares as- DING.

Joe drags his worn body to center ring.

Crusher remains plopped on his stool.

IN CRUSHER'S CORNER

BONECRUSHER

I can't.

TRAINER

Big Fella, gimme one more round.

BONECRUSHER

He won't fall. I don't know what it is, but he won't fall.

Crusher pulls himself up, but his legs collapse and he falls back to his stool.

Trainer fights to lift Crusher, but he's dead on his feet.

Soon Referee calls an end to the fight and the crowd throws food and drinks into the ring.

An enraged-looking Red stomps to Referee.

RED

What the hell are you doing? You can't stop this fight. I'm paying you.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - SAME TIME

Megaphone in-hand, Parody Red peers into the fight area in disbelief as the crowd waits like rabid dogs.

INT. FIGHT AREA - RING - SAME TIME

Red hustles to Crusher.

RED

What's the matter with you? Get up and finish this fight.

Crusher doesn't move as Red slaps him in the face.

RED
I said get up and knock this
nigger out.

From out of nowhere...

A right cross knocks Red senseless.

It's Gus.

Gus kneels to a dazed Red. Snatches the deed. Examines it as he steps to Pitt.

Over Gus's shoulder, a pistol in-hand Red rises.

Just then...

Joe's gloved right hand knocks Red out cold.

With Red flat out in the ring, Gus swaps grins with Joe.

GUS
I reckon I didn't have one left in
me after all.

EXT. RED'S SALOON - SAME TIME

All hell breaks loose as blacks and whites storm inside.

INT. FIGHT AREA - SAME TIME

It's a madhouse as the earlier blacks and whites wedge their way to the ring.

They usher Joe, Gus and Pitt outside.

EXT. CICERO STREET - NIGHT

Chaos abounds as Gus, Pitt and Joe hustle through shadows to the town's edge.

Joe uses his teeth to tear at his now-shredded gloves.

He tosses them to the ground as he races away.

EXT. CICERO STREET - MINUTES LATER

Woody scoops Joe's glove from the dirt. Sniffs it.

Looking satisfied, he points his smirk to a few men.

WOODY
Get the horses and the hounds.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MINUTES LATER

Gus, Pitt and Joe appear gassed and halt.

After a beat...

It's the SOUND of DOGS and all turn to spy faint torches.

GUS

We're bein' hunted. The woods.

WE STAY PUT as OUR men run into the woods.

Led by hounds, Woody and his hooded men arrive on horses.

WOODY

There they go.

Woody settles his rifle on a target- BLAM.

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

Pitt stumbles to the ground as blood oozes from his leg.

PITT

Listen, I can only slow ya' down.
Ya' gotta go. Both of ya'.

GUS

I won't let go.

Pitt and Gus trade knowing looks as they grip hands.

GUS

Run Joe. The farm's that way.
Put some distance between you and
these boys.

JOE

What about ya'll?

GUS

(winks)
I grew up in these woods.

Pitt latches onto Joe. Locks eyes with him.

PITT

Famous. I saw greatness tonight.
In that ring, tonight, everybody
saw greatness. Everybody.

Now Pitt and Joe swap knowing looks as only two black men
alive in this time could.

Soon Joe runs off into the dawn.

EXT. GUS'S PORCH - DAWN

Grace scans the horizon.

GRACE'S POV

Smoke rises in the far distance.

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

DOGS SOUND like they're closing in as Joe spies Gus's distant house. He considers Grace. Bolts in the opposite direction.

EXT. GUS'S PORCH - SAME TIME

Grace studies the horizon.

GRACE'S POV

A small dot sprouts.

BACK TO SCENE

Her face crosses over into a relieved look.

GRACE'S POV

Two forms now appear. It's Pitt and Gus.

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

Trees sway and branches creak as Joe bolts away from Woody and the hooded men in the distance.

CLOSE ON

A battered Red as his eyes reflect fire light.

PULL BACK TO

EXT. CICERO'S MAIN STREET - SAME TIME

The town's destroyed as dead bodies lay about.

Wagons are overturned as wind blows trash.

Amongst the ruin, patrons scurry while a disheveled Red just watches as the bank and his saloon burn.

PUSH IN ON

A burning copy of *The Colored American* as flames eat their way through the headline: *JOE FAMOUS*

EXT. THE CLEARING OF TREE STUMPS - SAME TIME

Still on horseback, Woody and his hooded men are stopped on one side as countless stumps dot the area.

On the other side, Joe's eyes scan the stumps.

CLOSE ON

The axe is still planted in a stump near the clearing's middle.

BACK TO SCENE

Woody smirks as he spots Joe along the opposite edge.

The pair stare each other down.

After an intense beat...

Woody spurs his horse toward Joe.

Joe charges through the stumps toward Woody and the pair grow closer.

At the last second, Joe latches onto the axe handle that's buried in the stump.

Joe uses the stump to launch himself upward and buries the razor sharp axe deep into Woody's chest.

Joe's force knocks Woody to the ground as blood spatters.

Soon Joe's surrounded by horses and the hooded men.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Wind hits Gus and Pitt as they trek to the house.

- Grace's eyes scour the horizon.

After a long beat...

THUD -Grace pivots toward the barn.

- CLOSE ON a rope against wood as it CREAKS.

- BANG BANG THUD. Grace picks up pace as she draws closer to the barn.

She rips open the doors to find...

The lone heavy bag hangs lifeless as a sheet of the roof's metal slaps back-and-forth in the wind.

Grace eases around and scans the horizon.

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

With Woody's dead body draped over his horse, hooded men ride away as wind causes CREAKS and THUDS.

CLOSE ON

A rope tightens its grip on a large branch.

CLOSE ON

Joe's bloodied feet swing.

After a long, somber beat...

CUT TO BLACK:

After a long beat in black...

CLOSE ON

GUS
(flowers in-hand)
Mornin'. Brung ya' these.
They're sproutin' all over. Just
wanted ya' to know we been
thinkin' about ya'. We miss ya'.
Miss ya' every day. Welcome home,
Joe.

PULL BACK TO

EXT. THE TREE - DAY

Gus hovers with Grace as Pitt leans on a shovel.

A second marker's been placed next to Maggie's. The hand-carved inscription reads: *FAMOUS*

After a long beat...

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

*This film is meant to honor all those whose greatness was
kept hidden from the rest of us by the time in which they
lived.*

FADE OUT.

THE END

NOTE: Throughout the end credits, the writers wish to include names and photos of black fighters who died in obscurity, having never gotten their shot at greatness.