

4TH OF JULY

By

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EXT. GEORGIA FAIRGROUNDS – DAY

A suffocating cloud of crimson red dust hangs over the midday horizon. The sweltering Georgia heat beats down on a lively 19th-century carnival. Cotton candy vendors scream over the crowd. A distant calliope organ blares a cheerful, mechanical melody that feels completely hollow.

Walking through the thick of the crowd are MARY MATT (8, Albino, her stark white hair glowing like an eerie halo in the harsh sun) and her twin brother, ELIAS MATT (8, Black, eyes wide with childhood wonder). They hold hands tightly, navigating the sea of moving legs.

YOUR MOTHER (30s) kneels down in the dirt in front of them. Her face is lined with exhaustion, her hands calloused. She presses a shiny silver dime and a smooth nickel into Mary's small, pale palm.

MOTHER

You hold onto this tight, Mary.
Don't you let go. Take your
brother to see the animals, then
come straight back to the main
tent. You hear me?

MARY

(nodding fiercely)
I won't let go, Mama. Promise.

The Mother kisses both of their foreheads, stands, and disappears into the thick crowd toward a distant canvas tent. Mary closes her fist over the fifteen cents, feeling the cold metal press against her skin. She tugs on Elias's arm, pulling him away from the main thoroughfare toward the quiet, neglected back rows of the traveling carnival.

EXT. BEHIND THE TENTS – CONTINUOUS

The lively music of the calliope fades into a muffled, droning echo. Here, the air changes instantly—thick, damp, and foul. It reeks of wet hay, rotting wood, and animal musk.

They stop in front of a towering, rusted iron cage on the back of a wooden flatbed wagon.

Inside the cramped bars stands OLD RAJ, a colossal, magnificent elephant. His gray skin is crosshatched with thick, jagged white scars. He sways rhythmically from side to side, a restless, tragic dance of captivity. Mary and Elias stare up in absolute awe.

Nearby, in the deep shadows of a baggage wagon, two other enslaved children—KOFI (10, wearing tattered rags, his face smudged with soot) and SARAH (5, clutching a small piece of burlap)—watch the twins in terrified silence. They don't move. They barely breathe.

ELIAS

(whispering, eyes wide)

Look at his eyes, Mary. He looks
like he's lived a thousand years.
He looks like he's sad.

MARY

He's just lonely, Elias. Like
he's waiting for someone to talk
to him.

Mary reaches a small, pale hand through the rusted iron bars, aiming for the tip of Old Raj's trunk. Suddenly, a massive, oppressive shadow falls over both children. The Owner's lips curl into a slow, predatory grin, revealing teeth that are entirely too white. He looks the twins up and down, his eyes lingering on Mary's white hair and then Elias's dark skin.

THE OWNER

Well, now. Look what stumbled
into my backyard. Nature's little
contradictions. The Moon and the
Midnight, standing right in front
of me. Do you children belong to
anyone? Do you have a price?

MARY

(stepping out, defiant)

We aren't for sale. Mama gave us
fifteen cents. We just wanted to
see the elephants.

Mary proudly opens her pale palm, displaying the silver dime and nickel. Before she can blink, The Owner snatches her by the wrist. His grip is like an iron vice. Mary gasps as he squeezes brutally, twisting her arm until her fingers force open.

The silver dime and nickel clatter into the filthy sawdust below.

The camera hovers in a tight, suffocating CLOSE-UP on the smooth silver nickel buried in the dark, wet mud. The last image of her free childhood.

ELIAS

Let her go!

Elias lunges forward with raw, childhood bravery, throwing his small fists against the Owner's tailored coat—

THE OWNER

Worthless, ungrateful property.

With a swift, practiced backhand, The Owner swings his heavy brass cane. The solid metal strikes Elias squarely across the chest. Elias leaves his feet, crashing hard into the dirt, coughing violently as he gasps for air.

From the shadows, little Sarah covers her mouth to stifle a scream. Kofi grabs her, pulling her deeper into the darkness.

MARY

Elias!

Mary fires a desperate, vicious kick directly into The Owner's shin. Enraged, the Owner yanks Mary off her feet by her hair.

THE OWNER
(roaring)
Jackson! Get the crate! Now!

GUARD JACKSON (30s, burly) emerges from a nearby tent, dragging a heavy, reinforced wooden equipment crate. Jackson slaps a rough hand over her mouth, choking out her screams.

Together, the two men hurl the flailing, crying Mary into the pitch-black interior of the wooden crate. Before Elias can even stand up from the dirt, Jackson grabs him by the collar and throws him into the crate right on top of his sister. The heavy wooden lid slams shut.

INT. WOODEN CRATE – CONTINUOUS

Total, terrifying darkness. The sharp, metallic CLINK of a heavy iron padlock snapping shut seals their fate.

THE OWNER (O.S.)
(muffled, commanding)
Throw a tarp over it and move the wagons out the back gate. We just found the new headliners for our grand exhibition.

INT. SIDE-SHOW TENT – NIGHT (FOUR YEARS LATER)

Mary (12) and Elias (12) stand on a small, elevated wooden platform. A flickering oil lamp overhead casts a harsh, unflattering glare over them.

A small, jeering crowd of paying customers stands behind a velvet rope, whispering and pointing.

Mary's stark white hair has grown longer, framing her incredibly pale skin. Elias stands directly beside her, his arm wrapped around her shoulder protectively. The Owner (40s) paces the stage, gesturing to them with his brass cane.

THE OWNER

Step right up, ladies and gentlemen! Behold the grandest curiosity of the natural world! Born from the same womb at the exact same hour—The Moon and the Midnight! An albino freak and her shadow!

A rowdy PATRON in the front row leans forward, sneering.

PATRON

They don't even look like people. Look at her eyes. They're like milk.

The patron reaches out, trying to grab a strand of Mary's white hair. Elias instantly steps in front of Mary, slapping the man's hand away with a fierce glare.

ELIAS

Don't touch her!

The patron recoils, offended. Guard Jackson steps out from the wings immediately, uncoiling a heavy leather whip from his belt.

GUARD JACKSON

You don't talk to the guests, boy. Master told you about that mouth.

Jackson raises the leather whip. Mary lunges forward, throwing her own small body over her twin brother's back to shield him from the blow.

MARY

No! Strike me instead! Strike me!

Jackson pauses, looking to The Owner for guidance. The Owner merely chuckles, tapping his cane against the floorboards.

THE OWNER
(laughing, to the crowd)
Don't worry, folks! The boy's got
a bit of

(MORE)

THE OWNER (CONT'D)
grit, but he knows who buys the
corn. Every soul in this tent is
worth a pretty penny, but I
wouldn't trade these two for a
goddamn nickel!

Jackson grabs Elias by the collar, dragging him off the stage. Mary watches them go, her small fists clenching so tightly that her fingernails draw blood from her pale palms.

EXT. ELEPHANT PICKETS - MIDNIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

A low, sweeping fog rolls across the circus lot. The encampment is dead silent, save for the rhythmic, heavy clanking of iron chains.

Mary (12) slips through the shadow of the main stables, her bare feet silent in the wet straw. Her shoulders shake with silent sobs, her mind racing with the image of Jackson dragging Elias away.

ELIAS (O.S.)
(whispering from behind
a hay bale)
Mary... slow down. Jackson is
still checking the horse lines.
If he catches you out here...

MARY
(without looking back)
He's hurting you because of me,
Elias. Every single time. I can't
stay in that tent. I can't let
them look at me anymore.

She runs blindly toward the heavy stakes where Old Raj is chained. The colossal elephant sways rhythmically in the dark, a silent ghost of grief.

Mary drops to her knees in the dirt right in front of the beast's massive front legs. She buries her face in her hands, her white hair falling forward like a shroud. To keep her mind from shattering, she begins to whisper her mother's favorite skipping rhyme, her voice trembling.

MARY (CONT'D)

(whispering, sobbing)

Ms. Mary Matt, Matt, Matt... All
dressed in black, black, black...

Old Raj stops swaying. His massive head tilts in the darkness.

Slowly, deliberately, the colossal elephant lowers his trunk into the dirt, sliding the tip across the wet grass until it gently brushes against Mary's small, trembling shoulder.

Mary freezes. She looks up through her tears, her pale eyes wide in the moonlight.

The elephant doesn't pull away. He blows a soft, warm draft of air against her cheek, a gentle pressure that feels entirely like a caress. Mary reaches out her small, pale hand, her fingers pressing deep into the rough, scarred skin of his trunk. As she touches him, a profound, eerie silence falls over the clearing. The trembling in her chest stops.

Elias steps out from the shadows, watching them in absolute awe.

ELIAS

(breathless)

Mary... he's listening to you.

Mary slowly stands up, keeping her palm flat against the elephant's trunk. Her gaze locks onto Old Raj's massive,

dark eye.

MARY
(her voice suddenly
steady, cold)
He knows, Elias. He knows what
they are. He's waiting. Just like
we are.

She begins to hum the rhythm of the rhyme again, her hand moving in a slow, rhythmic pattern against the elephant's skin. Old Raj closes his eyes, leaning his massive weight toward her.

INT. THE MAIN TENT – NIGHT (TEN YEARS LATER)

A suffocating blanket of heat hangs under the canvas ceiling,

trapped alongside the heavy stench of cheap tobacco, stale popcorn, and sawdust.

In the center ring, MARY MATT (18) sits cross-legged on a low

wooden platform. Her stark white hair is tightly braided with

jagged strands of silver wire that catch the light like small

blades. Her pale face is entirely expressionless as she ties

a thick, black lace blindfold over her eyes. Her lap is weighed down by a solid, heavy block of granite.

Standing directly over her is ELIAS MATT (18). His bare back

is a roadmap of thick, silver keloid scars. He breathes

heavily,

balancing a massive, iron-headed sledgehammer in his calloused hands.

In the wings of the tent, working the heavy rigging ropes, an

older KOFI (20) and SARAH (15) watch the center ring.

The Owner steps into the center spotlight, wearing a velvet

tailcoat. He gestures toward the platform with his brass cane.

THE OWNER

Ten years of training! Ten years of

perfection! Tonight, for your absolute

amusement, the Midnight will shatter stone

upon the Moon!

In the ring, Elias looks down at Mary. He lowers his voice to

a bare whisper.

ELIAS

(low, urgent)

My hands are slick, Mary. The heat

in here... the iron is slipping.

MARY

Break it, Elias. Before he comes

over here.

Elias takes a deep, ragged breath. He raises the heavy iron

sledgehammer high above his head, his muscles locking. The

audience goes dead silent. Elias swings the hammer down with

immense, explosive force. CRACK.

The sledgehammer meets the granite block with a deafening report.

The stone shatters into jagged fragments. One sharp, violent

shard grazes Mary's cheek under the edge of the cloth, drawing a

thin line of crimson blood that tracks slowly down her pale jawline.

Beneath the blindfold, her face remains completely still. Dead stone.

The Owner steps forward, tipping his hat to the crowd, completely

ignoring the blood on Mary's face.

THE OWNER

And now, ladies and gentlemen!
The act

that defied death from London to
New York!

The Eclipse Catch!

EXT. TRAPEZE PERCH – MOMENTS LATER

The air fifty feet above the ground is dizzying. Mary and Elias stand side-by-side on a narrow, trembling wooden platform.

Elias adjusts his grip on the support wire, his eyes tracking upward to the primary rigging beam. A massive, rusted iron pulley holds the main trapeze cable.

ELIAS

(low voice)

Look at the housing, Mary. The weld is snapping. Don't jump. Not tonight.

MARY

If we stall the show, Jackson takes the heavy leather to Kofi and Sarah. I have to jump, Elias. On three.

In the front row, a WEALTHY PATRON (50s, covered in gold rings, holding a glass of whiskey) slams his fist on the wooden barricade. He sneers up at the platform.

WEALTHY PATRON

Aw, come on, Lowe! We've seen the catch a hundred times! Make 'em do it backward! Blindfolded!

The crowd grumbles, shifting in their seats. The Owner pauses, his eyes narrowing.

WEALTHY PATRON

(CONT'D)

(reaching into his vest)

Tell you what. I'll throw in an extra silver nickel if you make the Midnight catch her with his eyes shut. Let's see how much that freak blood is really worth!

The Wealthy Patron flips a shiny silver nickel through the air.

The camera drops into an icy, breathless SLOW-MOTION as the nickel spins end-over-end through the rising cigar smoke, catching the glare of the hot gas-lamps. A blinding omen of sorrow.

The Owner catches the coin out of the air with a lightning- fast snap of his hand. He looks down at the silver, his greedy lips curling into a predatory smile. He points his brass cane directly at Elias.

THE OWNER

You heard the gentleman.
Blindfolded. And don't look back.

Mary and Elias share a look of absolute dread. Elias whispers fiercely under his breath as he ties the black cloth over his eyes.

ELIAS

If I'm blindfolded, I can't see
the cable snap!

MARY

He won't let us down until he
gets that coin, Elias. We don't
have a choice.

Before Mary's fingers can catch him, Elias leaps into the open air. He arcs perfectly through the heat of the tent, reaching for the oncoming trapeze bar-

SNAP.

The rusted iron pulley shears completely off the overhead rigging beam with the explosive crack of a gunshot. Elias's fingers miss the metal bar by inches. He drops fifty feet. The audience lets out a collective gasp. Elias hits the heavy wooden center stage with a sickening, hollow thud.

Mary screams-a raw, primal, screeching sound. She slides down the vertical support pole, her rough palms skinning raw against the coarse rope, leaving streaks of blood on

the line. She drops to her knees beside him in the sawdust.

Elias takes one final, rattling breath. His hand twitches in the dirt, his fingers curling inward. Then, his body goes completely still.

The Owner rushes into the ring, walking straight to the snapped cable, examining the sheared weld.

THE OWNER

That pulley cost me four dollars
in Savannah! The whole rigging is
ruined! Get this mess cleared
out!

MARY

(screaming, weeping)

He's dead! You killed him! You
knew the lines were rotted and
you sent him up there blindfolded
for a goddamn nickel!

The Owner turns his cold, stone-like eyes down toward Mary.

THE OWNER

He was clumsy, Mary. And clumsy
property is a bad investment.
Roustabouts! Get her off the
floor. We have an encore to
finish.

Two burly handlers step forward, violently ripping her away from Elias's body. Mary doesn't fight them. The frantic, desperate grief in her pale eyes instantly solidifies into a cold, blinding, white-hot clarity.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS – NIGHT (ONE YEAR LATER)

A massive holiday celebration is underway. Fireworks explode in

brilliant bursts over the main performance tent.

Inside the ring, MARY (19) stands at the center, her white hair

braided with silver wire. She scales the massive trunk of OLD RAJ.

As the fireworks thunder overhead, Mary looks down at the ring where

Elias fell. She closes her eyes and whispers under her breath:

MARY
(whispering)
They jumped so high, high,
high...

They touched the sky, sky, sky...

Her eyes snap open—cold, razor-sharp, and devoid of fear.

She releases her grip, dropping into the center ring and kicking

a pre-set flash-powder charge. A suffocating cloud of thick white

smoke fills the entire tent.

In the total chaos, Mary slips through the rear flap into the dark,

rainy night.

EXT. ELEPHANT PICKETS – MOMENTS LATER

Mary runs through the downpour, discarding her scorched white cloak into the brush. Guard Jackson spots her movement from the edge of the property, raising his lantern.

GUARD JACKSON
Hey! Stop right there!

Mary ducks behind a heavy supply wagon, pulling a heavy iron crowbar from her tunic. She swings it down, smashing the padlock on Old Raj's leg chain. Guard Jackson tackles her from behind, slamming her into the mud. Mary fights back with visceral fury, striking him with the iron bar. She breaks free, climbs onto Old Raj's back, and commands the elephant forward.

OLD RAJ ROARS, violently crashing through the wooden perimeter fence and plunging into the rushing river, escaping into the darkness.

EXT. PINE CLEARING – DAY (DAYS LATER)

The rain has stopped, leaving the thick Georgia woods dripping,

silent, and choked with rising morning mist. Deep in a hidden

hollow stands a crude, sturdy lean-to shelter built from cracked

pine branches and packed red mud.

Mary stands at the edge of the clearing, her raw, skinned palms

caked in dried black mud. Old Raj stands near a thick oak. The

heavy iron shackle that once bound his leg lies broken in the brush.

Mary steps toward him, her movements slow, deliberate, and perfectly silent, carrying crushed wild blackberries.

MARY

Come here, boy. Easy. No hooks
today.

No hooks ever again.

Old Raj rumbles—a deep, low vibration through the dirt. He
extends

his massive trunk, gently sweeping the berries into his
mouth. Mary

steps closer, pressing her forehead against his massive,
scarred trunk.

MARY (CONT'D)

(softly chanting)

She asked her mother for fifteen
cents...

to see the elephant jump the
fence...

Old Raj tilts his massive head and lets out a low, breathy
huff,

shifting his weight in perfect rhythm with her words.

MARY (CONT'D)

They think you're just property.
We're going

to show them what happens when a
king takes

back his freedom.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE – DAY

A blistering sun beats down on the bustling brick square.
Mary moves through the crowd, her white hair completely
hidden beneath a tattered vendor's shawl.

She stops near a vegetable cart. Nailed to a telegraph pole is a peeling circus poster: *LOWE'S EXTREME CENTENNIAL

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EXHIBITION*

Across the cobblestones, the heavy oak doors of the bank swing open. The Owner steps out, clutching a brass-locked leather satchel flat against his chest. Beside him steps Guard Jackson, a loaded rifle cradled in his arms.

Mary steps deeper into the shadow. Her fingers slide inside her cloak, scratching a fresh mark into a pine twig with a

*

piece of flint: *Two guards.
Front gates. Noon.

The Owner climbs into a carriage, and the convoy rattles down the road. Mary lowers the shawl just enough to breathe the dusty air.

MARY

Enjoy the coin while you have it.

INT. KITCHEN TENT - MIDNIGHT (THREE WEEKS LATER)

The air inside the canvas kitchen tent is a humid fog of boiling grease and lye. Kofi stands over a massive cast-iron cauldron, scrubbing with a wire brush. Sarah stands beside him, wiping a stack of heavy ceramic platters clean. Kofi freezes, dropping the wire brush into the cauldron with a dull CLANG. He reaches slowly for a heavy iron meat cleaver resting on the table.

KOFI

Jackson? That you? We're almost
through with the pots...

Out of the deep shadows behind the flour barrels, Mary

steps into the dim candlelight. Her white hair is hidden beneath a dark canvas hood.

SARAH
(gasping)

Mary!

In her sheer panic, Sarah's slick hands lose their grip on a heavy ceramic platter. It slips, tumbling through the air toward the hard dirt floor. Mary lunges forward with explosive speed, dropping to one knee. She catches the heavy platter three inches before it strikes the ground. Not a sound is made. Mary slowly stands, placing the platter quietly onto the table. She places a single finger over her lips.

MARY
Shh. I told you I'd come back for you.

Sarah throws her arms around Mary's waist, sobbing silently. Mary holds her tight, her eyes fixed on Kofi. Kofi looks at Mary, his chest heaving with terror.

KOFI
Mary, you shouldn't be here.
Jackson's been patrolling the
back perimeter every hour with
the hounds. If they catch you—

MARY
They won't catch me, Kofi.

KOFI
It doesn't matter. You can't get
the others out.

The minute the evening show ends, Jackson locks the slave quarters with the heavy iron deadbolt. He keeps the brass key chained to his belt.

Mary reaches into the deep pocket of her tunic. The clink of cold metal echoes. She pulls out a massive ring of keys

snatched from Guard Jackson's belt during her struggle. She forces the ring directly into Kofi's hands.

MARY

The 4th of July celebration is in exactly three weeks. The Owner is bringing in the biggest crowd of the year. The tents will be packed, the guards will be distracted, and the fireworks will be loud enough to mask any sound we make.

Kofi stares down at the keys, his jaw dropping.

MARY (CONT'D)

Kofi, you keep those keys hidden in the bottom of the grain sacks. Sarah, you talk to the other ten children. Tell them when the first mortar hits the sky on the 4th of July, they don't run for the roads. They wait for my whistle behind the main stables.

Sarah takes the keys from Kofi and slides them deep into her apron pocket. Mary pulls her hood back over her white hair, steps into the rear crease of the canvas flap, and vanishes into the midnight rain.

EXT. PINE CLEARING – NIGHT (TWO WEEKS LATER)

The midnight air is dense. A single lantern sits on the dirt floor of the lean-to shelter, shielded by a canvas flap. Kofi and Sarah sit in a circle on the ground alongside three of the younger captive children, weaving wild hemp vines. Mary sits cross-legged, her blistered fingers moving with mechanical precision.

MARY

If the rope isn't tight, the friction of the canvas will burn right through it before the main

tent can drop. Twist it over.
Like this.

She passes the thick cord to Sarah. Kofi looks over his shoulder toward the dark woods.

KOFI
Jackson counted the children
twice during the lockdown
tonight, Mary. He knows someone's
been slipping out.

MARY
Let him look. Did you get the
kerosene?

KOFI
Two jars. Hidden beneath the hay
in the stables.

Mary takes a tattered piece of parchment, pointing a piece of charcoal to a crude drawing of the main performance ring's structural ropes.

MARY
They won't be looking at the
perimeter when the first mortars
hit the sky. That's our clock.

Sarah, when the crowd cheers for the grand finale, you take the little ones to the rear flap. Kofi, you and I cut the rigging.

Sarah looks at the heavy hemp rope in her lap. To keep her courage up, she begins to hum a low, breathless tune under her breath.

SARAH
(low whisper, rhythmic)

*
*Ms. Mary Matt, Matt, Matt...
*All dressed in black, black,

*

black... *With silver buttons,
buttons,

*

buttons...

*

*All down her back, back, back...

The younger children join in, their tiny voices a mere
whisper against the wind.

CHILDREN
(whispering in unison)

*She asked her mother, mother,

*

mother... *For fifteen cents,
cents,

*

cents... *To see the elephant,
elephant,

*

elephant...

*

*Jump the fence, fence, fence...

Mary stops weaving. She looks at the children, the
charcoal tight in her hand.

MARY

They jumped so high, high,
high... They touched the sky,
sky, sky...

KOFI
(finishing the line)

And they didn't come back, back,
back... 'Til the 4th of July.

Mary stands up, looking north through the dark trees toward the distant circus encampment.

MARY

Tomorrow night. We finish it.

EXT. EDGE OF THE CIRCUS CAMP – NIGHT (4TH OF JULY)

The sky explodes with massive, deafening holiday fireworks. Mary sits atop Old Raj at the tree line, wrapped in a dark canvas cloak. Surrounding the elephant, the twelve children stand in a circle. Mary hands a long, unlit wooden torch to each of them. She raises her hand, signaling the deployment.

EXT. THE OWNER'S TRAILER – MOMENTS LATER

The Owner steps out of his private wooden trailer, clutching his leather satchel of cash tightly against his side. Out of the deep shadows, Old Raj steps forward, completely blocking his exit path to the road.

Mary places two fingers to her lips and blows a sharp, piercing whistle. Kofi, Sarah, and the ten liberated children step out from between the wagons, completing a tight circle around the ringmaster.

THE OWNER

What is the meaning of this? Get
back to your cages!

Kofi and Sarah strike matchsticks against the rocks, lighting their torches. The Owner drops his brass cane and pulls a small pocket pistol from his coat.

Suddenly—

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

From the pitch-black roofs of the surrounding wagons, a dozen blinding oil lanterns flare open all at once. A dozen armed guards step into the light, their rifles aimed directly down at the children. Guard Jackson steps out

from behind the carriage, a cruel smile cutting across his scarred jaw.

GUARD JACKSON

Did you really think I didn't see
the tracks in the mud, Mary? We
changed the padlocks two weeks
ago, girl. You brought these
children straight to the
slaughter.

The children gasp, backing up in absolute terror. The Owner throws his head back, unleashing a booming, theatrical laugh. Mary sits atop Old Raj. A slow,

"happy but evil" smile

spreads across her pale face.

MARY

Jackson didn't find my tracks,
Lowe. I left them for him.
Because I needed you to bring
every single guard out into this
courtyard tonight. Kofi! Sarah!
Pull the high lines!

Kofi and Sarah pull the pins on the heavy hemp ropes Mary had them weave. The heavy iron mortar tubes are instantly yanked sideways by Old Raj's immense strength, turning ninety degrees on their axles—aiming their explosive barrels horizontally at the wagons and guards.

The grand finale ignites. A blinding barrage of explosive rockets, mortar shells, and firebombs shoot horizontally across the lot, detonating the wagons into giant balls of fire. The guards scream, dropping their weapons and scattering in absolute chaos.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE – CONTINUOUS

In the blazing confusion of the explosions, Guard Jackson tries to steady his rifle, aiming directly through the

smoke at Mary. Before he can squeeze the trigger, a war-cry rips through the yard.

Kofi (20) lunges through the smoke, slamming a heavy iron pot directly into Jackson's jaw. Jackson stumbles, but swings his rifle butt, catching Kofi in the ribs.

Suddenly, little Sarah (15) and the ten liberated children swarm him like a pack of wolves. They use their raw, unified weight, their bare hands pulling and dragging the brutal handler down into the wet mud. Jackson screams, completely overwhelmed by the very children he terrorized for a decade, as they brutally disarm him and pin him to the earth, stripping away his authority forever.

INT. THE MAIN TENT - CONTINUOUS

The horizontal rockets pierce through the canvas walls, turning the interior into a vortex of fire. The Owner runs through the burning sawdust, but Old Raj plunges through the canvas, his trunk wrapping around The Owner's waist. With a massive grunt, the elephant slams him hard into the center ring.

The Owner scrambles backward on his hands and knees, blood leaking from his mouth, completely cornered against the primary wooden support beam. Mary slides down from Old Raj's back. She walks slowly through the burning sawdust, her black mourning tunic trailing behind her, the silver buttons down her back catching the brilliant white glare of the explosions. In her hand, she clutches the heavy, solid brass cane The Owner dropped in the mud.

Her face is caught in a terrifying close-up: an evil, happy smile, her pale eyes wide with an unhinged hunger for justice.

THE OWNER

(weeping, coughing in
the smoke)

Mary... please. I made you a
star. I can give you everything.
The money... take the satchel!

Mary steps directly over him, the brass cane catching the firelight. She lets out a sharp, happy, breathless laugh.

MARY

You told that crowd you wouldn't
trade us for a goddamn nickel.

RAPID-FIRE

PSYCHOLOGICAL

MONTAGE

(FLASHBACKS):

- A flash of eight-year-old Mary's pale fingers forcing open, her mother's nickel clattering into the dark, wet sawdust mud.
- A flash of the silver nickel spinning end-over-end through the hot tent air in dizzying slow-motion, glinting under the lights.
- A flash of eighteen-year-old Elias hitting the center stage with that hollow, sickening, bones-shattering THUD.

BACK TO SCENE:

Mary raises the heavy brass cane high above her head. The firelight paints her white hair a deep, demonic crimson.

MARY (CONT'D)

Well, look at you now. You took
his whole life... and it didn't
save you a fucking dime.

She brings the heavy brass cane down with visceral, crushing force directly onto The Owner's knee. A hollow CRACK echoes over the roar of the fire. The Owner shrieks in agony.

Mary strikes again, smashing his shoulder, pinning him against the burning wood beam. She lets out a final,

happy, breathless laugh that cuts right through his screams. The main canvas roof snaps, a towering wall of blazing canvas and burning rigging ropes collapsing entirely over the center ring, swallowing the tyrant's screams in a mountain of roaring ash.

EXT. RED DIRT ROAD – DAWN

The sun rises over the smoking, black ruins of the circus. Mary sits atop Old Raj, guiding the elephant north along the empty road. Behind them, Kofi and Sarah lead the ten liberated children in a single-file line toward a brand-new life of freedom.

Mary looks back over her shoulder. Her face is framed in a striking CLOSE-UP: Her happy but evil smile remains fixed as the camera pulls back into a slow, heavy crawl to black.

Sarah begins to clap her hands in a slow, sharp, rhythmic beat against her apron. Kofi joins the rhythm, his voice rising into the morning wind as he chants the updated, haunting playground rhyme:

KOFI
(chanting)

*

*Ms. Mary Matt, Matt, Matt...
*All dressed in black, black,

*

black... *With silver buttons,
buttons,

*

buttons...

*

*All down her back, back, back...

The children join in, their voices echoing loudly over the red dirt road, building into a unified anthem.

CHILDREN

(chanting in unison)

*She asked her mother, mother,

*

mother... *For fifteen cents,
cents,

*

cents... *To see the elephant,
elephant,

*

elephant...

*

*Jump the fence, fence, fence...

AS THE FRAME

HITS TOTAL BLACKNESS,

MARY'S VOICE

ECHOES OUT IN A FINAL,
HAPPY BUT

CHILLING WHISPER:

MARY (O.S.)

(whispering)

*They jumped so high, high,

*

high...

*

*They touched the sky, sky,
sky...

(MORE)

MARY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*And they didn't come back, back,

*
back... *'Til the 4th of July!*

FADE TO BLACK.