

Dustbowl Xia

Episode 1: Gabriel's Trumpet

Written by Daniel Bayn

EXT . PARADE -- DAY

Mardis Gras floats lurch drunkely down BOURBON STREET. Above them, MASKED REVELERS lean precariously from the BALCONIES that line the street, waving half-empty BOTTLES of hooch at the crowd.

A BOY leaps from balcony to balcony, evading an ANGRY MOB that pushes its way through the throng below. His face is hidden behind a painted skull, but his expression is unmistakable. He's running for his life.

The boy charges across tables and vaults over revelers; he's on to the next balcony by the time they turn to grab him. At the end of the block, where the street yawns too wide, he picks up a bottle and smashes it over a STONE BUST, then uses it to cut through a ROPE anchoring a STREAMER. He uses it to swing around the corner, his legs dangling over the parade.

More balconies, more obstacles, but then the end of the road. The next block is bare of balconies. He sees the MISSISSIPPI RIVER shining in the distance. The young man twists as he leaves the last balcony, clings to the outer railing for a moment, then drops to the street.

Three MEN WITH PAINTED FACES are waiting for him. He ducks their clutches and takes off down an ALLEY, where he has to wall-run his way over another group of them. He turns the corner and the whole ANGRY MOB pours down the street after him.

The skull-faced boy heads for a burned-out WAREHOUSE, where he stalls for time by dodging and weaving through a forest of exposed 2x4's, tying his hunters in knots.

When a FOG HORN sounds in the distance, he runs up a woman's backside and leaps into the rafters, then swings himself up to the top of a fallen staircase. The mob hurls BRICKS and bottles at him, but he's through the door and on the roof in a blink.

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The HOUNGAN is waiting for him at the edge of the roof, the river at his back. He's an older man with a BLACK CANE in his hands and white sigils drawn all over his face and chest.

HOUNGAN

"So... that it, Dante? You just gonna catch a steam ship an' never look back?"

YOUNG DANTE

"Those people gonna lynch me!" Dante pleads.
"You gotta lemme go!"

HOUNGAN

"They ain't nothin' I can't handle, boy. You know that. Just tell 'em what they need to hear and..."

DANTE

"It's all bullshit! I can't spend my life lying to their faces!"

HOUNGAN

"Why not, Dante?! Why the hell not?! It's what they want you to do! It's all they ever asked you to do! You rather break your back in a sugar cane field?!"

A TRAMP STEAMER's smokestack drifts into view behind the houngan. Young Dante watches the angles, judges the distance. The mob POUNDS on the door behind him.

Young Dante

"You gotta lemme go."

HOUNGAN

"I'd rather let you hang."

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Dante charges the houngan as the door frame SPLINTERS. The black cane swings for his head, but Dante limbos beneath it before vaulting onto the old man's shoulders and leaping off the ledge. He flies toward his future, knees tucked to his chest and arms spread out behind him like wings.

EXT. CHURCHYARD -- NIGHT

DANTE hits the ground running. His feet tear fistfuls out of the churchyard as he sprints along the back wall of the RECTORY. He parkours his way onto the roof, then leaps across to the CHURCH, accidentally putting his foot through a STAINED GLASS WINDOW. He hears a STARTLED CRY from somewhere inside.

Not pausing to apologize, he scurries up the steeple. At the top, he vaults over the railing and kicks the BRASS BELL with both feet. It doesn't make much noise, but it hurts like hell. Take two: He fumbles for the bell's ROPE and tolls like Quasimodo.

The bell RINGS out across a tiny hamlet. Rows of simple, wooden homes line either side of what was once a river, now little more than a creek. Tents and shanties huddle inside the riverbed... directly in the path of the TSUNAMI that rises behind the church like one of Noah's nightmares.

AHOTE bursts out of a large TENT with an ORPHAN under each arm. He glances at the oncoming flood as he tosses the kids into his car, then rolls over the roof and slips into the driver's seat through the open window.

The back seat is stacked high with ORPHANS; NURSE HUGINGISS sits in the passenger seat with two TODDLERS on her lap.

SWEETNESS takes off like a cannon ball, CRASHING through rows of tents. One sticks on the windshield, blocking Ahote's view. He reaches out the window and yanks it free, just in time to avoid colliding with the center pillar of a STONE BRIDGE.

Ahote drifts around the obstacles and ends up driving backwards. He watches the flood engulf the church, swallow the shanty town, and SMASH the bridge to bits.

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Again, they spin around, but this time Ahote leans into the turn and heads up the embankment. They crest the rise only to get SMACKED back down by a stampeding COW. Ahote takes one look in his rear view mirror before opening the throttle and launching them over the heifer sideways.

They land in the middle of the herd. Sweetness bounces back and forth like a pinball as CATTLE crash into her.

AHOTE

(leaning on the horn)
"Come on, come on! Get off the road!"

He puts both hands on the wheel, locks the back tires, and fishtails to one side. The bumper scoops up one cow and pushes it forward, opening a tiny door in the wall of beef. Ahote swings the car around and races through the gap.

The flood has spent its fury. When it finally washes over them, Sweetness only floats a few yards downstream. The back doors open simultaneously, disgorging equal parts water and children. Ahote turns to check on the nurse and she kisses him full on the mouth.

Upstream, LOTUS skips over fallen and floating TREES to the base of a BROKEN DAM. She charges straight up and flies over the crest to find herself looking down at the worst jazz band in the word.

- A woman with a face like cracked earth carries a drum made of human skin; a sailor's tattoo is stretched taught across its surface.
- An old man made of leather and wrapped in overalls cradles a saxophone with crude, misshapen lumps of iron for keys.
- A stock broker strokes the strings of a double bass like he's comforting his girl.
- A black man with two faces lifts a weather-beaten trumpet to his lips and blows.

The whole band joins in, producing a CACOPHONY that knocks Lotus right out of the sky. She PLUNGES into the flood waters below.

30 minutes earlier...

INT. SWEETNESS -- NIGHT

Ahote and crew coast into town like a gurney down a hospital hallway. The nurse breaks the silence.

NURSE HUGINKISS

"I can't thank you enough."

Her gesture takes in everyone, but her eyes are only for Ahote.

"It's been a ghost town for days. I don't know who I would've called. Even the refugee families are off in the hills."

Dante's in the back seat. Lotus sleeps under his arm.

DANTE

(from the back seat)

"What for? Are the redcoats a' comin'?"

NURSE HUGINKISS

"No. Just some stupid, local legend. Might as well be the British, for all the actual invading. They'll give it up by the end of the week, then I can order some medicine for my kids."

Sweetness descends the husk of a riverbank and rolls through the shantytown. Nurse Huginkiss directs them to a big tent bearing a red cross. Ahote pulls up and parks.

NURSE HUGINKISS

"There's an old saloon back up the hill. You can probably just let yourselves in. Will you stay long?"

AHOTE

"Um, yeah. Maybe. I don't..."

Dante KICKS the driver's seat. Hard.

DANTE

"We'll stick around for a few days, until your neighbors get back."

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He flashes Ahote a wide-eyed look in the rear view mirror.

NURSE HUGINNISS

She just about bounces out of the car.

"Great! I'll see you tomorrow. Sleep tight."

She skips into her tent like a schoolgirl.

DANTE

"What's wrong with you, medicine man?!"

Dante makes to slap him, but he can't reach without waking Lotus.

DANTE

"You gotta *make* time for the ladies, Iya."

AHOTE

"I get nervous around white women, ok? Don't you?"

DANTE

"Dante Harrison Halloway doesn't get nervous around any kinda woman. Know that. When we get to the saloon, I'll give you an education in the ways of seduction."

AHOTE

"Wonderful."

EXT. SALOON -- NIGHT

The SALOON is dark, except for a pool of wan light that festers at the foot of the door. Ahote parks Sweetness at its edge.

In the back seat, Dante tries to kiss Lotus awake, but she's not having it. Ahote punches her in the shoulder.

LOTUS

"Hey!"

DANTE

"Sorry, Tomcat. We're home."

Ahote's already waiting for them outside.

Ahote

"Get a load of these."

He gestures over his shoulder to the saloon wall. It's plastered with PLAYBILLS. The art is crude, beyond amateur, and no two are exactly the same. Some are dominated by scenes of devastation: avalanches, earthquakes, cities set ablaze. Others are crowded by the faces of four ugly, ugly people. They all say the same thing...

Gabriel's Trumpet

One Night Only

AHOTE

"Think we missed the show?"

MAGICIAN (o.s.)

"No sir, no sir. I'd say you're just in time for the show, and what a show! It's safe to say, Gabriel's Trumpet *always* brings the house down!"

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The diatribe's source is a tiny man in a top hat. The rest of his ensemble is somewhat less formal. A ratty, tweed jacket encrusts a shriveled dress shirt and a tattered bow tie. His pants have patches on their patches and his shoes, well... he'd be better off with bread bags.

An almost-empty bottle of bourbon and fanned-out deck of playing cards accompany him at a table near the door. He sweeps up the cards with one hand and heads straight for the newcomers.

Ahote intercepts while Dante vaults the bar.

AHOTE

"You don't say!"

MAGICIAN

"Yes I do, yes I do. Hey," his eyes light up beneath the brim of his hat. "Wanna see a trick?"

AHOTE

"I'm sure I'm going to."

The cards dance among his diminutive fingers. When he's done, Ahote CLAPS politely. Behind him, Lotus watches Dante do similar juggling with bottles of hooch as he mixes them a round of god-knows-what. You'd think they had the place all to themselves.

MAGICIAN

(bowing)

"Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly."

Ahote puts a hand on his shoulder and steers them both back to the little man's table.

MAGICIAN

"But these are merely tricks of the hand, legerdemain. When the show starts, you'll see some *real* magic!"

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DANTE

"Pft!!"

MAGICIAN

"Scoff all you want, young man! Scoff while you can, because your doubts are about to be put to rest. Gabriel's Trumpet is the real deal and they're gonna give the Tailor what for!"

LOTUS

(suddenly interested)

"*The Tailor?* Wadaya know about *The Tailor?*"

MAGICIAN

"Not much, my dear, but more than most. I know how he's done every member of the band wrong and I know how they're gonna make it right..."

The Shepherd's Tale

EXT. CHURCH -- DAY

HAGGARD MEN beg on the steps of an OLD CHURCH while their WIVES sit in makeshift TENTS nearby. Some BOYS climb on the roof while a group of GIRLS wash their clothes in the HOLY WATER.

A rust RED PICKUP pulls around the corner. An old strip of leather called SHEPHERD sits behind the wheel. He makes eye contact with one of the girls, who sticks out her tongue and continues scrubbing.

Shepherd parks in front of the church and walks up to the door with a TOOLBOX in hand. He removes a HAMMER and NAIL, which he uses to have a LETTER on the dilapidated door. It's a hand-drawn MAP to his ranch outside of town. Emblazoned across the top and bottom, it reads:

"Homeless Welcome"

"God Helps Those Who Help Each Other"

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

A BLUE PICKUP trundles down a lonely road. It's piled high with APPLE CRATES. Shepherd's rust red pickup races up from behind and pulls alongside it.

SHEPHERD

"Hey, buddy! Which way to Albuquerque?!"

The appletruck driver guffaws.

JOHNNY APPLETRUCK

"Mister, you are nowhere near..."

He trails off as something in the SIDE MIRROR catches his eye. Children are streaming into the back of his truck like ants on a jelly donut. He reaches behind his seat, retrieves a sawed-off double-barrel SHOTGUN, and lets it finish his sentence.

Shepherd hammers the brake and zips out of harm's way. Buckshot streaks past his windshield. Children cling to the sides of both vehicles as they slide apart, their shoeless feet dangling just above the gravel.

The red truck regains steam while the kids help each other up. Shepherd bumps up against the blue truck's tailpipe and apple-laden children run across the cab. Their brothers and sisters greet them with open arms.

Johnny's tail lights flash as he taps his breaks, then really grinds them in. The blue truck pushes hard against its nemesis, causing the vehicles to fold in opposite directions. Johnny fishtails left and skids to a stop in middle of the road. The highwayman dives over the shoulder and takes off across the scrub.

Tiny fists pound the red truck's cab like hail.

CHILDREN

"Shepherd! Shepherd! Matthew's still back there!"

SHEPHERD

"Shit. You kids ever been shot at?"

They all nod their heads in the affirmative.

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SHEPHERD

"Good. Stack up those apple crates and take cover."

Shepherd lets the blue bastard catch up and, sure enough, he FIRES a few pot shots. One sends the side mirror to hardware heaven. The other wastes a perfectly good crate of apples. The children take it personally. They pop up from behind their barricade like veterans of the Great War and launch a volley of APPLES at the enemy.

Enough artillery SPLATTERS on impact to seriously obstruct the driver's view, which allows Shepherd to swing in beside him. The kids wave their comrade over, but the blue truck lurches forward as Johnny THROTTLES the engine. He pulls even and, guffawing once more, he levels his shotgun at Shepherd.

A tiny hand reaches through the driver's window, seizes Johnny's ear, and twists it like a stubborn candy machine. The driver screams. His gun does an about-face. The KID lets go of the ear and grabs the gun by its barrel, then smashes it into Johnny's nose. He takes the gun with him when he scampers over the roof and leaps onto the red pickup.

The kid FIRES a round into Johnny's tire. It EXPLODES and Johnny spins out. They leave him there, in the desert, to think about what he's done.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP -- DAY

The rust red pickup trundles towards a bustling CAMP. The meek have inherited a barren stretch of earth along a drought-starved riverbed. Their tents cling to the clay like barnacles on a sunken ship.

A crowd of REFUGEES has gathered around a DUESENBERG that's seen better days. The grill looks like a boxer's smile.

The children jump out of Shepherd's truck while the wheels are still rolling. THE TAILOR wades through them, followed by THE SHOOTIST, who passes out candy to keep little hands away from deep pockets. Shepherd parks and gets out to greet him with a stern expression.

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THE TAILOR

"Looks like someone's come into some money,
and *that* looks like a helluva haul."

SHEPHERD

"It fell off a truck.»

THE TAILOR

"Then perhaps I didn't make the godforsaken
trip out here for nothing. I'm willing to make
you one more offer."

He hands over a folded bit of embossed paper.

"Not a fair price, I know, but it's the best
you're going to get. I recommend you accept
this one-time, non-negotiable offer
immediately, else I'll be forced to seize your
land through eminent domain."

Torn bits of paper float towards the Tailor's feet.

SHEPHERD

(chuckling)
"Not in this county."

INT. COURT ROOM -- DAY

A JUDGE wields his gavel like a sword, pointing its
business end between the Tailor's eyes.

JUDGE

"Eminent domain is a right of the government,
not of rail barons or... whatever the hell you
are. The court has asked you repeatedly to
demonstrate the government's interest in
turning this property over to you and all
you've given us..."

He brandishes a fistful of loose papers.

"...is a collection of arcane scribblings so
inscrutable they resemble nothing moreso than
an alchemist's cookbook!"

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The Tailor clutches the side of the plaintiff's table. His fingers strain against the molding. It cracks under the pressure. He opens his mouth, but the Judge cuts him off like a Gordian knot.

JUDGE

"The simple fact of the matter is that this land is already being put to good by its generous owner, as a home for many wayward souls. The public has absolutely no interest in displacing them at this time. Try again when the rain comes."

His honor throws the Tailor's exhibits on the floor, re-sheathes his gavel, and departs. The peanut gallery erupts in cheers.

The Tailor's eyes smolder.

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP -- NIGHT

The encampment burns.

Shepherd flies over the desert in his red pickup, sloshing the TUB of water in the back. A BONFIRE fills his windshield. He skids to a stop behind the dozen or so refugees who managed to evacuate. They assemble immediately into a bucket line, but everyone knows it's useless. The flames tower over them like an angry god.

When the fire's ROAR is laced with children's SCREAMS, Shepherd and a few other man charge the pyre. They separate and begin scouring the camp. A PAVILION tent collapses, exhaling dragon's breath. CHARCOAL apples bounce off the Shepherd's boots.

He sees two of the children weeping over their father's BODY. Shepherd has enough time to notice the pool of BLOOD glimmering beneath the corpse before a man in a duster descends between him and the children.

THE SHOOTIST

"No seppuku for you. Last thing we need is more red tape tied 'round this property. You best tend to the ladies."

The cowboy punctuates his directive with a pair of PISTOLS, but the Shepherd doesn't budge.

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THE SHOOTIST

"Ya know what, you're absolutely right. It'd be a rotten shame to waste a backdrop like this."

He spins the guns on his fingers, then grips them around the barrels.

"Better hurry, though. Yer kids are dyin'."

Shepherd dusts off his best boxing moves, but The Shootist is way too fast. The cowboy cracks him on the skull, then kicks him into a pile of searing ASH.

One of the other men stumbles into the conflagration. Shepherd tries to wave him towards the children, but all he can force from his lungs is a soot-stained cough, so the poor fool charges the cowboy. The duster flares out like a matador's cape as he spins out of the way, then sweeps the man's legs out from under him and drives him into the ground with a pistol blow to the small of his back. Before he can even roll himself over, a bullet penetrates his skull. BANG!

Shepherd SNAPS a burning tent pole off the pyre and wields it like a baseball bat.

THE SHOOTIST

"Now we're talkin'!"

Two swings trace glowing arcs through the air. The third stops cold as the cowboy catches it in the crook of his pistol, then whips Shepherd mercilessly with the gun in his off hand.

Through a veil of blood, Shepherd watches one of the refugees gather up the children. They cry out for their father despite the smoke in their lungs, which draws the cowboy's attention. He lets go of the old man, knocks the club from his limp fingers, and turns both pistols on his prey.

Shepherd lurches forward, concussed, as a dozen GUNSHOTS tear through the blaze. Then, a SIZZLING circle of molten gunmetal brands him between the eyes.

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THE SHOOTIST

"Count yer blessin's, old timer."

The cowboy kicks him in the chest hard enough to CRACK his ribcage and send him flying through the fire. He lands on his pick, SMASHING the windshield.

Dimly, against a pillar of flame, he watches the yellow duster fly into the night.

INT. SALOON -- NIGHT

MAGICIAN

"The next day, a man with two faces helped him salvage the deceased's only remains: the iron from their fillings. He told the Shepherd to melt them down and make 23 keys for a saxophone. Now, the souls of the vengeful dead scream through his instrument. They cry out for justice!"

The little man stands up on his seat and raises his arms toward heaven. Ahote and Lotus look on with bemused interest while Dante lounges on top of the bar, seemingly asleep.

MAGICIAN

"The next member of the band was a stock broker who lost a lot more than his shirt in the Crash of '29..."

Mr. Mountebank's Tale

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

NURSE #2 throws open the DRAPES, shedding light on a little girl's bedroom crowded with DOLLS and TOYS. A tiny, quivering GIRL lies on a FOUR-POST BED, uneaten FOOD piled high all around her.

MR. MOUNTEBANK, a portly man in a business suit, escorts a DOCTOR to her bedside. He checks the girl's pulse, depresses her tongue, shines a light into her eyes, jabs his fingers into her abdomen. She groans pitifully at the rough handling.

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DOCTOR

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mountebank, but your daughter is not responding to treatment. Even when we can get her to eat, her body doesn't absorb the nutrients like it should. I give her another month, at the most."

TIME LAPSE as more doctors flash through the room. The sun lurches in fits and starts towards the horizon.

Last is THE TAILOR, whose lapels are lined with ACUPUNCTURE NEEDLES. He circles the bed slowly, then begins inserting needles all over the girl's body. She shivers and they JINGLE against each other like wind chimes. Then, he STRIKES her in the chest.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"What the *hell* are you doing?!"

He's around the bed in a heartbeat, but the Tailor halts his client with one finger.

THE TAILOR

"Never second-guess your physician, Mr. Mountebank."

The girl's eyes are wide open, her body still for the first time. She starts to reach for the food at her beside, but the Tailor puts one hand on her forehead and forces her back down.

THE TAILOR

"One more minute, child, then you may eat."

He removes his needles carefully, stows them back in his lapels, then releases her. Mountebank places a dinner tray in her lap and the girl devours it like a marine.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

(weeping)

"Thank you. Thank you, so much. You've worked a miracle!"

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THE TAILOR

(sarcastic)

"Please."

The Tailor rolls his eyes as he pulls the thankful father toward the door.

"I cannot cure your daughter. This is just a treatment: a very expensive treatment that I will need to administer once a week. Her symptoms may pass in a month or a year... or never. Luckily for her, she comes from money."

EXT. BROKERAGE OFFICE -- DAY

REPO MEN rush in and out of the building, removing files and furniture like hyenas stripping a carcass. The SIGN above reads "Mountebank Brokerage," but not for much longer. Two men on ladders are pulling it down presently.

In their shadow, the eponymous Mountebank goes toe-to-toe with a slightly taller man's scowl.

TALL MAN

"We all lost our shirts, Mountebank! We've all got creditors to pay. The only difference between you and I is that you didn't secure any collateral."

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"No, *sir*, the only difference between you and I is the I don't kick a man while he's down!"

With that, Mountebank kicks his creditor in the shin and makes a run for the door. Six repo men drop a bureau when they see him coming and tackle him to the ground.

TALL MAN

"Don't make me call the police That's the last thing your daughter needs."

The repo men let Mountebank up and escort him to his CAR.

EXT. ALLEY -- DAY

Mr. Mountebank drives around the block and pulls into the alley behind the office, muttering angrily to himself. He waits for a small group of workmen to finish their cigarettes, then flags down the last before he steps through the door.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Hey, pal! Wanna make a quick buck?"

The repo man looks around, then props the door open with his foot and leans into the alley.

WORKMAN

"Wadaya got?"

Mountebank offers up his pocket watch.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"It retails for \$20. I'm sure you could get at least \$10 at a pawn shop."

WORKMAN

"And what I gotta do?"

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"I just need you to let me in for a few minutes to collect some personal effects."

WORKMAN

"Done deal, daddy-o."

INT. BROKERAGE OFFICE -- DAY

Mountebank isn't two steps inside before the repo man pops the watch open and finds its face cracked, its arms still.

WORKMAN

"Hey! The fat man's lootin' his office!!"

Mr. Mountebank approximates a run as he hussles into his office and barricades the door. Silhouettes pile up against the FROSTED GLASS; their fists POOUND on the frame.

Mountebank rips a drawer out of his desk and tears free a stack of BILLS taped to its back, then scrambles out the window. His barricade crashes down behind him.

EXT. ALLEY -- DAY

Repo men start pouring into the alley.

Mountebank dives into his car and slams the lock down. The angry mob CRASH against his window like a wave. He crawls across the seat and fumbles for his KEYS.

The repo men spread out and begin to rock the car back and forth. It's up on two wheels when he finally gets the engine running.

The car pulls itself loose and SLAMS down amidst the mob, scattering them down the alley. A couple get caught between the bumper and a brick wall. Mountebank starts toward the street, then thinks better of it and points the car down the alley instead. Repo men BOUNCE off his hood like bocce balls.

EXT. MOUNTEBANK ESTATE -- DAY

The Tailor arrives as a truck is towing Mountebank's car away. He KNOCKS at the door. The moment Mountebank answers, he marches inside with practiced familiarity.

INT. MOUNTEBANK ESTATE -- DAY

THE TAILOR

"I hope you have my money, this time. I doubt your daughter can skip another treatment."

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"I had your money, but then I gave it to these guys."

Two serious TRIGGERMEN emerge from side rooms and flank the Tailor with GUNS drawn.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"You're going to teach me how to treat my daughter, then these two gentleman are going to show you out. Politely. Screw with me... well, I might give you one more chance to cooperate after they break every one of those talented fingers."

The Tailor puts his hands up and lets the thugs escort him upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

Mountebank throws open the drapes and sheds light on a little girl's room devoid of dolls or furniture. Only the four-post bed and its pallid occupant remain.

THE TAILOR

"Would you believe me if I told you there's a cure? I was going to sell it to you, really clean you out one last time, but that moment has passed in so many ways."

His right hand folds into a pistol shape, pointing to one goon's forehead, then he whirls on the other. A streak of red mist BLASTS from the first goon's head as the Tailor takes control of the second's gun. The hapless thug finds his pistol buried in his own stomach as the Tailor twists him around and pushes him in front of the window. Another bullet BLASTS through the glass and perforates his skull.

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The Tailor tips his hat to the setting sun.

CUT TO:

A quarter of a mile away, THE SHOOTIST looks up from his rifle and returns the gesture.

BACK TO:

Mountebank gets a gun half way out of his pocket before the Tailor brings the dead goon's piece to bear.

THE TAILOR

"You wasted your money, Mr. Mountebank, but you still have to pay something."

He throws both their guns aside and begins working the poor man over with precise strikes to the spine, kidneys, and chest. Mr. Mountebank doubles over and vomits violently.

The Tailor places a vile of brackish liquid on the floor in front of him.

THE TAILOR

"I'm going to leave this with you. Call it a gift, but know this: There's enough for you or the girl, not both."

INT. SALOON -- NIGHT

MAGICIAN

"Did you know, they used to make instrument strings out of cat gut? It's true! The two-faced man showed Mr. Mountebank how to do the same with his daughter's bewitched entrails and now he plays the band's double bass."

Lotus, now seated at the magician's table, kicks Ahote's chair.

LOTUS

"That sounds a lot like the story Jack told me in Dodge City."

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Dante snorts derisively, abandoning his sleepy facade.

DANTE

"That's a very old trick. Medicine men and snake oil salesmen do it all the time. They poison a well or do some fake diagnosis to create an illness only they care 'cure.' Seen it a hundred times."

MAGICIAN

"Maybe so, young man, maybe so, but the Tailor is no mere flim fam man. He's a master of strange and terrible arts, born of the wizards who tamed the West..."

Valentine's Tale

INT. DIVE BAR -- EVENING

VALENTINE, a dark-haired beauty, sits in her latin FIANCE'S lap. She sips a beer and smiles like the sun. Two dusty MEN sit opposite them in a cramped booth.

FIANCE

(grinning)
"Next month."

One of his friends almost loses a mouthful of booze. The other swallows carefully before asking...

FRIEND

"That soon?"

VALENTINE

(mechanically)
"I've always wanted a spring wedding."

OTHER FRIEND

(raising his bottle)
"Well... to passionate hearts."

Four bottles clink, four bottles empty. Valentine plucks them from calloused hands. The men protest.

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VALENTINE

"Please. You boys spend all day on your feet. I'll get the next round."

She slinks her way out of the booth, walks up front, and deposits the spent bottles on the bar. She signals to the BARTENDER, but he's busy hitting on SOME WOMAN.

THE TAILOR (o.s.)

"Nectar."

Valentine jumps like a rabbit, but the wolf behind her has already backed off. He's a young man in a finely-tailored suit.

THE TAILOR

"Hummingbirds drink it for its high sugar content. The word was originally used to describe the drink of the gods. It means 'overcoming death.'"

She recovers quickly, looks him over, and decides to display her plumage.

VALENTINE

"Let me guess: You want to know what beautiful creatures drink."

THE TAILOR

(smiling)

"You've heard that one before?"

VALENTINE

"Not quite those words, but I know the tune."

The bartender finally wanders over. She orders four more. He staggers away with the fallen soldiers.

THE TAILOR

"You here with friends?"

(continued)

continued:

VALENTINE

"My fiance and his friends... and yes, he's the jealous type."

He takes her hand, turns it over.

THE TAILOR

"No engagement ring, so he's also either the impulsive type or the impoverished type. Either way, you could do so much better."

Her fermented quartet finally appears on the bar. She doesn't pick them up, not yet.

VALENTINE

(stepping close)
"Can't you see? I'm in love."

THE TAILOR

(examining her)
"Hmm... Yes, I do see. The color in your cheeks, the sheen of your hair."

He grabs her abdomen like he's robbing the till.

"I see exactly what you are."

She wrestles his hand away and retreats from the bar, leaving the drinks behind. Moments later, three angry drunks have come to claim them. Scratch that, they've come to claim him.

FIANCE

"What's your problem, zoot suit?"

The big man pushes him, playground style.

THE TAILOR

"Please, this suit is tailored. And I don't even like jazz."

(continued)

continued:

He pulls a slim, wooden case from an inside pocket and flips open the clasp, but the fiance knocks it out of his hand and over the bar. Needles scatter like dandelion seeds.

FIANCE

"I think you'd better leave, before something bad happens."

THE TAILOR

"Too late."

The Tailor kicks a barstool into his hands and jabs the seat towards his assailant's face. The big man tries to take it away, but the Tailor uses the legs and spokes to trap his arm... then dislocates it at the shoulder and elbow. The big man screams even bigger, stumbles back.

His friends step up, but both strike out. The bar stool crunches the bridge of a foot, breaks a fist in mid-punch, and cracks a skull at the temple. Both men fall.

The fiance returns with a knife in his good hand. The Tailor dodges a few slashes, then catches the blade by impaling his own palm. With the knife neutralized, the Tailor goes on the offensive.

He strikes the big man twice in the chest and once in the shoulder, rapid and precise. A spasm ripples through the fiance's body. His eyes roll back in his head and blood bubbles up onto his lips. He tips backwards, his weapon forgotten, and hits the floorboards like falling timber.

Valentine rushes to him. She cradles his shivering head in her lap and looks up at the Tailor with anguished eyes.

VALENTINE

"Am I supposed to be impressed?"

THE TAILOR

"I should say so."

Slowly, he pulls the blade from his hand, then binds the wound and vaults over the bar to collect his needles.

(continued)

continued:

THE TAILOR

"Your lover's not going to die. Not today, anyway. Just give him some water when he wakes up and make sure he doesn't do anything taxing for a while."

One of the other men fights his way back to consciousness and picks up the bloody knife, but the Tailor kicks him in the face on his way back over the bar. Tears stream down Valentine's face.

THE TAILOR

"God! If it'll make you feel better..."

He pops the quaking man's joints back into place, then plants a palm strike on his sternum. The shivering stops.

THE TAILOR

"See? Your big, strapping paycheck will be just fine."

He takes one of their beers with him as he struts out the door.

"See you around."

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

The dearly beloved are gathered as if for a wedding, but the bride is dressed in black and the groom lies in a casket. Valentine is now clearly pregnant. The PADRE gathers her and guides her to the receiving line.

When a young man in a pin-stripped suit appears before her, she almost screams.

VALENTINE

(harshly)
"What are you doing?"

(continued)

continued:

THE TAILOR

"I heard about your misfortune and wanted to help. Please allow me to cover your expenses. I've already spoken to the padre. I know a woman in your position has few options. If you need anything..."

He slips a business card into her hand.

EXT. MANSION -- DAY

A broken woman stands at a stranger's door. It opens to admit her. A butler brings in her bags.

INT. ANTEROOM -- DAY

The building is a lost fragment from another age, a museum of old west relics: SALOON FURNITURE, a bleached STEER'S SKULL, etc.

THE TAILOR

"I'm glad you came."

He approaches and kisses her on both cheeks. She responds like her creepy uncle just caught her under the mistletoe.

THE TAILOR

"I know we got off on the wrong foot, to say the least, but I think there was something between us, a force drawing us inexorably closer, like gravity."

He takes her hand and leads her down the hall.

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

VALENTINE

"Is this all yours?"

THE TAILOR

"It was my father's. He was an engineer. I used to help him build railroads when I was a boy."

VALENTINE

"I take it you don't mean models."

He chuckles distractedly.

THE TAILOR

"No, actual railroads. There are still a few to be built, you know. This great continent isn't tamed yet."

INT. STUDY -- DAY

They enter what is either a large study or a small library. The walls are stuffed with BOOKS. Only a lone window on the far wall competes with them for space. Strange DEVICES litter tables and shelves, but the DESK is immaculate, bare except for a few DOCUMENTS.

THE TAILOR

"I hope you don't mind, but I've had all the necessary documents prepared."

VALENTINE

"Documents? Necessary for what?"

THE TAILOR

"Come, now. We can't have you living here in sin."

She looks down at the marriage certificate and recoils.

(continued)

continued:

THE TAILOR

"You knew what this way when you knocked on the door. A woman in your position..."

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

VALENTINE

"Noooooooo!!!"

She screams with the lungs of a lioness. Her dark mane is matted against her face, slick with sweat. She twists the bed sheets beneath her.

VALENTINE

"It's too soon!! What did you do?! *What did you do?!*"

The Tailor stands at the foot of the bed and between her legs.

THE TAILOR

"I had nothing to do with this, remember? Blame either yourself or your first husband. Now push."

She screams again, strains like a heathen on the rack. When she finally relaxes, no child cries for its mother.

INT. ANTEROOM -- DAY

Valentine strikes the Tailor across the face.

VALENTINE

"You killed by husband and my son!"

Her bags are by the door, again, larger and more numerous than when she arrived. He has her pinned against the nearby wall.

(continued)

continued:

THE TAILOR

"Please. You never loved either of them.
There's only room in your heart for one."

VALENTINE

"That's right, which means I'll never love
you, so you can choke on that marriage
certificate. I'll never be your wife!"

THE TAILOR

"I think the sheriff would disagree."

He releases her, steps back, and straightens
his clothes.

"You can either stay here and meet your
contractual obligations, love be damned, or
you can spend the rest of your life as a
fugitive."

Her eyes blaze. She heads for the door. He grabs her by
the hair and SMASHES her head into a mirror, grinds her
face into the shards. His lips brush her ear.

THE TAILOR

"Not even I want you now."

INT. SALOON -- NIGHT

MAGICIAN

"That very night, Valentine and the two-faced
man went to the cemetery, dug up her fiance's
grave, and harvested his skin. They stretched
it across a wooden drum and trapped his soul
inside. It always beats a steady rhythm, even
when no one's playing."

AHOTE

"What about her stillborn child?"

(continued)

continued:

MAGICIAN

"Well, the Tailor had already cremated his remains, but Valentine had kept some of the ashes. The two-faced man used them to make a mojo bag. She wears it over her womb."

DANTE

"Wait, wait, wait. Is this guy a man with two faces or an actual two-faced man, in the hoodoo sense?"

MAGICIAN

"Both..."

Two Tony's Tale

INT. EVEN WORSE DIVE BAR -- NIGHT

A TRUMPET PLAYER'S soulful NOTES caress the AUDIENCE, such as it is. The DIRT FLOOR records the footprints of no more than a dozen men and women. They sit in creaky, wooden CHAIRS and tap their, often bare, feet to the languid rhythms of the blues.

TWO TONY, his face unpainted, sits with a couple near the STAGE.

BOYFRIEND

"Your brother's got a gift. Why ain't he playin' the District?"

Tony rolls his head slowly around, then lets his gaze slip up past the rim of his fedora and lock onto the GIRLFRIEND.

TWO TONY

"You need someone driven away, n'est pas?"

She gulps, fumbles in her PURSE, and produces a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. There's a white man's face in the swarm of dots.

(continued)

continued:

GIRLFRIEND

"He used to come see me at this club I worked at and now he won't leave us alone even after I quit and threatened to tell his wife everything."

She mines a wad of rumpled BILLS from her handbag and offers them up like a pagan prayer.

"Is this enough? We just want him to leave us be."

Tony counts his cash, weighs it on some invisible scale, then hefts a salesman's SAMPLE CASE into his lap. He digs in, muttering to himself, and pulls out a PICKLE JAR.

TWO TONY

"Here's what I'm gonna do."

He tosses in a handful of grey DIRT, nine rusty NAILS, one rotten EGG, and the newspaper clipping. He tightens the lid and gives the jar a single, violent SHAKE.

"Bury this where he'll walk over it, under his front step or outside where he works. Wait three days. If he's still sniffin' around after that, well, murder'd be worth considerin'. In the meantime, take this."

He plucks a GRIS-GRIS BAG from his case and hands it across the table to the woman.

"Wear it under your clothes, against your skin, and don't let nobody touch it."

The boyfriend starts to open his mouth.

TWO TONY

"No, not even your man, here. It'll protect you from..."

THE TAILOR (o.s.)

"Bullshit!"

(continued)

continued:

A mug SLAMS down on the driftwood bar like a gavel handing down a sentence.

THE TAILOR

"Can you believe this bullshit?"

The audience stares at him while the trumpet's notes fade away.

THE TAILOR

"He's selling you dirt in a goddamned jar!"

The blues musician's on his feet, his finger stabbing the air between himself and the Tailor.

TRUMPET PLAYER

"Wadaya you know about it, ofay?!"

THE TAILOR

"About bullshit?! Plenty! I had to wade through a sea of it to find *real* power."

BARTENDER #2

"Time to go, big-talker."

The Tailor reaches up and grabs the bartender's jaw in one hand, then yanks it a fraction of an inch. The bone POPS loose from its sockets.

THE TAILOR

"Shhhh."

He turns back towards the stage just as Tony bolts out of his chair. The hoodoo man brings one hand to his lips and blows a puff of yellow powder in the Tailor's face. Using his hat as both shield and fan, the Tailor waves the cloud back where it came from. The conjurer lurches away, pawing frantically at his eyes.

THE TAILOR

"I stand corrected! Looks like this shit does something after all!"

(continued)

continued:

The audience has bolted for the door. The trumpet player checks on his brother, then returns to the Tailor with balled fists.

TRUMPET PLAYER

"Did you come all the way out here just to pick on the colored folk?"

THE TAILOR

"I have nothing against negroes, but stupidity... I cannot abide stupidity."

With blood pulsing through his eyes, the hoodoo man rejoins the fray.

TWO TONY

"Let's go out to the crossroads and I'll show you my mojo."

THE TAILOR

"How about you show me right here?"

He draws a wooden case from his jacket, opens it, and removes several needles. He throws one at the trumpeter, pinning him in the forehead. His whole body goes rigid. Tony tries to intervene, but the Tailor kicks him through a table. More needles find their way into the musician's head. His lips grow foamy, his eyes roll back, and he falls to the floor.

THE TAILOR

(snapping his case closed)
"Fix *that* and I'll be impressed."

Tony crouches over his brother. He examines his eyes and lips, turns his head over in his hands, listens to his chest. He produces a SILVER DIME on a STRING and dangles it over the trumpeter, watching its every swing and spin with feverish concentration. Then, hands shaking, he yanks out every needle and flings them around the room.

(continued)

continued:

THE TAILOR

"Sorry, but no."

He walks around the bar, sees its tender cowering on the floor.

"You're still here?"

The bartender scampers past his feet and makes a hasty retreat.

THE TAILOR

(pouring himself a drink)

"Once the process is initiated, it's self-sustaining. You'll have to counter-act it... like a professional."

A parade of oddities proceeds from the sample case: SHINY STONES, VIALS OF BLOOD, severed CROW'S FEET, a SAL CRYSTAL, CAYENNE PEPPER. Some are rubbed into the patient's skin, some placed under his tongue, others forced down his throat. Nothing works.

THE TAILOR

"I'm getting bored. You're boring me. Bring out the ace material or, I swear, I might die before he does."

Tony rolls his brother over and pours of circle of SALT on the floor, then crosses it with an "X." Once his brother is lying back on top of it, he rolls up a PSALM, cuts the flesh of his palm, and lets his BLOOD mingle with the ink. Incanting beneath his breath, he places his other hand his brother's chest, fingers spread wide, and immolates the psalm in a flash of GREEN FIRE.

Nothing.

THE TAILOR

(applauding)

"Close! So close. I think you almost had something, there. I appreciate the showmanship, though. You're a real entertainer."

(continued)

continued:

Growling like a bear, the hoodoo man rises and turns toward the bar, but his brother's killer is already out the door. It swings closed, muffling the Tailor's LAUGHTER.

TRUMPET PLAYER

"Tony?"

The musician's eyes are back where they belong, barely, and he's struggling to sit. The two-faced man props him up against the stage.

TRUMPET PLAYER

"Where's my trumpet?"

Tony fetches the instrument and wraps his brother's fingers around the keys.

TRUMPET PLAYER

"Thank you."

He plays... weakly, but he plays. The NOTES float up to the ceiling and mingle by the FAN, dance around it like a maypole. Tony watches as, one by one, they slip out the WINDOW and drift away to where ever music goes when it dies.

INT. SALOON — NIGHT

MAGICIAN

"Now he lives for himself and his brother. No longer one man, he calls himself Two Tony and he has walked in the Tailor's footsteps ever since. With his band assembled, they've finally begun demolishing his great works, putting the land right again. Their justice shall bring back the rain and end all this misery!"

The magician seems to be waiting for an Hallelujah.

(continued)

continued:

LOTUS

"His 'great works?' So, they're not just trying to kill him? They're, what... knocking down bridges?"

MAGICIAN

"No. Well, one. The Tailor has built all kinds of things in the dustbowl. He built the damn that robbed this town of its water supply. He's got bridges and tunnels and railroads all over the place, tying the West up in knots."

AHOTE

"And untying those knots means what, exactly?"

MAGICIAN

"When they're all together, the band is powerful enough to destroy a city!"

Dante hops down off the bar.

DANTE

"And they're playing here. Tonight."

MAGICIAN

"Oh, yes!"

The little man vibrates with excitement.

"I'm finally gonna see the show!"

MONTAGE -- OPENING SCENE

- Dante climbs the church, rings the bell.
- Ahote outruns a flash flood.
- Lotus gets knocked down by a hoodoo jaz band.

INT. RUINS OF A SALOON -- NIGHT

Three people, all very wet and very angry, drag the magician out of the wreckage. Lotus lifts him by his bow tie. Dante pours the water out of his top hat and crushes it back on the little man's head.

MAGICIAN

"Wasn't that amazing! Even my dreams were an unfit opening act!"

Ahote leans in close and asks the little man one question.

AHOTE

"Where are they playing next?"

INT. BENTLEY'S BACK SEAT -- DAY

An unusual scene is framed in Sweetness' back window: A gaggle of ORPHANS and an ELDERLY COUPLE cavort beneath a gargantuan COWBELL. According a SIGN nearby, it's the world's largest.

DANTE

"I've seen bigger."

LOTUS

"Oh, you have not. It's the world's largest. Says so right on the sign."

DANTE

"Maybe not, but I did know a guy who built a triangle big enough to fit in Christ the Redeemer's right hand."

LOTUS

"What the hell for?"

(continued)

continued:

DANTE

"Brazilians love Carnivale! They wouldn't let him get it up the mountain, though. Apparently, important people thought it was sacrilege."

LOTUS

"Or maybe they thought it was stupid."

DANTE

"Or maybe that."

One of the orphans hurles a stone up at the bell, causing a calamitous CLANG. Dante and Lotus duck to avoid the reverberations.

In front of the car, the NURSE is bidding Ahote a leisurely adieu. When he covers his ears against the tolling of the bell, she plants a kiss on his cheek.

LOTUS

"Will ya look at that?!"

She gives the shaman a slow clap.

"Ahote's gettin' some despite himself."

DANTE

"That's about the only way he's gonna. You know he's afraid of white women?"

LOTUS

"No way."

Dante confirms with his serious face.

LOTUS

"Really?"

(continued)

continued:

DANTE

"As I live and breath. I offered to tutor him, but he ain't interested."

LOTUS

"You can tutor me."

She slides a hand up his arm, grabs him by the lapels.

"Tell me about this hoodoo stuff."

Dante's lights go out.

DANTE

"How should I know about that crap?"

Her body language shifts from *come hither* to *or else*.

LOTUS

"You sure sounded like you knew a thing or three back in the saloon, when the little barker was calling Two Tony a 'two-faced man.' If you don't know somethin' about somethin', then what was all that about?"

DANTE

"I don't wanna talk about it. It's all garbage, anyway. Nothin' but tricks and bullshit."

She looks as if she might shake him down, but the door opens and Ahote returns to his rightful place behind the wheel.

AHOTE

"We'd better get going. The band already has enough of a head start."

(continued)

continued:

DANTE

"And we don't know where they're going."

AHOTE

"I don't think we have to know," Ahote grins as he opens up the throttle. "I think they're following the Tailor's karmic current. If I just keep doing what I always do, let destiny pick our destination, I think we'll run right smack into them."

LOTUS

"Sure, but aren't you leaving out one, crucial detail?"

She leans into the front seat with a look of belabored sincerity.

"You're afraid of white women?!"

He blushes and the lovebirds roll with laughter as the nurse disappears in the rear view mirror.

AHOTE

"I'm not afraid of white women. As a red man, I'm just a little leery of accepting their affections. It's a good way to get lynched. Don't you ever worry about that, lover boy?"

DANTE

"They ain't never made a noose that can catch this neck!"

LOTUS

"Besides, there ain't no good ol' boys here and that nurse still had you trippin' over your own feet."

AHOTE

"Hey, I did alright around Esther, didn't I?"

Lotus flinches. The laughter dies.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- SUNSET

Dante teaches an OLD WOMAN the Charleston while his friends fix her flat tire. Ahote lines up the ratchet and Lotus knocks loose each bolt with a flick of her wrist.

AHOTE

"I'm sorry for bringing up Esther that way. I wasn't trying to shut your trap."

LOTUS

"I know."

She holds up the car while he rolls away the flat.

"I don't normally leave it open like that."

AHOTE

"It's a good thing."

He grunts as he wrestles the spare into place.

"Hess et tu tease."

LOTUS

"What?"

AHOTE

(breathing heavily)
"He sets you at ease."

LOTUS

"Dante. Yeah, he does. He's being real evasive about this hoodoo stuff, though. Didn't you get a whiff of somethin' back at the saloon?"

AHOTE

"Hmm... He did perk up quick when the magician started talking about hoodoo. Tighten these, will ya? I need a break."

(continued)

continued:

Lotus cranks through the task like a machine.

LOTUS

"John Henry was a sissy."

DANTE (o.s.)

"I bet he didn't look half as good in a suit, neither."

Dante has exhausted the old lady. She's perched on the trunk, swigging something out of hip flask.

DANTE

"You guys weren't talking about me, were you. My ears be burnin'."

LOTUS

"Sounds like a medical problem."

DANTE

"Good, 'cuz a man's got a right to his secrets."

Ahote shakes his head and smiles.

AHOTE

"Some day, my boy, you'll dearly regret saying that."

INT. BENTLEY -- NIGHT

Lotus slumps back in her seat and drags her fedora over her eyes. The sun has long set, but Ahote's still driving. He's turned completely around in his seat to pursue this conversation.

LOTUS

"All I'm saying is we're on the same side."

(continued)

continued:

AHOTE

"And let's not worry about those caught in the middle? They're destroying innocent people's homes and lives in the name of revenge!"

LOTUS

"Yeah, yeah. Revenge bad. I get it."

She peaks under the rim of her hat, but the shaman clearly remains skeptical.

LOTUS

"Seriously, I get that. I just don't wanna have this turn into Dodge City all over again."

Dante's forehead is pressed against the front seat. He lifts it an inch and lets it fall into the upholstery.

DANTE

"Yes, please no encores of *that* performance."

AHOTE

(to Dante)
"Judas."

(to Lotus)
"I admit, I snapped to a judgement on that one, but this situation is far less ambiguous. We watched them drown an entire town!"

LOTUS

"It was mostly deserted."

AHOTE

"I didn't see them evacuating the children, did you? Nor did they pause to talk before blasting you off a cliff. I'm not seeing a lot of concern for their fellow man."

(continued)

continued:

LOTUS

"They're bad, reckless people. Fine! No one's saying we should let them keep on doin' what they're doin', but maybe you could uncork some of that mystical wisdom you're always luggin' around. Put 'em back on the path, road shaman!"

DANTE

"If anything that little band promoter said was true, these people have already done some grisly things, just to build their fetishes."

Lotus and Ahote give him matching blank stares.

DANTE

"... their instruments."

His companions nod sagely.

DANTE

"They've dug up corpses and made strings out of intestines. They're doubled down on this bet. Nobody just walks away from shit like that, not on a stranger's say-so."

LOTUS

"We're gonna have to hit 'em separately, anyway. Whatshisface said they're only powerful when they're together. As long as they don't got their mojo workin', I don't see the harm in a little diplomacy."

DANTE

"You do what you'll do, baby doll, but, I'm not givin' mine a chance to blow or pluck or beat a single goddamned note."

He slumps back in his chair, arms crossed.

Lotus turns a wordless stare toward Ahote, but her eyes grow wide when a cow looms into view behind his head. The shaman turns the wheel without looking and swings them gracefully around the obstacle.

(continued)

continued:

AHOTE

"Fine. If we're splitting up the band, I guess words are all I'll have, regardless."

She gives him a sunrise smile.

AHOTE

"I do, however, reserve the right to hit them with my car."

EXT. HILLSIDE -- DAY

The hill juts up from Oklahoma's tabula rasa as if the Devil were poking his finger through from Hell. Dozens of giant, IRON SPIKES ring its base, each easily the size of a train car. JACKRABBITS infest the scene like flies on spoiled fruit.

The trio stands next to Sweetness, parked near one of the spikes, as they struggle to take in the scene.

LOTUS

"He did this, the Tailor. I know it. The Chinese do this kind of thing to lands they conquer: find holy sites and disrupt their chi. It demoralizes the locals, but this is something else. This is..."

AHOTE

"Industrial."

LOTUS

"I was going to say 'impressive,' but yeah."

Dante approaches the spike and crouches down, inspecting the mound of displaced SOIL that boils up around its base.

DANTE

"Back alley witch doctors are one thing, but this is monstrous. He's putting the whole Earth in leg irons."

(continued)

continued:

Lotus looks to her shaman, but he's already looking to her. They debate via sideways nods and raised eyebrows. Lotus loses.

LOTUS

"What happened to 'It's all just tricks and bullshit?'"

DANTE

"I never said tricksters aren't dangerous. All the Devil has are tricks, and look how much trouble *he* starts."

Slowly, resolutely, he stands and turns back toward them.

"I'll tell ya where we'll find Two Tony. Look for a crossroads; they're places of power."

EXT. CROSSROADS -- SUNRISE

They find Two Tony at a crossroads, sitting on a BENCH by a FOUNTAIN in the dead center of town. Sweetness rolls down one of four cobblestone boulevards that converge on this PLAZA, her headlights casting stark shadows on the ARCANE SYMBOLS carved into its masonry. She pulls up right in front of Tony's bench and Ahote lowers his window.

AHOTE

"Your gig's been cancelled."

Tony looks up with both faces, then casts his eyes around the rest of the plaza. Street lights shine on a PHONE BOOTH and a NEWSPAPER STAND, long since closed for the night. RAIN falls gently.

TWO TONY

"Do you work for him?"

He spits the words out like bad sangria.

Ahote steps out of the car while Dante exits and passenger's side and vaults effortless over the hood.

(continued)

continued:

AHOTE

"No. We're on your side, more or less, but we can't let you destroy these people's homes."

Tony gets up, starts backing around the fountain, opening up an escape route. Lotus floats down behind him, arms crossed.

TWO TONY

"What the hell happened to my band?"

INT. DINER -- NIGHT

Mr. Mountebank enters and sits down at a booth with his double bass. Before the WAITRESS can take his order, Ahote enters and slides into the seat opposite them.

AHOTE

"Have you ever had your leg humped by a dog?"

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"What?"

He fumbles for words and gropes for his gun.

AHOTE

"I mean really humped? Humped so hard that no amount of shaking or kicking could forestall the embarrassing-but-inevitable conclusion? Could I get a soda? Thank you."

The waitress hurries over with a chilled bottle and the fat man eases off his sidearm.

WAITRESS

(to Mr. Mountebank)
"Um... and for you, sir?"

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Just water."

(continued)

continued:

She retreats to her sanctuary behind the bar before he finishes speaking.

AHOTE

"I have. I don't think I did anything to lead the dog on. Our relationship was always friendly, but professional. We played a lot of fetch. At some point, he just got so worked up that his brain lost its bearings. The elevated heart rate, the heavy breathing, all that perfectly platonic pleasure coursing through his cortex... if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be sexual arousal."

The fat man draws his weapon under the table, but Ahote puts his foot up on the seat, trapping the gun beneath his heel.

AHOTE

"You're a lot like that dog, Mr. Mountebank. You've got all this rage and regret, all this emotion, but you're humping the wrong leg."

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Who are you?"

AHOTE

"I'm the good cop, Mr. Mountebank. My friends are meeting your friends at this very moment, and they're not stopping to chat. Let me assure you that I am indulging a life-long love of understatement when I tell you that they are, hands down, the two heaviest hitters this side of Perdition. By now, they've taken your band apart like stage lights after a show."

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The Shepherd sleeps fitfully on a motel bed. A DAMP TOWEL and DRY BOTTLE recount the evening's entertainment; they extend their thanks to the BRASS KNUCKLES and three EMPTY WALLETS on the night stand. A SAXOPHONE with IRON KEYS leans causally against the lamp, waiting for a trick to turn.

Dante slips in through an open window and perches over the old man. He pulls back the sheets and finds him nearly naked, but the only sign of his GRIS-GRIS BAG is an awkward bulge in his boxer shorts.

Dante crosses himself and looks away while his fingers plumb the old man's depths. Suddenly, a gnarled hand seizes his wrist.

SHEPHERD

"Son, a man always knows when someone's ticklin' his ivories."

INT. BUS -- NIGHT

Valentine stares blankly out the window as her bus pulls into the station. The place is freshly minted, all gleaming chrome and steady, neon lights. The buses line up beneath its awning like cattle at the trough.

Out on the curb, she spots a familiar face: Lotus is lurking among the cars parked nearby. Valentine shoves a young mother out of the way and drags her DRUM from the overhead compartment. The first BEAT blows out every window in the station.

EXT. BUS STATION -- NIGHT

Lotus hits the bricks as broken glass SPRAYS from a dozen automobiles. A newspaper van veers over the median and rolls onto the hood of a car, flipping it into the air. Lotus ducks again as the auto crashes to the ground behind her.

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The other passengers stampede, some even jumping through jagged window frames in their panic. Valentine tears into a frantic DRUM SOLO as Lotus hops onto the hood of a car and opens FIRE. The kinetic beats send each shot spiraling into the pavement. Glittering shards of glass dance in the concentric rings of sound waves coursing outward from the bus.

The bus' frame begins to buckle; its roof PEELS open like an onion. The car beneath Lotus begins to shake, then tip. She flies off as it rolls into the street, joining the rest of the wreckage.

The wildly vibrating chi spins Lotus off balance and drops her out of the sky. She lands between two buses just as they start to slide, so she kisses the pavement and lets them push each other into the street.

Lotus clutches her hat as the air ripples across her body, rattles her skull.

LOTUS

(mocking)

"'They're only powerful when they're together.' I'm gonna fucking kill that guy."

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The saxophone SCREAMS as Dante dives out the window. A wall mirror EXPLODES behind him. Shepherd BLASTS a hole in the outer wall. Dante runs back inside and dodges more blasts as Shepherd demolished the room.

When the sax finally catches him in mid-air, it throws Dante into the next room. He SLAMS into the far wall, then falls into bed between two terrified LOVERS. He kicks the male out one side, then rolls off the other with his woman. A BLAST reduces the bed to timber.

Dante leaves her with a wink and apologies to her beau on his way out the door. The Shepherd unleashes a LOW NOTE that demolishes the support beams between rooms. A plaintive CREAK passes down the length of the motel, then the ceiling...

EXT. BUS STATION -- NIGHT

... collapses in on itself. Dust billows out from what was recently a building, then flies away on the ceaseless WAVES OF SOUND. PIPES tumble out of the ruin and the waves scatter whenever they CHIME against each other. Lotus rolls through the debris and picks up two pipes, then gets to her feet. She CRACKS her new weapons against each drumbeat and the waves break before her.

Again, Valentine sees her coming. Her music becomes manic; the sound waves froth and boil. Lotus takes to the air, but this time her chimes cut a path through the pulsating churn. She lands in front of the drummer and PUNCHES one pipe through the drum's tattooed skin. Instantly, the world goes silent, save for a high-toned RINGING.

Lotus' other pipe crosses Valentine's ravaged face with a resolute CRACK!

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Dante kicks the door off its hinges and sends it sailing into the room. Shepherd BLASTS it toothpicks, but it gives Dante just enough cover to run up the rubble and escape onto the roof. The old man follows.

EXT. MOTEL ROOF -- NIGHT

Shepherd mounts the summit just in time to see Dante leap off the side. The Shepherd charges after, sucks in some ammunition, and blows one last volley... SQUEAK. He puckers up and blows again... SQUEEEEEK, SPUTTER.

The King of Swing smiles as he shimmies up a DRAIN PIPE on the neighboring building. He kicks off the wall flies back over. Below him, and all around the Shepherd, a crossroads symbol has been poured out in SALT.

The musician tries to run, but Dante plants his heels in the bastard's back and KNOCKS him to the ground. The saxophone SKITTERS across the gravel and smudges the five-spot.

DANTE

"Oh, too late."

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He rummages through the Shepherd's sundries,
then yanks the gris-gris bag free.

"And now I've got your mojo."

He hops off his quarry, SMASHES the sax against a
STOVEPIPE, and scatters the gris-gris' contents on the
night wind.

DANTE

"This house is clean."

INT. DINER -- NIGHT

The waitress drops off Mr. Mountebank's water like it's
a hand grenade. The contents aren't done spilling before
she's back in the kitchen, probably calling the police.

AHOTE

"I'm giving you a chance to make good, Mr.
Mountebank. I think you deserve it. Your
friends are after revenge, and I know how hard
that is to give up, but the Tailor isn't the
one responsible for your daughter's death, is
he?"

The fat man tries to yank his gun free, but Ahote's heel
is a vice. The water cup tips over completely and
CRASHES to the floor.

AHOTE

"You would've added a few more daughters to
your death toll, back at the dam, if not for
my friends and I. You're not too far gone, Mr.
Mountebank, but you need to let go of the
Tailor's leg. Tell me where you're supposed to
meet your hoodoo trumpeter. Tell me where to
find Two Tony."

EXT. CROSSROADS -- SUNRISE

Two Tony conjures a length of barbed wire from inside his raggedy suit and holds it up for their inspection.

TWO TONY

"You should'na faced me on a crossroads,
'specially not this crossroads. It was made
for magic."

Dante locks eyes with the two-faced man while Ahote offers Lotus a confused shrug. She takes a step towards Tony and he whirls, throwing the bit of trash at her like he's hurling a dagger. Lotus swings her gun to block, but connects with nothing. The barbed wire has vanished.

Then, she doubles over and GASPS in agony as blood SPRAYS from her mouth. Her men rush to help, but Tony's trumpet is all warmed up. He unleashes a TREBLY BLAST that pulses through the rain and BOUNCES Ahote off his automobile.

Dante slides to the side, skating along the wet cobblestones and skirting the fountain to reach his girl.

DANTE

"Are you alright?"

Her expression says he's an idiot for asking. She raises one gun over his shoulder and FIRES the clip, but Tony's ready for her. Staccato beats intercept each bullet and BLAST them to smithereens. The air ripples with rainbow light. He only stops to take a breath when her gun clicks empty.

Dante finally turns to face him, but not fast enough. Tony's next NOTE plucks him from the earth and throws him across the plaza. The shockwave pulverizes a brownstone, but Dante manages to find a nice, soft window to break his fall. The brick gives way all around, cratering under the impact.

Lotus stares blankly at her gun, lying there on the cobblestones as blood and water pour down in equal measure. Above her, Two Tony inhales for his killshot. He pulls the proverbial trigger, but a deep BASS TONE knocks it wide. Lotus loses her hat, but not her head.

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Two Tony turns to face Mr. Mountebank, who's instrument now stands near the phone booth at the edge of the plaza.

TWO TONY

"Do you betray *everybody* you know?! You deserve revenge as much as anyone, Mountebank! Don't tell me you gone an' grown a conscience!"

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"No, Tony. It was my fault. I let her die."

He plucks a resolute CHORD and the ground REVERBERATES. The cobblestones quiver, then loosen. Crackes spread out around the bass like bolts of lightning.

The conjure man counters with a sharp BURST of sound that thrusts like a spear point through the rain. Mr. Mountebank abandons his demolition to pluck a few defensive NOTES, deflecting the skewer through the phone booth. The air quakes as the discordant sounds duel one another.

Finally, a note SLICES through the bass' stand. It drops out of Mr. Mountebank's hands for just a moment, but it's long enough for Tony to PERFORATE the instrument with a furious solo.

To his right, Dante emerges from the brownstone with a six-foot pole. He charges, SCREAMING, and uses the pole to vault over Lotus. A fist of sound PUNCHES through the wood. Dante hangs in the air for a second, then drops to the ground and rolls beneath Tony's guard. He leaps back up with a mercy stick of jagged lumber in one fist. He brings it down on the conjure man's clavicle, GRINDING wood into bone.

His other hand grapples for the haunted trumpet. Two Tony lets it go and sinks his fingers into Dante's chest. They SEAR right through his clothes and bore holes between his ribs. The dancer SCREAMS and lets go of the stake, starts patting Tony down with both hands.

TWO TONY

(grinning madly)
"You best stick with that stick. I sew the important gris-gris into my flesh."

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Behind him, Sweetness SQUEALS on the wet road and speeds off down the street. Tony LAUGHS triumphantly, but then the Bentley spins a 180 and stares back at him with predatory eyes. Ahote REVS the engine and begins his charge. Tony tries to pull his hands free and reach for his trumpet, but Dante grabs his wrists and holds the conjure man fast.

The car hits the edge of the fountain and takes to the sky. Momentum carries the rear wheels forward as Sweetness back flips overhead; her bumper only clears Dante's scalp by inches. Ahote glares down at Two Tony as the car finishes its rotation, then SLAMS into the street right atop the remains of Mr. Mountebank's double bass. The stonework BUCKLES, the cracks widen, and the sewer swallows Sweetness whole.

Tony SHRIEKS and pulls back from Dante. He holds up his hands; each finger ends in a bloody, pulsing stump. Dante looks down at his chest, through the holes in his shirt, and finds no wounds.

Lotus pulls a twisted length of barbed wire from her throat, throws it on the ground, and picks up her guns.

Dante massages his chest with one hand and retrieves Tony's trumpet with the other.

DANTE

"God, I hope your fingers aren't still in there."

EXT. CROSSROADS -- DAY

At an outdoor cafe near the pulverized brownstone, Dante is spinning PLATES for Lotus' amusement while a WAITER and a BUSBOY jockey nervously between the dinnerware and the ground.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY -- DAY

Mr. Mountebank watches them from across the way. Between them, a team of WORKMEN are already hard at work repairing the crossroads.

Ahote takes a seat beside Mountebank and the recently retired musician grimaces. The shaman pats him on the shoulder.

AHOTE

"That's what this is all about, you know. People finding each other, doing their best to make each other happy. Justice becomes vengeance the moment it *stops* being about that."

Mr. Mountebank just stares at him expectantly, letting the moments accrue.

AHOTE

"What?"

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Oh, that's it? I was expecting some bizarre anecdote about a constipated turtle."

AHOTE

"I don't get blue this early in the morning."

They both turn back to the window. Lotus has commandeered her own set of sticks and plates, and now the two of them are juggling china in a cruel game of keep-away.

AHOTE

"You can still help us stop the Tailor, mojo or no."

Mr. Mountebank shakes his head and pats the case on the seat next to him.

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MR. MOUNTEBANK

"I have to go home and finish burying my daughter, then I'm done with all of this. Besides, I think you've got it well in hand."

The waiter and busboy collide with each other and tumble into the table, flipping it over. Hot coffee fills the air and both jugglers jump out of harm's way.

FADE TO BLACK on the sound of CRASHING china.

Epilogue

INT. CABIN -- NIGHT

Firelight flickers inside a lonely, dilapidated cabin. The cupboards are bare, but LIQUOR BOTTLES crowd the KITCHEN TABLE. Mr. Mountebank clutches a GLASS OF BRANDY and stares blankly into the FIREPLACE. A double barreled SHOTGUN sits beside him like a faithful pet.

The man's eyes are gaunt, but a full beard obscures the rest of his face. Grey hairs creep in at his temples and the corners of his mouth. He wears a HEAVY COAT, despite the fire, and lets his drink rest on his protruding belly.

Something kicks the back of his chair and he almost dives headfirst into the blaze. The brandy flies ahead of him, creating a BURST of heat and light that sears his corneas.

Then, someone is wrestling him to his feet, holding his arms behind his back. A woman's voice SCREAMS curses into his ear.

Two faces swim in his gradually-returning vision. It takes Mountebank a moment to realize he's not seeing double. Two Tony PUNCHES him hard across the face.

TWO TONY

"Been a long time, fat man. How are the wife and kids? Oh, that's right."

Mountebank spits out a TOOTH and looks around the room while Tony relieves the shotgun of its AMMO.

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MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Where's the old man? Did he finally give you and bitchcakes the ankle?"

Valentine knees him in the crotch.

TWO TONY

"The Shepherd is with us in spirit."

He holds up an empty BEER BOTTLE for inspection. SOMETHING BLOODY dangles from a STRING inside and it seems to pull toward Mountbank like a magnet.

TWO TONY

"He hates you even in death."

The bottle vanishes back into Tony's voluminous rags and is replaced by a BUTCHER'S KNIFE.

Valentine CHUCKLES behind Mountbank and leans in to bite his ear.

VALENTINE

"Get ready for a long night, fat man."

Two Tony grabs him by the jaw and shows him the rusty blade, then pauses.

TWO TONY

"Have you lost weight?"

He pats Mountbank down with increasing alarm, then tears open his coat. Buttons PING off the fireplace like stray bullets.

MR. MOUNTEBANK

"Funny you should ask."

Mountbank smiles as the WIRE running across the inside of his coat SNAPS, triggering the FIRING PINS on twenty-four sticks of DYNAMITE strapped to his decidedly lean stomach.

FADE TO WHITE

END