

Shea Man

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW ENGLAND - EARLY 1900s

Rugged upstate New York farm, landscape beautiful and severe, spring.

JOHNSON SHEA, 40s, craggy as the landscape, guides two oxen plowing the stony soil. THOMAS SHEA, 16, tall and gangly, trails behind, piling stones to be carted away.

Suddenly, Johnson calls to Thomas. Thomas unhooks a wire mesh from the traces. Johnson shovels in soil, and they sieve until two perfect Indian arrowheads appear. With smiles on their dirty faces, they inspect the artifacts carefully.

THOMAS' VISION

In an instant, Thomas in his mind sees the whole arrow nocked into the sinew tied to a bow drawn by the lean hands of an aboriginal sighting along the arrow's length and ready to release it. Which he does.

FIELD

JOHNSON

Keepers.

THOMAS

For sure.

INT. BARN - EVENING

Johnson hammers four brads into a wall lined with arrowheads of all shapes, each resting on two brass brads and labeled by a strip of stiff white paper perfectly lettered with date and location.

To the side are shelves lined with fossils, also dated and located: trilobites, mastodon bones, etc.

Thomas, at the workbench, prints in perfect miniscule letters.

ENTRANCE TO BARN

SARAH SHEA, 40s, rough exterior but with laughlines around her eyes, stands drying her hands.

SARAH

You two will have more arrowheads than all the Indians ever had.

THOMAS

That is a logical impossibility.

Thomas hands a label to Johnson, who holds it with tweezers while Thomas applies a thin line of glue. Together, they press the label home under the new arrowheads.

SARAH

I wonder how many mothers get insulted like that in a day.

JOHNSON

He wasn't insulting you.

They put up the second label.

JOHNSON

Come see.

Sarah joins them, and the three look at the admittedly impressive, if amateur, scientific display.

SARAH

(tousling Thomas' hair)
My little scientist.

(snaps Johnson's suspenders)
My big scientist.

Johnson grabs her towel and playfully snaps it at Sarah's behind.

JOHNSON
And the woman who keeps 'em fit.

Johnson and Sarah LAUGH as she tries to get the towel away from him.
Suddenly he turns and faces her.

JOHNSON
Come dance with me, Sarah Shea.

They dance a jaggedy reel over the rough floorboards. Thomas can't conceal a smile at his foolish parents.

JOHNSON
C'mon, Thomas—give the belle of the ball a whirl!

Johnson pulls in his son, and Thomas and Sarah high-step around the barn as Johnson claps time and LAUGHS.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM - AFTER DINNER

Thomas, schoolbooks open, studying. He overhears the arguing VOICES of his parents in the dining room.

INT. STAIRCASE

Thomas, on the stairs, can see into the dining room. The VOICES now are distinct, sharp. Between them is what looks like a new book. Also two mugs of tea and a ledger.

INT. DINING ROOM

JOHNSON
He is going to go to state university after next year,
and I don't care what it costs.

SARAH
Not if you keep buying books—

Johnson lays his hand on the book, strokes the spine.

JOHNSON

We will find the means.

SARAH

Not if you keep buying books the cost of which would feed us for a month.

STAIRS

Through the open door of the dining room can just be seen the pale face of Thomas peering through the balusters.

DINING ROOM

JOHNSON

This book— He is not going to turn into a dirt farmer.

SARAH

You're not just a "dirt farmer."

Johnson opens the big accounting ledger to a page of figures in red and black ink.

JOHNSON

Look at this, Sarah.

SARAH

I know what it says.

JOHNSON

Look at it.

SARAH

I know what it says.

JOHNSON

And all our hard work has gotten us what?

(tapping page)

That's it. That's all. And will it get any easier?

Everything in this town is drying up—us included. But not for him. Not for him.

STAIRCASE

Thomas, head leaning against the baluster, picks at the varnish, his face pained and troubled.

THOMAS
(whispering)

Not for him.

DINING ROOM

Johnson lets the ledger close with a THUD.

JOHNSON
We'll make it fine for this year, and probably the next couple, as long as the crews keep digging the gravel for the roads and the cows milk clean.

A moment of SILENCE—a clock TICKS, the house CREAKS.

SARAH
I want him to go, too, you know.

JOHNSON
He's got the head for it.

SARAH
Just look at his parents.

JOHNSON
But you and I never wrote a paper. A paper! A scientific paper at fifteen. And sending it to the state university museum director.

Sarah takes up the two mugs, moves toward the kitchen.

JOHNSON
Sarah?

She stops, waits.

JOHNSON
Am I still the guy with all the big plans you married?
No, I'm not.

SARAH

Plans have changed, the man hasn't.

Johnson lets his finger trace over the book.

JOHNSON

It's me who wants to go, you know.

SARAH

I know. Freshman Johnson Shea—now, that would be a sight! Let me wash these.

Sarah starts to exit into the kitchen, then walks over and gives Johnson a peck on the temple. Then into the kitchen.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Thomas at his desk, books open, his eyes staring at the wall in front of him. A KNOCK on his door.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

Thomas?

THOMAS

It's open, Dad.

Johnson and Sarah enter, Johnson holding the book.

JOHNSON

Special delivery.

Thomas takes the book, but when he sees the title, his whole attitude changes—his face softens, his eyes shine.

THOMAS

(handing back book)

Hold this.

In a rush he clears off his textbooks, then re-takes the book and lays it gently on the desk, like some sacred text, which, to him, it is. The title page: "Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man, by Sir Charles Lyell."

JOHNSON

I wanted to go for the three volumes of his Principles of Geology, but—

Thomas leafs through, his face filled with wonder and joy.

THOMAS

This is amazing. Look at this.

Johnson and Sarah join him on either side, and they leaf through the book, Thomas and Johnson exclaiming, as if leafing through a volume of family pictures.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM - LATER

Thomas, sitting up in his bed, the lantern on his side table, reading, skimming, now almost to the back cover.

THOMAS' VISION

Standing at the base of a rugged bluff. Suddenly, the face of the bluff slides away, revealing a perfect layering, each labeled with its proper geological name. Levitated, Thomas ascends, covering the whole course of geological evolution until he comes to Holocene, where, embedded in a large piece of shale, he sees a perfect fossil relief of his own face, which smiles back at him.

INT. JOHNSON AND SARAH'S BEDROOM - LATER

Johnson's eyes pop open. Sarah sleeps beside him. A NOISE—the front door OPENING and CLOSING. From the window he sees Thomas, lantern in hand, walking down the road.

Quietly, Johnson picks up his clothes, tip-toes out.

Just as he leaves, Sarah sits up. She listens to Johnson's not-so-quiet dressing and leaving. She also stands at the window and watches Johnson's lantern dwindle down the road.

Sarah sits back on the bed, hesitates, then swiftly pins up her loose hair and moves downstairs to the kitchen.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Under a massively starry sky, Thomas comes to the gravel pit. He scans the ground and pit wall, then pulls a geologist's hammer from his coat pocket.

His eyes pick through the rubble like a dog picking up a scent until he lights on a thick slab of rock. A few taps of the hammer, the rock splits, and there, a fossil.

Thomas suddenly pivots as he hears FOOTSTEPS.

THOMAS

Who's there?

Johnson holds up his lantern to show his face.

JOHNSON

Late night geology?

THOMAS

The book—couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON

I couldn't sleep because you couldn't sleep. Nice find.

Thomas puts it in his pocket.

THOMAS

I heard what you and Mom were talking about tonight.

JOHNSON

Our voices do travel, don't they?

Johnson sits. Thomas joins him. They pick up stones and toss them into the darkness as they talk.

THOMAS

And that means I'm going to have to travel, doesn't it?

JOHNSON

Only if you want to. There's no "have to" about it, Thomas. You can stay here and raise dirt and no money—

THOMAS

I should stay and help you and Mom.

JOHNSON

(ignoring)

—or you go to state university and raise your chances of being somebody. Dirt—or success. Simple as that.

THOMAS

Simple?

JOHNSON

If you stay to home out of being scared or you think you're betraying something or out of loyalty to me and your mother—then you're being a fool. And we didn't raise a fool.

THOMAS

It's not that bad here, Dad.

JOHNSON

Then you are going to make one terrible scientist because the evidence is all around you. Property auctioned off every day, mastitis running through herds—you're not blind, Thomas, I know you know this stuff.

Thomas and Johnson throw stones into the darkness.

THOMAS

Would you come visit?

JOHNSON

I am going to embarrass the hell out of you, I'm going to visit you so often. I will miss you.

Suddenly, they both perk up their heads as they hear FOOTSTEPS on the road, then see another lantern. Sarah appears, carrying a basket. Johnson takes it from her.

SARAH

Couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON

Tea, bread, jam—a moonlight picnic.

SARAH

Would you mind serving us, Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON

'Twouldn't mind at all, Dame Shea.

As Johnson serves, Sarah caresses Thomas' cheek.

SARAH

You will do us proud.

They drink, eat, talk, laugh as the stars wheel overhead.

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - SPRING SEMESTER FRESHMAN YEAR

Arrowheads like those in Thomas' barn appear on the pages of a textbook Thomas has open while PROFESSOR HARLAN JORDAN, museum director and department head, paces the front of a lecture hall.

On the blackboard at the front of the hall Jordan has written "Lines of Ascent." Under that he has drawn parallel lines labeled "Neanderthal," "Cro-Magnon," "Java Man," "Piltdown," and "???".

JORDAN

The Piltdown Man's fossil remains show clearly that modern man arose from the apes and gorillas.

AUDIENCE

FLETCHER CALVIN, sitting next to Thomas, and Thomas' roommate, raises his hand.

FLETCHER

Professor—

THOMAS

(whispering)

Fletch, don't.

FRONT OF HALL

Jordan holds him off.

JORDAN

I'm well aware, Mr. Calvin, that God and Mr. Darwin may differ about how you evolved enough to end up in my class, so let me finish before you bring the wrath of the Almighty down among us.

(to the rest)

Mr. Calvin resents that he may be a descendant of apes.

AUDIENCE

FLETCHER

Human beings are not just animals.

THOMAS

(whispering)

Fletch, hold off.

FRONT OF HALL

Again, Jordan gestures for him to stop.

JORDAN

We don't yet know, however, what the apes think of having such a cousin as Mr. Calvin.

A small ripple of LAUGHTER.

JORDAN

The ways of God are mysterious, Mr. Calvin—but he's not a trickster.

Jordan picks up a pair of knuckle bones from his desk and rolls them across the tabletop.

JORDAN

He does not play dice with our minds. Everything is available to us if we only put our minds to finding it out. Which should give us a good dose of that Christian humility you prefer.

Jordan picks up the skull of an ape.

JORDAN

And who knows? Perhaps in some jungle university, as we speak, an orangutan Harlan Jordan is holding forth to a group of primate freshmen—

Jordan wiggles the jaw, again making everyone LAUGH.

JORDAN

—about this creature called Homo calvinus and wondering if he, indeed, despite his protests, is really the be-all and end-all of God’s creation. Which leads us to—Thomas Shea, would you stand up?

AUDIENCE

Thomas, startled at hearing his name called, stands.

FRONT OF HALL

JORDAN

Ah, good. Mr. Shea, who is Mr. Calvin’s roommate, if I’m not mistaken.

THOMAS

Yes, sir.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea wrote an excellent response to my question to you all last class about Neanderthal, Java Man, Piltdown Man, and the “missing link.”

The class, as one, turns to look at Thomas, who stands like a deer caught in the headlights.

INTERCUT BETWEEN JORDAN AND THOMAS

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

You made a point about human nature, Mr. Shea, that I would like you to repeat to the rest of us.

THOMAS

Sir?

Jordan speaks to the rest of the class.

JORDAN

The chimpanzee need not be afraid of this old orangutan. Mr. Shea—your point. For the rest of us.

Thomas hesitates, looking at all the faces looking at him. Fletcher, looking up at him, grins and WHISPERS.

FLETCHER

Should've let me keep talking.

Thomas speaks, hesitantly at first.

THOMAS

My point. If the “missing link” exists—

JORDAN

It does—it just hasn't applied for admission to my class yet.

LAUGHTER, some smiles.

THOMAS

(pointing to door)

If it did show up for class—then we have some hard questions to ask about—whether it is human, if it would be our brother.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea is modest. He said that we would have to re-define what it means to be human—even better than that—

THOMAS

Professor Jordan—

JORDAN

He said that this thing we call “human nature” doesn't exist at all but that we make it up as we go along. A story we tell ourselves about who we are. Mr. Calvin, that would seem to put God out of a job.

FLETCHER

I don't think God has a job, Professor.

JORDAN

Not in Mr. Shea's universe.

FLETCHER

Though He wouldn't mind being a university professor.

JORDAN

I'll see if I can get him tenure, Mr. Calvin. Thank you, Mr. Shea. If all of you can't find the missing link by the next class, at least read the next chapter and give me the usual 2-page summary of its major points.

INT. HALLWAY

Students and professors crowd the area, VOICES loud. Fletcher punches Thomas playfully in the arm, speaks to the crowd around him.

FLETCHER

(kiddingly)

Teacher's pet. Teacher's pet.

Thomas speaks to the crowd as well.

THOMAS

(punching back)

And lucky me—I get the missing link for my roommate.

Jordan approaches the group, which parts respectfully.

JORDAN

No lightning bolts yet.

FLETCHER

That's Zeus, Professor.

JORDAN

I cannot keep all those gods straight.

FLETCHER

That's okay, professor—they'll keep you straight.

JORDAN

How do you like him as a roommate?

THOMAS

Give him enough bananas, he's fine.

JORDAN

You've got a sharp tongue, Mr. Calvin—we'll convert it to science yet.

Fletcher playfully cowers, looking up at the ceiling, then snaps his fingers.

FLETCHER

Can't get a lightning bolt when you need one. I might lose faith after all.

JORDAN

It's a start. Mr. Fletcher, would you allow Thomas to come with me?

FLETCHER

I release you. Just be sure to get back in time to write the literature essay for this poor gorilla.

Thomas and Jordan leave the group, which continues to CHATTER. Fletcher watches them walk away, speaks to the group.

FLETCHER

I think he is one star worth hitching a wagon to.

INT. HALLWAY - ANOTHER BUILDING

More quiet, more cloistered. Off the hallway are labs. Thomas glimpses white-coated workers measuring bones, making casts, and so on, recording data in huge ledgers.

THOMAS

Are you sure I'm supposed to be here—

JORDAN

I am Virgil, guiding you through.

Jordan sees that Thomas doesn't get the reference.

JORDAN

Dante? Divine Comedy? We have to expand your reading. Remind to make you a list. Follow me.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Seated at a desk neatly arranged is MISS JENNINGS, 30s, Jordan's secretary, hair up neatly, sweater draped. She is opening mail, the opener deftly slicing the envelopes.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings. My muse and savior.

JENNINGS

You have a letter here from Dawson, in England, and—

Jordan stands at the door to his office, ready to open it.

JORDAN

I'll get to that later.

JENNINGS

Should I give him the helmet before he goes in there?

JORDAN

It's a bit of a mess.

The ZIP of the opener through a thick envelope.

JENNINGS

They never found the last student.

Another deft SLICE.

JORDAN

Actually, they did—his femur's in drawer 4A, in the west annex.

JENNINGS

(to Thomas)

It was nice to have known you.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

A veritable cave of wood paneling, books, papers, skeletons—the den of a very learned anthropologist.

JORDAN

Plato had his cave, and I have mine.
(sees Thomas' puzzlement)
Not Plato either?

THOMAS

My school only had one room.

JORDAN

And thirty students and half that number of books,
excluding Bibles. And one teacher. Do you know how
remarkable it is for you to be here?

THOMAS

I never forget it, sir.

Jordan picks up an arrowhead and hands it to Thomas.

THOMAS

Susquehanna group.

Jordan takes it back, looks at Thomas.

JORDAN

Most would have guessed—

THOMAS

It's easy to confuse—the edges—

JORDAN

I know the differences. And so do you.

Jordan tosses the arrowhead back onto the desk, which scatters a nest of pencils and gim-cracks.

JORDAN

That isn't why I brought you here.

INT. STORAGE ROOM

A solid wooden door swings open as Jordan pushes in against its weight and holds it open for Thomas to enter.

JORDAN

The sanctum sanctorum.

Thomas stands awed. Arrayed before him is a seemingly endless row of enormous cabinets, drawers, lockers, broad worktables, everything crammed with animal fossils.

JORDAN

Do you recognize that?

GLASS CASE

Jordan points to the plaster cast of what looks like a misshapen skull and jawbone.

JORDAN

Pitldown—a cast of—

Jordan opens the case, takes the skull, hands it to Thomas.

JORDAN

I went to England to see the pieces for myself. Would certainly like more of him. But—our supposed missing link.

Thomas turns the skull in his hands, looking at it from all angles, immediately absorbed.

JORDAN

(whispering)

Alas, poor Yorick—

But Thomas doesn't hear him. As he hands the skull back, utter amazement wreathes Thomas' face.

THOMAS

I can't believe—

Jordan puts the skull back, locks the case.

JORDAN

A lot of people still don't. He is just too oddly built for their tastes. But Mr. Darwin said we need him, Mr. Charles Dawson of Piltdown, England, has delivered him, so what can mere mortals do? Come, let us reason together.

THOMAS

That one I know.

Jordan escorts him along the cases, watching Thomas discover the treasures.

THOMAS' VISION

For Thomas, the inanimate objects spark visions—in his mind they reconstitute themselves and come alive, evolution reassembling itself in his mind's eye.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

THOMAS

My father and I stuck arrowheads up on a wall. But nothing like that.

JORDAN

That's not all your father did. Did you know that somewhere out there are fossils your father sent to us?

THOMAS

My father?

JORDAN

Mastodon bones, I believe. Correctly named, dated, measured. Not bad for a dirt farmer, eh? And like father, like son—I'm sure I could dig up that paper you sent me—

THOMAS

You still have that?

JORDAN

Courtesy of your teacher. That's why you have a scholarship—courtesy of this teacher, impressed with father and son.

THOMAS

Thank you.

JORDAN

And that's why I want to talk to you, Thomas. I have a proposal. I didn't take you on the tour just for exercise.

THOMAS

Yes, sir.

But instead of explaining, Jordan gets up from his desk.

WINDOW

Jordan watches the students crossing the quadrangle, watches the wind take up the new leaves of the trees.

THOMAS

Sir?

Jordan turns to look at Thomas, looks very carefully.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Like you, Thomas, I got hooked as a child. For fifty years the search for man has never disappointed me.

DESK

Jordan takes up a bolo and drops it from one hand to the other, then puts it back.

JORDAN

Thomas, I am going to say something I've not said to anyone else—yet. Pilt-down—the supposed “missing link”? I think we can do better.

THOMAS

Better?

JORDAN

Why should Europe and Asia have all the glory?

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Boule with his Neanderthals, Breuil with his Cro-Magnons, Dubois with his Pithecanthropus. Haeckel predicted a missing link, but he never said where. Well, why not here?

(gesturing to office)

Well, not here—but in the United States.

Jordan paces.

JORDAN

They called Piltdown “Dawn Man”—eoanthropus. Why not our own “dawn man?” What do you say to that? The New World, the New Man—eoanthropus libertatis. Doesn’t this nation deserve it?

Jordan is now thoroughly caught up in his vision.

JORDAN

The American Dawn Man—the origin of what has become good and fine in the world. It’ll take a lot of hard work—but think of the glory, Thomas, if we can do it. The pride of America. And not just that—the pride of the American race. Just imagine if we find it!

THOMAS

Do you really think—

JORDAN

Without a doubt. We are not a doubting people, Thomas, are we? Those storage rooms? We have stuff no human has ever cleanly examined. I need a keen eye next to mine to sift through it. I need a good brain to read and analyze. That would be yours.

THOMAS

You want me to work for you.

JORDAN

Not work, Thomas. This is not work—this is discovery, exploration—a grand journey. I want you to travel that journey with me. I want you to be my assistant, my protégé—Watson to Holmes.

(look of incomprehension)

We have to work on that reading list. Do you accept?

THOMAS

I would be paid?

JORDAN

You would have money enough to send home—where I understand it would do a lot of good. You'll start now, stay here for the summer. Yes?

THOMAS

When's my first payday?

Jordan reaches over to his intercom.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings—an employment application, if you please.

JENNINGS (O.S.)

He's still alive?

JORDAN

Yes.

JENNINGS (O.S.)

Will wonders never cease.

INT. WORKSHOP - SUMMER

Thomas, sweating, gets a facefull of dust as he opens a drawer full of teeth. Jordan takes a brush and, laughing, dusts off his forehead.

INT. WORKSHOP - BENCH

Thomas, in his miniscule type, fills in ledger columns with measurements of bones he takes with calipers and rulers—page after page until his eyes grow bleary.

INT. MOLDING ROOM

Thomas, grimy, as he wrestles to make a clay mold for a mastodon tusk as long as he is. Jordan supervises him with a bemused expression on his face.

INT. LIBRARY

Towers of books surround Thomas as he reads and take notes—and is almost crushed when one pile tips over, echoing through the empty space. The librarian scowls.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

Jordan and Thomas, bag lunches in front of them, toss pebbles into an upturned top-half of a skull, laughing.

INT. MOLDING ROOM

The plaster cast crumbles.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas looks at the sunset while he rolls in his hands an arrowhead sent to him by his father.

INT. WORKSHOP

Thomas tapes a notecard to the drawer: "Done." Drawer after drawer bears the same notecard: "Done."

INT. MOLDING ROOM

Thomas pulls off the clay. The plaster cast holds. Jordan applauds politely.

INT. FACULTY CLUB

Jordan, neatly dressed, meets with a crowd of similarly dressed men. He introduces Thomas to them all.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

Six successive "hits" in the skull, followed by two crumpled brown paper bags.

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

Johnson slides fresh money from an envelope. Also enclosed is a copy of a catalogue card with a neatly printed citation on it, attributing the mastodon bones to one Johnson Shea.

INT. WORKSHOP

Thomas closes the last of the ledger books, then puts it into a posterboard wrapper and ties it shut, placing it on top of the pile of other completed ledgers.

He straightens the pile a hair, then folds his hands and looks at it. Smiles.

THOMAS

Done.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM - FALL SEMESTER SOPHOMORE YEAR

Thomas, wearing a white lab coat, rushes into the room, lets his bag of books thump to the floor. From the bag he takes out a letter, slits it open, and reads. As he reads, he slowly sinks into his desk chair.

Fletcher pops in.

FLETCHER

Coming to the pep rally?

THOMAS

No.

FLETCHER

Hey, doom and gloom, what's the matter?

Thomas hands him the letter. Fletcher reads.

THOMAS
My father's never said a word.

FLETCHER
How long has the bank given him?

THOMAS
I don't know—he and the banker know each other
pretty well. I figure—I don't know what to figure.

Fletcher hands back the letter.

FLETCHER
I'm sorry.

THOMAS
I don't know what to do.

FLETCHER
So come to the pep rally.

THOMAS
Can't—got to get back to work for Jordan.

FLETCHER
He slaved you all summer—

THOMAS
(holds up letter)
Without Jordan's money—

FLETCHER
I'll shout extra hard for you, my friend.

STUDENTS in the hallway—someone calls Fletcher's name.

FLETCHER
Coming!
(to Thomas)
I want to say "don't worry"—

THOMAS
Don't worry—go.

Fletcher joins the herd and disappears.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

The late autumn sky, now almost dark, wind and leaves—the lonely beauty of it strikes Thomas fully. With a SIGH, he enters the huge dark museum.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

Thomas sees the light on and Jordan at his workbench.

THOMAS

Professor?

Jordan turns and smiles when he sees Thomas.

JORDAN

You are one glutton for punishment. Come in. Sit.

Thomas pulls up a high chair to the bench.

SURFACE OF WORKBENCH

Thomas sees sepia bottles labeled with chemical names, pots of paints bristling with brushes, pieces of bone scattered.

JORDAN

Thomas, I want to show you something. And I will pay you for the showing—consider this a paid night off.

Thomas pulls his chair closer. He wrinkles his nose at the strong chemical smells.

JORDAN

A hobby of mine—faking fossils. Keeps me on the look-out.

THOMAS

Fakes?

JORDAN

A big business in forgery. And we're always a step behind.

Jordan holds a piece of fresh bone. In front of him is a piece of fossilized bone, much darker in color.

JORDAN

Fresh bone, unfossilized—full of organic matter. Feel how light compared to this.

Thomas balances them, nods yes. Jordan takes up a drill with a thin bit.

JORDAN

Now this.

Jordan drills into the fresh bone, and a wisp of black smoke rises.

JORDAN

Smell that?

THOMAS

Like burning horn.

JORDAN

Now this.

Jordan drills into the fossil—nothing but powder, no smoke at all.

JORDAN

But now watch this.

Jordan takes a pot and a brush and paints the fresh bone.

JORDAN

Potassium bichromate. Watch.

Slowly the bone colors like the fossil.

JORDAN

It's only skin-deep, so to speak. When it dries, you can wash in off with hydrochloric acid—or scratch it with a pin. But if you don't—it'll look real. And it hardens the bone, too. Give me that tooth there.

Jordan takes a tooth no larger than a little fingernail, dabs into another pot, and paints the tooth.

JORDAN

Now that one.

Jordan holds them both up, and they look remarkably alike.

JORDAN

Van Dyke brown adds a couple of thousand millennia
in an instant.

THOMAS

How many—

JORDAN

In this museum? Don't even want to think about it,
even though as director I have to.

Jordan stretches, gets up from his chair.

JORDAN

But a question for another time. Let's call it a night,
dear friend. The discovery of the spectacular can wait
until tomorrow.

THOMAS

Professor, I got a letter from my father today.

EXT. MUSEUM - STEPS

Thomas locks the door, pockets the keys. Jordan and Thomas stare at the stars,
the wind SIGHING. Silence.

JORDAN

Don't worry, Thomas. Things will work out. Go get
some rest.

Jordan shakes Thomas' hand, then walks into the darkness. Thomas watches,
then looks up at the façade of the museum. He jingles his keys as the leaves
swirl around him.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas, on his back, hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling, the wind
RATTLING his window.

INT. SHEAS' BEDROOM

Johnson and Sarah stare at the ceiling, the same wind RATTLING their windows.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Thomas gets up and in the darkness dresses slowly.

Fletcher tosses in the next bed, then settles back in.

Thomas grabs a burlap bag. Tip-toeing lightly, he leaves.

EXT. MUSEUM - STEPS

Thomas faces the door. The branches toss in the strong autumn wind, tug at the burlap bag slung from his shoulder.

He slides his key into the door, turns, opens, and enters.

INT. HALLWAY OF DORM - END OF SEMESTER

Suitcases, trunks, bags, and shouting people jam the hallway as everyone prepares to go home for the holidays.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas stuffs the burlap bag into his duffel bag. Fletcher's bags are on his bed. VOICE of the PORTER bulls out from the hallway.

PORTER (O.S.)

Train station next. All jackasses goin' home better get aboard!

THOMAS

That's my call.

Thomas and Fletcher pause, then give each other a "masculine" embrace, with a sharp slap on the back.

FLETCHER

You're coming back, you hear?

THOMAS

Wild horses wouldn't keep me from arguing with the preacher's son.

Thomas shoulders his duffel bag.

FLETCHER

What would I do if I didn't have the heathen to convert?

THOMAS

You can always tell a religious man—

FLETCHER

But you can't tell him much.

They shake hands.

FLETCHER

Good luck.

INT. TRAIN CAR

Thomas peers at a rural winter landscape, a dreary beauty.

EXT. TRAIN CAR

Flashing by: an "Auction" sign, then another, then a "For Sale" sign, then a rapid succession of such signs, all indicating how economically depressed the whole region is.

INT. TRAIN CAR

Thomas is startled by the CONDUCTOR leaning over his shoulder. His VOICE, twangy, rings in his ear.

CONDUCTOR

Ticket?

Thomas hands it to him, and the conductor, with a brisk succession of pops and snaps, punches it, hands it back.

CONDUCTOR

University?

THOMAS

Second year.

CONDUCTOR

Lot nicer there than out there. Sad sight, eh? Like that all along the line. Drying up and blowing away.

THOMAS

You live around here?

CONDUCTOR

I live on the rails—a lot safer.

THOMAS

Lonelier.

CONDUCTOR

I'll take lonely over starving.

Conductor salutes Thomas, toddles off.

EXT. TRAIN STATION

Johnson and Sarah greet Thomas at the station, and for a moment, amidst the embraces and happy VOICES, the winter and its discontents are forgotten.

But only momentarily. As they leave the station, Thomas catches sight of women and men looking defeated, their faces seamed and grey, beggared if not yet beggars.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Johnson, holding Thomas' duffel bag, pushes open the bedroom door. Thomas is carrying a lantern.

JOHNSON

Kept it just the way you left it.

Thomas enters the room, puts down the lantern.

THOMAS

You make it sound like a world tour.

Johnson puts down the duffel bag, sits on the bed.

JOHNSON

Compared to around here, you have. You saw—never great even in the best of times, and these are not the best of times.

Thomas opens the duffel bag and puts away his clothes. He carefully puts the burlap bag down next to his desk.

THOMAS

I wish—

JOHNSON

Don't even say it, Thomas. There's not a thing you could do that would make it any better. The only thing keeping the wolf from the door is your money and that gravel pit—the road crews are digging it out and laying it down as fast as they can.

THOMAS

So, some "stones in your pocket"—

JOHNSON

The bank's pocket, you mean.

Johnson pats the bed.

JOHNSON

Sit down.

Thomas sits down.

JOHNSON

I just want to tell you how proud I am of you. Proud that my son—

DOOR TO ROOM

Sarah, apron in hand, stands in the doorway.

SARAH

And my son, too.

JOHNSON

She had a little something to do with it.

SARAH

We're both proud.

THOMAS

I just wish—

SARAH

We've always survived—no reason to forget that we know how to do that.

JOHNSON

Yes, well—

An awkward SILENCE as they realize Sarah's words are so much whistling past the graveyard.

JOHNSON

You must be tired.

SARAH

Sleep well.

Awkwardly, Johnson kisses his son on the cheek.

JOHNSON

Sleep well.

Johnson and Sarah leave, and Thomas hears their VOICES recede down the hallway.

Bathed in the glow of the lantern, Thomas stares at his reflection in the window while the wind grips the branches and whips them around.

EXT. SHEA HOUSE - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The window to Thomas' bedroom opens and Thomas, with lantern and burlap, carefully climbs out onto the porch roof and makes his way to the edge.

With a movement practiced a thousand times as a child, he slithers down the porch post and drops to the ground.

He pauses. Nothing but the stars turning in the sky.

INT. BARN

Thomas grabs a shovel and pick.

EXT. ROAD

Thomas, in complete darkness, makes it to the top of the hill overlooking his family's property. Only then does he light the lantern and continue down the road.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SHEA PROPERTY

The lantern's beam falls on a mess of clay and stone roughly gouged out of the earth.

With the shovel and pick, Thomas scrapes away gravel. From his bag he pulls three pieces of discolored skull bones he had lifted from the museum.

He scoops up some grayish muck and rubs the bones, then works them until the wet clay grabs them tight. Then a skim-coat of gravel to cover them.

ANOTHER PART OF THE PIT

He repeats the process, stashing several more pieces of the skull, marking each location with a stick or branch that looks unobtrusive.

ANOTHER PART OF THE PIT

An overhanging shelf. Using a small spade, Thomas digs a cavity under the shelf.

Carefully, Thomas takes a partial skull and a partial jaw with two teeth out of his bag. The bone fragments already salted come from this skull, but the jaw is of a very different size, even though it shares the brownish patina of the skull.

Thomas inserts them into the hole and, using both hands, tucks in a slurry of clay and stone to cover them up. Using his spade, he slashes a tree root just over the buried bones to mark the site.

EXT. ROAD

For a moment Thomas stares at the sky, engulfed in darkness.

EXT. HILL - EARLY MORNING

An uncharacteristically warm December day: a butter sun in a blue sky flecked with clouds.

Thomas, the burlap bag over his shoulder, looks down on his father and the road crew. Their trucks look like large beasts. He also carries a wood-and-wire mesh for sifting dirt, and a shovel and pick.

Sarah pours out tea and CHATS UP the workers.

Thomas turns and books down the road.

EXT. ROAD

The trucks GRIND up the hill. Johnson, in the bed of the lead truck, angles his face to catch the sun.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Thomas, kneeling, geologist's hammer in his hand and small spade by his knee, waits as the GROWL of the trucks turns into a loud ROAR as they close in.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

Just as they turn the bend, Johnson sees Thomas in the gravel pit, his geologist's hammer cracking stones.

JOHNSON

What is that boy—

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Thomas sees his father. He does a few flicks of his spade to expose the tips of the first planted skull bones.

THOMAS
(whispering)

Here goes.

Thomas stands, waves his arms, YELLING.

THOMAS
Dad! Dad! Come here!

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The truck pulls to the pit edge. Johnson sprints to Thomas.

BEHIND LEAD TRUCK

The other trucks stop, turn off their engines. The air fills with a sudden SILENCE.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Johnson, breathless, goes to speak, but Thomas points to the ground, and they both drop carefully to their knees.

THOMAS
Look.

Johnson presses his face close to the ground, an inch away from the bone tip. He sniffs. He rests a very light fingertip against the bone, feels the rough edge.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The DRIVER gets out of the truck, takes off his jacket.

DRIVER
Mr. Shea!

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Johnson, without taking his eyes off the bone fragment, holds up his hand, as if to say "Wait."

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The driver, seeing the gesture, throws his jacket into the front seat.

DRIVER

It better be emeralds they're looking at.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

JOHNSON

(softly)

Dig it out.

Using a small chisel-shaped tool, Thomas carefully pulls the bone out of the muck with a "pop." The second and third pieces appear, and Thomas pulls them out as well.

He lays all three pieces in Johnson's hand.

JOHNSON

You tell me—you're the expert now.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

DRIVER

Mr. Shea!

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

THOMAS

Probably skull pieces.

Thomas picks up one, hefts it.

THOMAS

See how thick it is. Fossilized.

JOHNSON
Real, then. Human?

THOMAS
Probably.

Johnson lets out a WHOOP.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

Johnson runs up to the driver, cradling the bones as if they were glass, Thomas trailing behind.

Other WORKERS drift up to see what is going on.

JOHNSON
You gotta see these.

DRIVER
They look like bones.

JOHNSON
Skull bones.

DRIVER
(to crowd)
Looks like they found my wife!

JOHNSON
No, you don't understand—

Thomas walks up, lays a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS
Dad.

JOHNSON
(ignoring Thomas)
These are ancient!

THOMAS
Dad—

JOHNSON
I mean, ancient. Feel how heavy they are.

DRIVER

Older than Scotty over there, who's older than dirt?

JOHNSON

Aren't they beautiful? And he found them, right over there, my son, he found them.

Thomas again puts a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS

Dad.

Johnson turns on Thomas with an unusual fierceness.

JOHNSON

What?!

Everyone in the crowd freezes as they hear the anger in Johnson's answer. And several beats behind, Johnson hears it himself, his face melting immediately into apology.

THOMAS

(to driver)

They're just some old bones—really old, probably 50,000 years old.

DRIVER

Well, I think that's really interesting.

The VOICE of SCOTTY pipes up from the back.

SCOTTY

That's a bit older than I am.

DRIVER

(shouting over shoulder)

Not by much.

Everyone laughs, and the tension breaks.

THOMAS

We used to do this when I was kid.

JOHNSON

(sheepish)

Would you mind—I know it's a hell of a thing to ask—
but could you dig over in the south forty?

DRIVER

You really like those bones?

THOMAS

It'd just be for today—promise. Promise.

The driver gestures, and Johnson hands him one of the fragments, which he weighs in his hand.

DRIVER

Fifty thousand?

THOMAS

Give or take a birthday or two.

The driver holds the fragment over his head and SHOUTS.

DRIVER

Hey, Scotty—get a load of your long-lost cousin!

Everybody LAUGHS. The driver hands the fragment back.

DRIVER

All right, Mr. Shea. Adds 10 minutes at either end of
the day, but—

THOMAS

That's 20 minutes of sunshine in December—how
often do you get that?

DRIVER

You got a smart son.

EXT. ROAD

Johnson and Shea watch the last of the trucks take the bend toward the south
forty.

JOHNSON

Let's dig.

THOMAS

Dad—

JOHNSON

They don't need me—I dig with 'em just to keep myself from going stir-crazy. Get paid whether I dig or not.

Johnson walks down into the pit.

JOHNSON

Like old times, eh?

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

They are sifting dirt when Johnson pulls out another bone fragment, holds it overhead with a grand smile on his face. He adds to the pile.

A WHILE LATER

Another fragment—shout of triumph.

A WHILE LATER

Another fragment—this time a weary smile.

EXT. ROAD - LUNCHTIME

Sarah, carrying a basket, comes up over the crest, a puzzled look on her face. But she does hear VOICES.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Sarah stands looking down at Johnson and Thomas, grimed and grinning, as they shimmy their bodies shaking the dirt through the sifter.

SARAH

Johnson and Thomas Shea.

Johnson looks up, sees her, whoops, runs up the slope, and embraces her with a twirl.

JOHNSON

Look at what I found. Thomas! Bring 'em up!

EXT. GLADE OF TREES - LUNCHTIME

Sarah handles one of the bone fragments.

SARAH

Are you sure?

JOHNSON

Of course he's sure—he's being taught by the best!

SARAH

But can you really tell?

JOHNSON

Of course he can!

SARAH

Eat your sandwich. I just mean, all that digging you two did here—and then the road crews, all their digging—and never once—

JOHNSON

It's like that—big haystack, one needle. Most of the time—straw. Right?

THOMAS

Right.

JOHNSON

That's how it works.

SARAH

Well—there's a smile on that face I haven't seen in a while.

Sarah bounces the fragment in her hand.

JOHNSON

Her skeptical mind works.

Sarah tosses it back to Johnson, who deftly catches it.

SARAH

Look, muck about with bones if you want. I've got to do such boring things as clean your underwear and cook some food for your ordinary bones.

JOHNSON

(mock Irish accent)

Ah, what a fine woman she be, eh?

Thomas watches his parents joke and smiles shyly at their banter. For the moment, his face looks completely relaxed.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - A FEW HOURS LATER

Johnson stretches and groans. They are near the shelf where Thomas had salted the skull and jaw.

JOHNSON

My back is not as young as it used to be. What d'ya say we call it a day?

THOMAS

(pointing to shelf)

What about there?

JOHNSON

Where?

THOMAS

Over your shoulder.

JOHNSON

There?

THOMAS

It looks like a place for a needle.

A big smile on Johnson's face as he inspects the shelf.

JOHNSON

A turn in an ancient river, water slows down, things settle to the bottom.

THOMAS

A last try?

JOHNSON

Give me the spade.

Johnson, using Thomas' small spade, delicately pulls away dirt and stone, then he stops.

THOMAS

What?

Wordlessly, Johnson points, and Thomas sees the protruding end of the jawbone.

THOMAS

Maybe just a branch. From the trees.

Using an even smaller spade, Johnson carves around the jawbone, exposing more and more of it. Johnson has to restrain himself, so eager is he to rip it free. He leans in to smell the bone, then points with the shovel-tip.

JOHNSON

This isn't a branch.

INT. KITCHEN—SEVERAL HOURS LATER

On a rough cloth in the middle of the table are their "finds." Johnson, still grimed, hovers, Sarah off a little to the side, Thomas in the background.

JOHNSON

(whispering)

Goddamn!

SARAH

Johnson.

JOHNSON

Sorry.

Johnson clomps into the dining room, returns almost immediately with a large book, then lays it open on the table and points to the timeline with the prominent question mark and caption "The Missing Link?"

JOHNSON

That's what I think.

(to Thomas)

And we're going to go to Professor Jordan and get him to say that. Because it's true.

Before Thomas can answer, they hear the GRIND of gears as the trucks roll in. Almost immediately, they can hear the driver's knock on the back door.

DRIVER

(to Johnson)

Just wanted to let you know— Hey, more bones, I see.

JOHNSON

Not just bones, you see—

(pointing to book)

The Missing Link.

DRIVER

You don't say.

JOHNSON

I do say.

The driver steps to the door and shouts.

DRIVER

Hey, Scotty—we got your great-great-great aunt in here!

The workers pile in to see the bones.

JOHNSON

My son and I—we have found the missing link.

Johnson continues saying this to everyone, and the HUBBUB gets louder as Johnson tells the story of the "find."

Thomas catches Sarah's eye. She looks at him as if to say, "What gives?" But he shrugs and looks away. Johnson looks absolutely ecstatic as he explains about the missing link and geology and so forth and so forth—as if he were Professor Jordan in front of his freshmen. The HUM of talk gradually tails off into....

EXT. PORCH - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Knuckles RAPPING on the front door, the knuckles of DAN MORAN, reporter. The unseasonably warm weather has held.

INT. HOUSE

Sarah parts the curtain, looks at the ruddy face and fedora cocked back on his head, pad of paper and pencil in his hand. She sees a bicycle propped against the porch.

Sarah opens the door and steps out.

EXT. PORCH

MORAN
(touching hat)

Morning.

SARAH

Morning.

MORAN
Is Johnson Shea around?

SARAH
Not within shouting distance.

MORAN
How far would I have to go to be in shouting distance?

SARAH
Who are you?

MORAN
Dan Moran, newspaper reporter.

SARAH
There's been no killings around here.

MORAN
I am here for the missing link. I understand Mr. Shea has one?

SARAH

How can you have a link that's missing? If it's missing, you can't have it, so leave.

MORAN

If I lose something, I still have it, even if it's missing.

SARAH

Who told you?

MORAN

I got a call at the paper from someone here in town.

SARAH

Who?

MORAN

Confidential.

Sarah gives his scuffed shoes and ratty sweater the once-over.

SARAH

He's off digging.

MORAN

How can I get there?

SARAH

See that grove of trees over there?

MORAN

I can't walk down that road over there?

SARAH

You saying I don't know my own property?

MORAN

All right—that grove of trees.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SOUTH FORTY

Johnson and the other workers look up as they hear something thrashing through the woods, with an occasional OUTCRY or shouted CURSE.

Finally, Moran stumbles out of the woods, pricked and briared and muddied up.

JOHNSON

Who are you?

MORAN

Who the fuck are you? Goddamn—

JOHNSON

Johnson Shea.

MORAN

Oh.

JOHNSON

And who, as you say, the fuck are you?

MORAN

Dan Moran, newspaper reporter.

JOHNSON

Why didn't you just come down the road?

MORAN

Your wife—I assume she was—

JOHNSON

Evil-looking woman, sneer on her face?

MORAN

Wouldn't go that far.

(indicating behind him)

She told me to come that way.

JOHNSON

(pointing down the road)

My house is a half mile that way.

MORAN

I walked—

JOHNSON

You've had a good long jaunt, Mr. Moran. And for what purpose?

MORAN

The missing link. I want to do a story about you and the missing link.

JOHNSON

You don't say.

MORAN

Do say.

(takes out pad)

S-H-E-A or S-H-A-Y?

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

With a WALLOP, a newspaper, "The Sun Times," lands on the table, headline crisp: "Is This America's 'Missing Link'?"

Under the headline, a sub-headline: "Local farmer got a crop he didn't expect."

Under the sub-headline, a sketch of the skull and jawbone, along with an artist's rendering of what the "missing link" might look like, wildly inaccurate and a hoot to look at.

A finger points out the headline—Johnson Shea's finger.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

Look, Thomas—now that is beautiful.

Sarah, arms crossed, scowling, gives Thomas a "look."

SARAH

Yes, I'm sure the bank is now going to forgive the mortgage based on—

JOHNSON

(with affection)

The wet blanket. I wonder what else is out there, Thomas? What else haven't we dug up yet?

THOMAS

Dad, don't go getting yourself—

JOHNSON

I'll bet you there's more out there.

Johnson looks back down at the paper.

JOHNSON

I'll just bet you. Shea Man. They're gonna call it Shea Man.

EXT. CITY STREET

A kiosk. A row of newspapers on the counter, one of which, "The Sun Times," in large type and garish font, states: "Is This America's 'Missing Link'?"

NEWSPAPER

A coin lands on the newspaper, and the VOICE of L.T. HOUSEMAN booms out.

HOUSEMAN (O.S.)

I'll take that one.

A beefy hand from the kiosk places the newspaper into an equally beefy hand decked with a large emerald ring in a gold setting that glints in the morning sun.

STREET

Houseman, 50s, corpulent, bewhiskered, with a ruddy face cunning and handsome, scans the 144-point type headline, reads the sub-headline, and plunges into the article.

HOUSEMAN

Well, well, well.

As he reads, he turns to enter....

EXT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM

Where a sign, "The L.T. Houseman Museum of Amazing Wonders," runs the entire width of a brick façade bedecked with bunting, pictures of animals and freaks, posters, and other items of renown and announcement.

Houseman's broad back, draped in a fawn-colored light wool suit jacket, with matching pants, and a pair of alligator skin shoes showing just a glimpse of scarlet silk socks, disappears into the building. At that same moment...

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

Jordan, at his desk, reads a letter, coffee in one hand. With a soft glide, a newspaper, "The Sun Times," held by Jennings's competent hand, slides into place in the middle of Jordan's desk.

JENNINGS

I thought you might like to see this.

As Jordan's eye jumps from word to word in the 144-point headline, Jennings takes the letter from his hand.

His glance leaps down to the name "Johnson Shea."

Jordan's face shows a mix of extreme displeasure and an effort not to show anything to Jennings, who is not fooled at all. He picks up a pencil and circles, several times, Johnson Shea's name.

JENNINGS

That is the same name as—

JORDAN

Yes.

JENNINGS

A telegram.

JORDAN

Immediately. And a train ticket.

JENNINGS

The professor sets off into the wilds.

JORDAN

This is not funny.

JENNINGS

Yet.

JORDAN

Just do your duties.

JENNINGS

(small salute)

Aye, aye, sir.

Jennings leaves, her sweater billowing like a small cape.

JORDAN

(under his breath)

Aye, aye, my ass.

Jordan eyes laser in on the headline. The pencil point digs into the cheap newsprint as Jordan jabs it sharply again and again, the pocking SOUND changing into...

INT. POST OFFICE

A POSTAL CLERK listens to the click-click-clack of the telegraph and scribbles out a message. A SECOND CLERK pops letters into mail slots. Moran lingers at the counter.

MORAN

Is that for me?

The clerk shakes his head “no,” finishes the message.

MORAN

Who’s it for?

CLERK

Confidential.

MORAN

Who in this town would get a confidential telegram?

The clerk looks at the second clerk, who is completely pre-occupied with his letter-sorting.

CLERK

Got a buck?

MORAN

Yeah.

The clerk snaps his fingers, and Moran tosses over a dollar. Moran reads the message, then hands it back.

MORAN

That was a buck well-spent.

CLERK

I thought so.

(to second clerk)

Delivering a message. Cover for me.

Moran watches the clerk disappear down the main street. The second clerk stands at the counter.

SECOND CLERK

I got some other telegrams if you're in the mood for paying.

MORAN

(ignoring question)

What's the quickest way to the train station?

EXT. TRAIN STATION

A small crowd of farmers, townspeople, hangers-around on the platform as the iron horse steams into the station with a screeching halt.

Thomas, nervous, stands just to the side and behind his father. And just behind and to the side of Thomas floats Moran, pad and pencil in hand, taking notes.

JOHNSON

Do you see him?

And Thomas clearly does, though every part of his mind and body wants to say no. But before Thomas can speak, Jordan waves and strides towards them.

For a moment the three men—one grizzled, one smooth and erudite, one young and anxious—face each other.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, I presume?

Johnson shakes his hand.

JORDAN

Thomas. Well, Mr. Shea—we have some business together.

Moran bustles up.

MORAN

Professor Jordan—

JORDAN

How do you know who I am?

MORAN

Name's Dan Moran.

JOHNSON

You wrote the article.

MORAN

I am the perp.

JORDAN

How did you know—

MORAN

Investigators investigate.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, we can't have—

MORAN

Mind if I tag along?

JORDAN

I do. Mr. Shea, we can't—

By this time, people are gaping at the quartet, whispering among themselves: the grapevine at work.

MORAN

(turning to Thomas)

Thomas Shea, right? You were with—

JOHNSON

Leave the boy alone.

MORAN

Then let me tag along, and I promise—on my mother's grave.

JOHNSON
(to Jordan)
Can't blame a bull-dog for biting.

JORDAN
This is not how we do things.

JOHNSON
Welcome to the country, professor. Mr. Moran—it'd
be a pleasure. I got the wagon over here.

As they walk, Jordan gives Thomas a piercing stare.

JORDAN
Thomas—

But Thomas hurries to help his father with the horses.

INT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM - HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

In the midst of a garish office stuffed with curios and quiddities sits REEVES, Houseman's assistant, filing papers and separating the morning mail with practiced wrist-flicks and hand-tosses.

As Houseman enters, Reeves holds his arm straight up, and Houseman tosses his hat, which settles neatly on top of his outstretched fingers. In turn, Reeves, without a wink, re-tosses the hat so that it lands on the top of coat pole made from a narwhal's tusk.

HOUSEMAN
Unbroken record.

REEVES
Don't forget your dinner tonight.

HOUSEMAN
I never forget a dinner with rich businessmen.

REEVES
And they never forget you.

HOUSEMAN
Which is why I can pay you such a handsome salary
for your marksmanship.

DOOR TO INNER OFFICE

Houseman pauses and turns.

HOUSEMAN

Get me Chalmers Diggs on the phone.

REEVES

The editor of the Sun Times?

Houseman holds up the newspaper, headline bold.

HOUSEMAN

The very one.

INNER OFFICE

Houseman throws the newspaper down on a desk littered with artifacts, genuine and faked, from around the world. He then tears out the front page of the newspaper.

Along one wall, display cases lined with bottles of all sizes, inside of which float oddities and grotesqueries. Also displays of torqued skulls, fractured bones, homunculi, and other biological curiosities.

DISPLAY CASES

Name cards identify each item—for instance, “Missing link, found 1907, Borneo.” In effect, Houseman’s personal hall of fame for missing links.

Houseman opens the last case. He folds the newspaper page so that it sits there blaring out its headline.

HOUSEMAN

Coming soon.

DESK

The phone rings.

HOUSEMAN

(answering)

Thanks, Reeves. Chalmers! No, no, no, this is not about La La, the Siamese twin—that has been—I'm glad to hear the relief in your voice. No, I have a favor to ask. You have a reporter on your staff—Dan Moran. Right, today's front page. About Shea Man. I need to get in touch with him.

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

The bones on a white cloth, the dirt still clinging to them, lit by a bright lamp hanging overhead. Jordan sits before the bones, Johnson, Thomas, and Moran in the background.

Sarah hands a cup of tea to Jordan.

JORDAN

Many thanks, Mrs. Shea.

The cup shakes slightly in Jordan's slightly nervous hand, nervous because what he sees looks as genuine as it does improbable.

Thomas gnaws on his fingernails. Sarah gently but firmly pushes his hand away from his mouth.

JOHNSON

We didn't wash them. Tried not to handle them much.

Jordan does not take his eyes off the bones as he speaks.

JORDAN

Did you mark the site?

THOMAS

Not exactly.

JORDAN

I taught you—

JOHNSON

They all came from the gravel pit, within yards of each other.

JORDAN

But stratigraphy—for dating—

But his voice trails off as he looks ever more closely at the bones. He puts the cup down on that table's edge, and Sarah has to catch it—but Jordan completely ignores it.

MORAN

Professor—

Jordan ignores him as well as he reaches into a bag and pulls out white cotton gloves and a small leather roll, which unrolled is full of what look like dental tools.

Very carefully, everyone hushed and tense, he uses the tools to turn over the bones, poke at them, scrape them. Only when he's done this for a minute or so does he actually pick up one of the skull fragments and the jaw and weigh them in his hands.

JORDAN

The first way to test if bone is new or ancient?

THOMAS

By its weight—fresh bone, full of organic matter, is light compared to—

JORDAN

Compared to fossilized bone.

Jordan abruptly puts them down and pulls back, as if catching himself at the edge of a cliff, and takes a deep breath.

JORDAN

Thomas, your theory.

Thomas surveys everyone around him.

JOHNSON

Thomas.

THOMAS

Well—the end of the jaw—

JORDAN

The condyle—use the right term.

THOMAS

The condyle. Is missing, so it's hard to know how the jaw hinges to the skull.

JORDAN

I noticed that right away.

THOMAS

But all the bones were found close to each other.

JORDAN

The jaw, Thomas—the jaw.

THOMAS

The color of the jaw and the skull are close. The densities are close.

Moran scribbles. Thomas hesitates. He looks up at his father, whose face is set in anticipation and delight.

THOMAS

I think we have eoanthropus, Professor.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, would you sit down, please?

Johnson sits, and everyone waits, tensely.

JORDAN

More tests, of course—more tests—these will have to go back to the lab. But—

MORAN

Does that “but” mean what I think it means?

JORDAN

This is the Dawn Man—

MORAN

(to himself, writing)

Shea Man is Dawn Man—

JORDAN

Today, Mr. Shea, America triumphs.

Across the page Moran scribbles “America triumphant.”

JORDAN

(laughing)

Take that, Piltdown!

MORAN

Piltdown?

THOMAS

The missing link found in England.

Moran scribbles across the paper, “Take that, Piltdown!”

MORAN

“Take that, Piltdown!” Don’t know what it means, but it makes a corker sub-head.

INT. LECTURE HALL - TWO MONTHS LATER

Jordan, on stage, speaks to scholars about the missing link. On easels are large drawings of the bones and a sketch of what the missing link might have looked like.

JORDAN

And my laboratory has confirmed, by the most modern methods of analysis, that these bones are genuine, and that their proximity at the site indicates they come from a single individual.

PRESS GALLERY - TO THE SIDE

Moran, surrounded by scribblers, scribbles his own notes.

BACK OF HALL

Thomas, squirreled against the wall, watches everything with eyes that look frightened and cornered. He gnaws his fingernails without pause.

AUDIENCE

A stout, bewhiskered SCHOLAR rises to speak.

SCHOLAR

But have you done the necessary stratigraphic analyses—

JORDAN

I have visited the site myself.

SCHOLAR

In the face of evidence that, to me at least, is quite incredible and hard to swallow—

JORDAN

Most bitter pills are, my friend—I've been swallowing a few of them over the past month.

A ripple of subdued LAUGHTER.

SCHOLAR

(undeterred)

You are willing to, well, bet your reputation on this Shea Man?

JORDAN

My good friend—I already have. For science, for the greater glory of my country, for my race—I already have.

A MURMUR as they comment on Jordan's comment.

PRESS GALLERY

Moran scribbles "I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth."

MORAN

(whispering to himself)

That'll sound better.

STAGE

JORDAN

Now, let me review in more detail—

BACK OF HALL

Thomas turns abruptly and leaves.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LECTURE HALL

Thomas leans unsteadily against the balcony railing. He closes his eyes and gulps hard several times, as if trying to not throw up.

Thomas does not see Fletcher come up.

FLETCHER

You okay, pal?

Thomas whirls, sees Fletcher's concerned face floating in a haze.

THOMAS

It was hot in there.

FLETCHER

You look green!

THOMAS

I'm fine, I'm fine—I've just got to get some air.

Fletcher watches Thomas unsteadily make his way down the stairs and out of the building.

FLETCHER

Must've been really hot in there.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Reeves types a letter, completely ignoring Moran sitting in a leather chair outfitted with elephant legs.

REEVES

(without looking up)

Your hat. You can't wear your hat in here.

MORAN

All right.

Moran takes off his hat but doesn't know where to put it.

REEVES

Toss it here.

Moran hesitates, then sails it toward Reeves, who catches it and, in a continuous motion, re-directs it, where it settles on the tip of a rack of antlers.

What sounds like the Westminster CHIMES played on a bunch of tin cans breaks the air.

REEVES

(without looking up)

He'll see you now.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S INNER OFFICE

Moran sees no one behind the desk.

HOUSEMAN (O.S.)

Over here.

Moran finds Houseman in front of the wall of missing links. Moran doesn't know whether to be impressed or appalled.

HOUSEMAN

Don't worry—no family resemblance to you. Filed your story yet?

MORAN

(still transfixed)

Yes.

HOUSEMAN

Well? Mr. Moran?

Moran tears his eyes away from the display and pulls his pad out of his pocket.

MORAN

I quote Professor Jordan's quote: "I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth."

HOUSEMAN

Good enough for me. Care to take another visit to the countryside?

But Moran is mesmerized again by the display, and Houseman lets him gaze while he churns over his next plan.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas sits in the dark. Stray light plays off the rime on the window. Fletcher's VOICE comes out of the darkness.

FLETCHER

Thomas, you here?

A hesitation, then...

THOMAS

Yes.

FLETCHER

Didn't see you at dinner, the library.

THOMAS

I'm fine.

FLETCHER

Always a bad liar.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

But Fletcher sits down, ignoring the request.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

FLETCHER

You shouldn't lie to a preacher's son.

Silence—perhaps the SIGH of wind outside the window.

FLETCHER

Ever since those bones—

THOMAS

Fletch—is it wrong if something you did wrong makes someone else happy?

More silence, thoughtful.

FLETCHER

How happy is happy if you always got a sword hanging over your head?

More silence.

FLETCHER

I have no idea if that's a good answer.

THOMAS

Neither do I.

FLETCHER

How about this? Mixing sugar with shit doesn't make the shit taste any better.

They both stare out the window as the wind WHISTLES by.

EXT. SHEA PORCH

Knuckles RAPPING on the front door, the knuckles of Dan Moran. Houseman stands next to him, dressed in a huge fur coat made from the pelts of some unnamable exotic animal.

FRONT YARD

Reeves sits and reads in a snappy car, the Houseman insignia embedded on all the doors and the hood.

PORCH

Johnson Shea answers the door.

HOUSEMAN

Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON

I got your telegram.

HOUSEMAN

May we?

Johnson stands back as they enter the house.

INT. DINING ROOM

Sarah serves tea, bread, and jam, then sits. A tense silence, though Houseman does not seem tense at all.

SARAH

Would your driver like anything?

HOUSEMAN

He's quite self-sufficient. Do you like the car?

JOHNSON

It's—

HOUSEMAN

It's a model not even on the market yet—I know the manufacturer personally. He made it just for me.

SARAH

Mr. Houseman, we are very impressed. Our neighbors are impressed.

HOUSEMAN

“Now what?” you mean?

SARAH

Exactly.

JOHNSON

It doesn't do to be rude.

SARAH

This is a man who made the money sitting in the yard out there from being rude. And crude.

HOUSEMAN

And lewd. Money in all three. But the funny thing, Mrs. Shea? The money stays innocent, free and clear, because you can put it to anything you want. I have seen money start out crude and end up angelic—washed clean. Money is the true universal solvent.

SARAH

And you want to help us get our wings?

HOUSEMAN

As you said: Exactly.

SARAH

Well, we are not interested—

JOHNSON

Sarah. I think we should let our guest speak his mind.

SARAH

Johnson—

JOHNSON

Do you know where the next few mortgage payments are coming from? I don't.

Silence as Sarah shoots Johnson a hard and hurt look.

SARAH

If you'll excuse me—

Sarah exits into the kitchen.

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be the cause—

JOHNSON

She'll be fine.

INT. KITCHEN

Sarah rattles around, furious. She then plants herself by the door, looking through the crack, her breathing heavy, her hands shaking.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be hypothetical about this, Mr. Shea. Mr. Moran here has confirmed for me that Professor Jordan has authenticated the bones.

Houseman gestures to Moran, who recites from memory.

MORAN

“I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth.” Exact quote.

HOUSEMAN

The question that comes to me is this: who owns Shea Man? Because he who owns the bones—do you see my drift?

JOHNSON

What would you want with the bones?

HOUSEMAN

What would I want with the bones? Mr. Johnson, you worry about your mortgage payment. How would you like to never hear the word “mortgage” again?

INT. KITCHEN

Sarah, tense, slams her hand gently against the door frame.

SARAH

Don't.

INT. DINING ROOM

JOHNSON

That would be a word worth losing.

HOUSEMAN

Then let me show you how.

Houseman gestures again to Moran, who pulls out a neatly folded paper from his inside pocket and hands it to Houseman, who spreads it open on the table. In great block lettering, crisp against the white of the paper, is a title: “The Museum of the Missing Link.”

HOUSEMAN

Let me explain.

EXT. PORCH - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Johnson watches Houseman's car pull away.

INT. DINING ROOM

Sarah scowls at the paper with its block lettering.

JOHNSON

Don't say a word.

Several beats of tense silence.

JOHNSON

Well, say something!

SARAH

I'm not supposed to say a word.

JOHNSON

I'll give you ten.

SARAH

How's it feel to sell your soul to the devil?

JOHNSON

Pretty good, actually.

Johnson suddenly looks very deflated, not able to keep up this tough stance at all. He sits heavily.

JOHNSON

Sarah, we got no pot to piss in—and this Houseman is giving us the pot.

SARAH

And the piss.

JOHNSON

What do you want me to do? I'm supposed to take care of my family—what do you want me to do?

Sarah sits next to him, strokes his hair.

SARAH

We'll make it through—we always do.

But this angers Johnson, who bounces out of his chair.

JOHNSON

No we won't! You know we won't! We're in that handbasket that's always going to hell—and there's no fooling ourselves. I am going to get those bones—they're mine—

SARAH

And Thomas'.

JOHNSON

Then we are going to get those bones, and I'm going to let this Houseman guy set up his museum, and we are going to make ourselves some money!

Sarah spins the paper on the table.

SARAH

We could call this house the museum of missing links.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Jennings sits perfectly still at her desk as the drum of ANGRY VOICES floats out of Jordan's inner office. A lull—and Jennings quickly types a few words. The voices start up again—she stops to listen.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

Jordan, Johnson, Houseman, Moran, and DANIEL GOLENBOCK, Houseman's lawyer, sit in a tense circle. Golenbock wears pince-nez attached to a cord strung with small pearls. Thomas stands off to the side, chewing on his fingernails.

JORDAN

You can't take the bones!

HOUSEMAN

And again I'll have Mr. Golenbock render his legal opinion.

GOLENBOCK

The bones were found—

JORDAN

I know where the bones were found! Mr. Shea, you can't—

Johnson goes to speak, but Houseman halts him and gestures to Golenbock, who opens his briefcase, takes out a legal document, and hands it to Jordan.

HOUSEMAN

I allowed Mr. Johnson to talk before, but that, instead, will speak. You'll notice that it's a power of attorney.

JORDAN

So, you own the bones now.

GOLENBOCK

No—we simply speak for the bones. Mr. Johnson still owns them.

JORDAN

Mr. Johnson—

HOUSEMAN

Look at me. We have come for their release. Unless you want the police to take them away for me, which we have every right—

Jordan, seething, sweeps the legal document off the desk.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings picks up a toy from her desk, where by winding it up, two boxers throw punches at each other. She winds it up and watches the figures pummel the air.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

You don't know what you're doing.

Golenbock retrieves the legal document, then takes out a handkerchief and very carefully cleans his pince-nez.

HOUSEMAN

I—we—know exactly what we're doing.

JORDAN

I've staked my reputation!

HOUSEMAN

'Tis bitter—I understand. Would there be anything that would sweeten life for you at this moment?

JORDAN

What do you mean?

Houseman gestures, and Golenbock retrieves another document from the depths of his briefcase, hands it to Jordan.

JORDAN

What is this?

HOUSEMAN

A contract. That would allow you sole access to Shea Man for research. Only you, Dr. Jordan. Only you would be able to publish about them, talk about them, pontificate about them.

JORDAN

That goes against everything I've ever believed—
about sharing knowledge—

HOUSEMAN

Charitable—I commend it. Don't you commend it, Mr. Golenbock? But if it's facts you deal in, deal in this: either you sign, or you will never handle these bones again.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings winds up the toy, and this time, one boxer hits the other boxer, and the other boxer's head pops off, held by a single string. Knock-out.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

Why me?

JOHNSON

Dr. Jordan—

HOUSEMAN

(holding up hand)

A gift from Mr. Johnson. He thanks you for what you've done for Thomas.

JORDAN

I can't— I can't—

HOUSEMAN

I don't really care about scientific advancement, the search for knowledge, and all that. But when a scientist like yourself blesses these bones— opportunities arise.

Houseman gestures again to Golenbock, who takes a poster out of his briefcase and holds it up—the usual garish Houseman poster, for the new “Museum of the Missing Link.”

Houseman points to a line on the poster.

HOUSEMAN

I had this made up to show you something—right there. “As verified by Dr. Harlan Jordan”—

JORDAN

I can read it.

HOUSEMAN

A new approach for me—truth in advertising. Your name, right there—stamp of approval—that's worth money. To me. And to you.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings re-sets the boxers—same result.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

I don't care—

HOUSEMAN

Simple math, Dr. Jordan—you will make more money than your pitiful salary will ever bring you, and you can apply that money to your “work.” Make contributions to young scholars like Thomas—opportunities that otherwise will never exist as long as you wait upon the kind heart of the legislature. Dr. Jordan, more money—more freedom. More glory for America.

Jordan takes a slow look at everyone, then down at the formidable legal document.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Both boxers connect, and both heads pop back.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE - A MONTH LATER

On a large table in Houseman's office is a model of his new Museum of the Missing Link. Moran with a clipboard, now Houseman's public relations go-to guy for this project. Gathered are reporters and others. Food and drink abound. Johnson stands awkwardly, unsure. Thomas skirts the crowd.

HOUSEMAN

And the newest amusement for the well-to-do.
Travelers will catch the train here in the city, then end up here—

Houseman points to a renovated train station.

HOUSEMAN

Take up their hotel rooms here—

Points to a grand hotel, ornamented and ornate.

HOUSEMAN

Be driven out to the site of the world-famous find—

Points to the black ribbon flowing out to the Shea house.

HOUSEMAN

On the newly macadamized road. And visit the newest addition to the L.T. Houseman caravan of wonders: the Museum of the Missing Link. Mr. Moran?

MORAN

We have a new name for this—we're calling it a "theme park"—and—

CORNER OF THE ROOM

To Thomas, the voices BUZZ in his ears, under and over the POUNDING blood.

He catches his father's eye, and Johnson smiles wanly at him, completely at sea, a little stunned.

THOMAS' VISION

Suddenly, everyone in the room becomes skeletons, with a human skull and an ape jaw. They still hold drinks and eat (though the food and drink dribble out of their rib cages) and talk (their teeth CLACKING like typewriter keys).

Thomas looks at himself—nothing but bones as well.

He looks at Houseman who, unlike others, has horns glued to his skull, and in his eye sockets are dice spinning like a slot machine. Houseman, returning Thomas' look, smiles, the bones stretching grotesquely.

Suddenly, a VOICE, thick and gross.

VOICE (O.S.)

Are you all right?

Again, suddenly, Thomas' vision clears.

HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Everyone is looking at him while Johnson stands next to his son, a hand on his arm, shaking him gently.

JOHNSON

Thomas—Mr. Houseman wants to introduce you.

Thomas gives everyone a wan smile and waves. They just as quickly turn away, he and his father exiled in the corner.

JOHNSON

This is out of our hands, isn't it?

Thomas nods yes, afraid. The people hover over the model, the air HUMMING with their deal- and image-making.

EXT. TOWN - MAIN STREET

Houseman overseeing the bustle of the renovation of the train station and the hotel.

EXT. TOWN - ROAD

Houseman moves among the workers laying the new road from the town out to the Johnson house.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Houseman moves among the workers spreading out the new parking lot, renovating the buildings on the property. Sarah watches, arms crossed, from the porch. Houseman waves to her, but she remains impassive.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Reeves serves food and drink to Houseman as he looks at the galley proofs of two books in front of him. The title page of one: "Onward and Upward: A Popular History of Mankind, by Prof. Harlan Jordan. Published by L.T. Houseman Press." The second title page: "How The Missing Link Was Found, by D. Moran. Published by L.T. Houseman Press."

HOUSEMAN

(pointing to Moran's book)

Especially the chapter on the sex lives of missing links. It makes history.

REEVES

Not to mention money.

HOUSEMAN

Since when in this house have the two ever parted company?

REEVES

(smiling)

And that is why I live to serve.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

Thomas, in white lab coat, works with Jordan to use castings of the bones to re-create the "skull," copies of which will end up in gift shops and other such stores.

EXT. TOWN

Opening day of the "theme park," a gala event, the town inundated with hordes, money flowing easily.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

The skull progresses, piece by glued-together piece.

INT. MUSEUM

Houseman conducts a tour for his rich friends, pointing out the gift shop, where, featured prominently, are row on row of the skulls. Also prominent is Houseman's collection of oddities and an extensive diorama of "The Ascent of Man," with the missing link displayed front and center.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

The skull moves closer to completion.

EXT. SITE

Johnson conducts a visit for those same friends. The site now has a diorama of how the creature must have looked and lived—all of which looks absurd, and all of which is ooh'd and aah'd over.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

A finished skull sits to one side.

INT. MUSEUM - THAT NIGHT

A celebration where rural townsfolk and city people dance, drink, and eat—a riot of class-mixing fueled by alcohol and illusions.

INT. DORMITORY - JUST BEFORE SUNRISE

Thomas sits in the dark. Fletcher asleep.

THOMAS

Fletch.

No response.

THOMAS

Fletch.

No response. Thomas gets up, kneels by Fletch's bed, stares. A pause, then Fletch pops open his eyes.

FLETCHER

What?

THOMAS

You any good at confessions?

FLETCHER

That's my old man's game.

THOMAS

Because I am sitting in the dark.

FLETCHER

What are you talking about?

THOMAS

The museum opened last night.

FLETCHER

We missed it.

THOMAS

And people are happy, and some money's coming in.

FLETCHER

Not just "some," from what Houseman says.

Thomas takes a big pause.

FLETCHER

And?

THOMAS

And Fletch—it's all a lie. A big, fat, sweaty lie.

FLETCHER

There's a beginning to this, right?

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

JORDAN

You stole the bones?

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings has a water glass stuck to the door in order to hear the conversation.

INSIDE THE GLASS

A clear view of Jennings's ear as the VOICES echo.

JORDAN (O.S.)

You stole the bones?

THOMAS (O.S.)

Yes.

JORDAN (O.S.)

Why? Why? Why? Miss Jennings! Miss Jennings!

DESK

Jennings slams the glass down, a painful ringing in her ear, as Jordan slams open the door.

JORDAN

Houseman, on the phone—now! And train tickets!

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM - EVENING

Johnson, Sarah, Jordan, Thomas, Fletcher, Houseman, Moran—all shoehorned in, everyone tense. Except for Houseman, who cleans his nails with what looks like a well-filed shark's tooth.

HOUSEMAN

Well, have we all eaten a big enough meal of doom and disaster?

JORDAN

You don't have a reputation that's ruined.

HOUSEMAN

Who outside this room knows what we know? Hmm?

A pause.

JORDAN

My secretary, Jennings. She eavesdropped through a water glass.

HOUSEMAN

And is she a poor working girl with something like an aged mother at home?

JORDAN

Father with lung disease.

HOUSEMAN

A generous contribution to his health care would go a long way. My man Reeves—but he knows who owns his tongue. So, no one, then, outside our little circle.

SARAH

I know what you're getting at.

HOUSEMAN

Do you?

SARAH

Do you know what he's getting at?

But SILENCE greets her because everyone knows the answer.

INT. MUSEUM OF THE MISSING LINK

SARAH (VOICEOVER)

Do you know what he's getting at?

Various faces, one after the other, all looking as if expecting an answer: the yeti, the two-headed grizzly, the one-eyed fetus floating in formaldehyde, and so on.

INT. DINING ROOM

SARAH

You won't get away with it.

HOUSEMAN

Thomas—

SARAH

You leave him out of this.

HOUSEMAN

(ignoring her)

Thomas, everything you did, you did out of love—isn't that right?

THOMAS

Yes.

SARAH

(to Thomas)

You don't have to talk to him.

INT. HOTEL - OFFICE

HOUSEMAN (VOICEOVER)

Love, yes.

THOMAS (VOICEOVER)

Yes.

The HOTEL OWNER dances with his WIFE as he counts up the day's receipts—more money than they have ever known.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

And would you want everything good that's now happened to the people you love—money for your parents, for the town, for Professor Jordan—

JORDAN

Tainted—

HOUSEMAN

Would you want all of that to go away?

THOMAS

But I stole and I cheated and it's all a lie.

HOUSEMAN

You didn't answer my question. Would you want things to go back to the way they were before? Banks foreclosing. People moving away—friends you'd known all your life gone. The town you grew up in dying.

SARAH

You are the devil!

HOUSEMAN

(again ignoring her)

Would you?

All eyes focused on Thomas.

THOMAS

No.

HOUSEMAN

Because you love them.

THOMAS

Yes.

(to Sarah)

It's true!

HOUSEMAN

Because you did what you did out of love.

THOMAS

Yes.

HOUSEMAN

Would any of you? Want to go back?

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - DIORAMA

HOUSEMAN (VOICEOVER)

Would you want to go back?

The face of the missing link stares into the darkness.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

I'm going to take your silence as a "no."

JORDAN

Not for me. My reputation as an honest scientist is shot full of holes.

HOUSEMAN

I was getting to you.

JORDAN

You're getting to me, all right.

HOUSEMAN

Don't bite the hand that feeds you yet. Let me ask you this, Professor: so what if it's all a fake?

JORDAN

So what? So what? You can't do proper science—

INT. MUSEUM GIFT SHOP

JORDAN (VOICEOVER)

—if what you're putting out there is fake!

Missing link skulls stare into the darkness on all manner of gift shop kitsch.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

False things are not a part of science? I thought that—

JORDAN

Well, of course they are—you cut out the false things to get the truth.

HOUSEMAN

Is there a timeline for that?

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Man—

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Man, oh man alive. You are slick, Mr. Houseman.

HOUSEMAN

(smiling)

The son obviously gets part of his intelligence from his mother.

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Let's say that at some future date—

HOUSEMAN

Twenty years.

SARAH

—it becomes known—

HOUSEMAN

Even by the scientist who “proved” it twenty years earlier—

SARAH

That eoanthropus libertatis was an elaborate hoax—

HOUSEMAN

And that science—

JORDAN

Wait, wait—

HOUSEMAN

In its ever-onward quest for truth—

MORAN

I get it!

JOHNSON

What?

JORDAN

Wait!

HOUSEMAN

Uncovers and corrects, reveals and re-directs—

JORDAN

You’re suggesting—

SARAH

He is definitely suggesting.

MORAN

Professor, if it’s a couple of double fins down the road—

HOUSEMAN

Science, ever self-correcting.

MORAN

You talk or don't talk as you see fit!

HOUSEMAN

And since you control access to the bones, by contract—a legal contract, which you have signed, by the way—

MORAN

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones!

HOUSEMAN

The professor makes a tidy sum with the publication of his popular history of human evolution—

MORAN

I get to keep my book on the hook.

HOUSEMAN

The museum—which has never pretended to be a model of science anyway—continues to roll on.

SARAH

The town keeps cashing in—

HOUSEMAN

Thomas gets a fine education all the way to a professorship if he wants.

JOHNSON

And everyone becomes happy.

HOUSEMAN

On board everyone except for—
(pointing at Fletcher)
—him.

Fletcher has poured out a little pile of salt from the shaker, into which he etches figures with his fingertip.

FLETCHER

I'm with Thomas. "Mum" is my word of the day.

HOUSEMAN

All right.

(to all)

So? Now that we all know the truth—we band of brothers—does anyone else need to know? Hm?

Everyone looks squarely at each other.

EXT. BEACH IN FLORIDA - YEARS LATER

Gentle waves on a beach. Under dual umbrellas on lounges lay Johnson and Sarah, cool drinks by their side, eyes closed, breathing easily.

INT. BOOKSTORE

People wait to have their copies of “The Apeman Cometh” signed by a beaming Harlan Jordan, the fifth in his series of Apeman science fiction novels.

INT. OFFICE - THE DAILY TAB

A stogie-chomping Dan Moran barks out orders to copy boys, writers, and others as they get the next issue of “The Daily Tab” ready, with the headline “Baby Born Reciting The Bible” and a front-page “photo” of a three-headed goat.

INT. HOUSEMAN BUILDING

Frosted glass office door with “Thomas Shea, President / Houseman Advertising.”

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

In lavishly appointed conference room, Thomas and Fletcher meet with makers of a hemorrhoid cream. On one easel, a large sign, titled “Your Name” and under that, “Itch-Free Cream.” On another easel, another sign, titled “Our Name” and under that, “Calmess.” They talk enthusiastically about their elaborate ad campaign for the hemorrhoid cream.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

On Houseman's desk sits a burlap bag, tied with twine. Houseman picks it up, lets it drop with a THUNK.

REEVES

Dem bone, dem bones—

HOUSEMAN

It's time.

Houseman hands the bag to Reeves.

EXT. FERRY

Reeves stands on the deck of a ferry plying the river, bag in hand. By the railing, with no one looking, he lets go of the bag, and it disappears into the river.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - 100,000 YEARS AGO

An exact replica of the missing link find himself surrounded by a group of armed Homo sapiens, composed of creatures that look incredibly like Johnson, Sarah, Houseman, Jordan, Thomas, Fletcher, and Moran. As they proceed to beat the missing link to death, a VOICE, that of Jennings, now a guide for the Houseman Museum, speaks.

JENNINGS (VOICEOVER)

The struggle for survival was fierce—

INT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM - DIORAMA

A group of schoolchildren listen raptly to Jennings recite the story of survival.

JENNINGS

And our race won out because we had more intelligence and better weapons.

Jennings points out the various figures in the diorama as she speaks.

JENNINGS

That poor missing link—an inferior race—never had a chance. Inferior races never do. Now, over here—

Jennings moves the group to another exhibit as the air fills with the hustle and bustle of crowds paying their money to see the wonders of the Houseman Museum.

INT. DEVELOPMENT OFFICE - TOP UNIVERSITY - 15 YEARS LATER

Thomas and Fletcher huddle with the PR DIRECTOR of a major university fleshing out the upcoming giving campaign. They have come far from the days of hemorrhoids.

Charts, potential slogans, graphics—shirtsleeves rolled up, brisk pace.

DIRECTOR
(pointing at chart)
Now, to increase the endowment by 30 percent—

A business-like KNOCK on the door.

DIRECTOR
Excuse me. Come in!

A SECRETARY carries in both a poster and a worried look.

SECRETARY
Sir—

DIRECTOR
What is it?

She hands him the poster. A frown settles on the director's face.

SECRETARY
I've got reporters crawling everywhere, I've got radio people wanting to set up a broadcast, newsreel people—

THOMAS
What's the problem?

DIRECTOR
(handing over poster)
Academic freedom.

As Thomas and Fletch read the poster, they struggle to keep the horror off their faces.

The poster: "Shea Man, Negroids, and Evolution: The Scientific Case for Segregation." Under that: "Professor Charles Herrnstein, Department of Anthropology."

DIRECTOR

Supposed to be just a simple keynote address at an obscure conference.

THOMAS

I can see your problem.

DIRECTOR

(to secretary)

Special protocol—passes—limited number—my daughter's age, twelve, by lottery. Everyone else—boilerplate later.

The secretary turns to go, but the director speaks again.

DIRECTOR

Keep me updated, every couple of hours. We don't need a race war inside the ivied walls.

(secretary leaves)

Now, back to getting the wealthy alumni to cough up.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

Thomas and Fletch throw down their charts and briefcases, loosen their ties, unbutton their jackets, and stare.

FLETCH

I need a drink.

THOMAS

A drink would help.

But they don't move an inch.

THOMAS

I have to call.

FLETCH

I know. Bourbon or scotch?

THOMAS

One for each hand.

DESK

Thomas punches the intercom.

THOMAS

Betty? I need your special magic. In two minutes I want you to track down the phone number of one Harlan Jordan.

BETTY (O.S.)

The science fiction writer?

THOMAS

That very one.

BETTY (O.S.)

I have his newest Aileron book right by my bed.

THOMAS

To each his own partner. Put him through directly to me.

BETTY (O.S.)

Up, up, and away!

Fletch brings over three glasses.

FLETCH

Scotch for the right, bourbon for the left.

(hold up his glass)

Vodka for me, right down the middle.

They both sip and stare at the phone.

INT. OFFICE OF HARLAN JORDAN

An older Jordan at a desk completely bare except for his typewriter and a neat pile of finished pages. The patient phone RINGS sweetly.

JORDAN
(picking up phone)

Hello?

As he listens, he slowly pushes the typewriter forward so that he can rest his elbows on the desk's edge.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

Thomas and Fletch do not even jump when Betty announces that Harlan Jordan is on the line. Thomas pushes the speakerphone button as if it were dynamite.

THOMAS
Hello, Harlan. I've got Fletch here.

FLETCH
Hel-lo.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THOMAS AND JORDAN

THOMAS
Sorry to bother you on what is probably a nice day where you are, but do you believe in ghosts?

JORDAN
If you're calling me now, then I am going to have to believe.

THOMAS
Because we are having a visitation.

FLETCH
(out of Jordan's earshot)
The sins of the fathers—

THOMAS
Have you heard of Charles Herrnstein?

Jordan pushes the typewriter even further away from him.

JORDAN
Yes.

THOMAS

I have a poster here.

JORDAN

I know. I heard. I still have ties.

THOMAS

Were you going to do anything?

Jordan does not answer, simply taps the nail of his index finger on the "X" key of the typewriter.

THOMAS

So?

JORDAN

So it's time to put old ghosts to rest, isn't it?

FLETCH

An exorcism.

JORDAN

Reserve me a room at the Plaza. Leave a message where to meet you. I can get a plane out of here tomorrow.

THOMAS

You once told me that fossils never stop talking.

But Jordan has already hung up.

FLETCH

(finishing vodka)

Fossils never shut up.

THOMAS

I'll call my parents.

FLETCH

I'll call Moran. And Houseman, speaking of fossils.

A heavy SILENCE between them, punctuated by STREET NOISES and OFFICE SOUNDS from the outer office.

FLETCH

Did you really think it would never come back?

THOMAS

I hoped.

FLETCH

Me, too.

THOMAS

Stupid, eh?

FLETCH

Ah, the right thing—why doesn't it feel so good?

They clink glasses, and Fletch downs the bourbon while Thomas does the same with the scotch.

INT. BEDROOM OF JOHNSON AND SARAH

Johnson and Sara put down their individual telephones. Sarah goes to the closet, pulls down a suitcase, and starts stuffing clothes into it.

SARAH

It's about time.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - THE DAILY TAB

Moran rocks in his sumptuous leather chair for several moments until, with a decisive jolt, he rocks forward, punches a button on his phone, and barks out an order.

MORAN

Jameson? I got a conference I want you to cover. For our upscale rag.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN MUSEUM

Houseman, much older but still perked and sly, puts down the telephone, then launches full, deep belly LAUGHS.

HOUSEMAN

Reeves!

Reeves, hardly looking a day older, enters.

HOUSEMAN

The safe—bring me the bag in the upper compartment.

Reeves, confused by the LAUGHTER, swings back a portrait of a bearded lady, opens a large safe, unlocks the upper compartment, and pulls out a burlap bag exactly like the one Reeves threw into the river. Houseman SLAPS his desk.

HOUSEMAN

Right here.

Which Reeves does, the bag landing with a solid THUNK. Reeves cocks his head, points to the bag.

HOUSEMAN

Yours was full of shrunken heads I didn't need anymore.

INT. RESTAURANT, BACK ROOM - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Thomas, Fletch, Johnson, Sarah, Jordan, Moran—all around a large circular table with a shining white tablecloth.

From the outer restaurant, they hear the familiar BOOM of Houseman's VOICE, and then the force that is Houseman sweeps in. The only difference between then and now is that he carries a polished walking stick as tall as he is.

He also holds a burlap bag.

HOUSEMAN

When shall we seven meet again, in thunder, lightning, or in rain?

THOMAS

When the hurlyburly's done, when the battle's lost and won.

(to Jordan)

I finally read the list.

Houseman sits. He places the bag gently beside his chair.

HOUSEMAN

Now, besides dinner, what is our plan?

INT. LECTURE HALL

CHARLES HERRNSTEIN, brash, boiling, older than he looks, stands triumphant behind a lectern. A small table, filled with books and papers, stands next to the lectern.

Ranks of suited men—and a sprinkling of women—none of them dark-skinned—spread in front of him, looking at the slide of Shea Man's skull thrown up on the large screen.

HERRNSTEIN

Though the actual Shea Man bones have been mysteriously lost, innumerable casts of the reconstructed skull exist, one of which you see here. Next.

The slide changes: Shea Man as drawn by an artist.

HERRNSTEIN

That speaks for itself. Next.

The slide changes: Shea Man on the left, a Negroid drawing on the right.

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

The seven move smoothly through the paneled doors, Jordan in the lead.

STAGE

HERRNSTEIN

Modern anthropologists have tried mightily to erase what they believed was the racist science of the 19th century—but they were wrong to do so. Races do exist, and they differ in their abilities, and the dark-skinned races rank lower than the white race, with Shea Man—

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

Houseman BANGS his walking stick several times, and its resonant BOOM turns everyone around.

THOMAS' VISION

Everyone turning to face them is dressed as if they were the BARBARIANS attacking Rome, faces in a snarl, canines bared, rude weapons ready to disembowel.

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

Houseman's VOICE brings Thomas out of the vision.

INTERCUT BETWEEN STAGE AND BACK OF LECTURE HALL

HOUSEMAN

Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye.

JORDAN

Mr. Herrnstein.

HERRNSTEIN

Doctor. And who are you?

JORDAN

You are seriously, seriously mistaken.

HERRNSTEIN

Who are you?

Moran looks over to the media section, catches the eye of his REPORTER, and gives him a thumbs-up. The reporter gives Moran a thumbs-up back.

Herrnstein watches the group moves to the stage, each head pivoting to trace their journey, the communal movement sounding like WIND in the suddenly quiet lecture hall.

THOMAS' VISION

All seven of them, dressed barely in torn togas and laurel wreaths, parade through a gauntlet of spears and SCREAMS.

STAGE

The seven ascend to the stage.

MEDIA SECTION

Photographers pop off shots, the reporters scribble, a movie camera grinds out footage.

STAGE

HERRNSTEIN

You can't—

But Houseman moves Herrnstein aside easily with his stick, and Jordan steps up to the microphone. Houseman drops the burlap bag on the table beside the lectern: THUNK.

JORDAN

My name is Harlan Jordan. Formerly Professor Harlan Jordan. Some of you may know me. The—what?—well, whatever I was, my name has been attached to that thing up there.

WHISPERING whips through the crowd. Jordan nods to Houseman, who hands his stick to Thomas, unties the bag, and gently dumps out Shea Man.

JORDAN

And to these as well.

HERRNSTEIN

They were lost.

HOUSEMAN

Once was lost has now been found. Hallelujah!

Herrnstein goes to touch them.

HOUSEMAN

Off!

JORDAN

Professor Herrnstein—whatever your ideas—no matter how wrong they are—and they are very wrong—you can’t base any of them on Shea Man. Because he never existed. Never. Existed. We—the seven of us—have a story to tell you. Let me start.

THOMAS’ VISION

As Jordan speaks, Thomas sees, not a crowd of barbarian academics, but a vast field of sunflowers waving slowly in the wind under a bright nourishing sun.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - ONE YEAR LATER

Light flickers over the seven as they watch a trailer for “ShaMan,” a superhero who combines in himself both animal and human and fights against prejudice everywhere.

Credits follow the trailer. Clearly emblazoned on the screen is the following: “Screenplay by Harlan Jordan. From a story conceived by Johnson Shea, Sarah Shea, Thomas Shea, Fletcher Calvin, Dan Moran, and L.T. Houseman.”

Lights come up, and they all turn to Jordan.

SARAH

Like it a lot.

JOHNSON

I second that.

MORAN

It’s got the juice.

HOUSEMAN

Already booked into my theatres for its opening. With expert publicity by—

THOMAS

Thomas/Fletcher Inc.

FLETCHER

And a great print campaign in—

MORAN

The Daily Tab's family of newspapers and magazines.
And a top-dog product line of toys and stuff—

JOHNSON

By J&S Manufacturing Enterprises, based in sunny
Miami, Florida.

HOUSEMAN

(to Jordan)

You're looking pensive, my friend.

JORDAN

I was just thinking what a good friend Shea Man—
ShaMan—has been.

HOUSEMAN

Here, here.

ALL

Here, here.

JORDAN

(quoting)

"With a clarion call—"

SARAH

"ShaMan fights—"

THOMAS

"For justice to all—"

FLETCHER

"And everyone's rights."

THOMAS' VISION

On the screen in a packed movie theatre ShaMan swoops through the sky
defeating evildoers while MARCHING MUSIC prompts the movie audience of old
and young alike to applaud wildly.

FADE OUT