

THE
LUMBERJACK

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EXT. PITCH-BLACKNESS

Haunting sounds of a primal rainforest: the cry of red-tailed hawks spotting shrews, the throaty rumble of cougars stalking elk between ferns.

Crack! A match flames to life. A brawny hand lights a lantern.

An enormous, muddied MASTER LOGGER is revealed in a spooky fog. Wearing a stag shirt and suspenders, he extends the lantern. It illuminates trunks of massive RED CEDARS, ninety feet in circumference and three hundred feet tall. Beyond remains a sea of darkness.

A nervous APPRENTICE staggers into the lantern light, panting, with two felling axes over his shoulders. The master logger gazes up at the Goliath before them, caressing its twisting bark.

MASTER LOGGER

She's one pretty dame, ain't she?

Suckling a cigarette, the apprentice scans the creepy darkness.

APPRENTICE

Sure thing, boss.

Behind them, a second pair of fallers--an IRISHMAN and a TAR HEEL--abruptly enter the light, their gear jangling. The commotion spooks the apprentice. The fallers snicker.

EXT. CEDAR TREE - NIGHT

Thwack! Thwack! The master logger and apprentice alternate strikes into their cedar's trunk, forming an undercut. Between blows, a branch snaps in the inky fog. The apprentice steals a glance. Scoffing:

MASTER LOGGER

You expectin' someone?

APPRENTICE

No sir. Just never been out here at night. It's a dark like I never seen.

The Irishman unholsters a Smith & Wesson REVOLVER.

IRISHMAN

Don't fret, sweetheart. "Bridget" here'll look after ya.

The Irishman, Tar Heel, and master logger chortle. The apprentice forces a queasy chuckle. Then, bizarrely, a high-pitched snicker emanates from the darkness.

Startled, they all go silent. They case the blackness. A rustling in the underbrush. Sword ferns sway.

APPRENTICE

Boss?

MASTER LOGGER

Hell. Ain't a man--we're four miles from shelter. Raccoon, I bet.

Just then, the apprentice glimpses a towering, lanky SHAPE lurch between cedars with freakish quickness. Beads of sweat form on the apprentice's forehead.

APPRENTICE

Boss--that ain't no raccoon.

Crrink! Metal grinds against stone in the blackness. *Crrink!* *Crrank!* It's an unmistakable sound to these men--someone's sharpening an axe. The apprentice's eyes bulge. The Irishman cocks his revolver.

MASTER LOGGER

Who's there?!

Another demented snicker, almost alien, reverberating. Then, murmurs of the old-growth rainforest--humming cicadas, whistling branches, a distant stream. The Irishman shares a skittish glance with the Tar Heel.

MASTER LOGGER (CONT'D)

I said who's out there?!

Beyond the nearest colonnade of trees, a nasally, predatory, paranormal voice:

VOICE

I am.

The Irishman jerks his aim toward the voice. The unseen figure cheerfully whistles a few notes of a lullaby. The Tar Heel and the bearded logger now clutch their axes like weapons. Steam chugs from the apprentice's mouth.

MASTER LOGGER

Fella, you're on private property! This here land belongs to the Jubilee Logging Company, of Ellisville, Washington.

Crrink! Crrank! Sparks flash, briefly revealing: veiny, bluish-white hands, seeming to glow in the fog, with clawed fingers. Not quite human. Scornfully:

VOICE

Loggers.

MASTER LOGGER

'Ey, I'm warning you--you're trespassing and we're armed, alright?

The voice titters. *Crunch* of a footstep over moss, still in front of them.

VOICE

My little girl ran off with one of you savages.

The master logger nods to the Irishman. The Irishman narrows his aim at the laughter. *Pow!* The apprentice jerks. Then silence. Did they get him?

Crunch of another footstep over moss and twigs, somehow now to their left. The demented voice now hums the lullaby.

MASTER LOGGER

How the hell did he--

VOICE

Want to see what's left of her?

The master logger gestures again to the Irishman. The Irishman aims--*pow!* A shrill, almost melodramatic groan, as if the predator's been struck. Then something slumps in the underbrush, thumping against the forest floor. When all is quiet, their moods lift. The master logger pumps a fist.

MASTER LOGGER

Attaboy, Donnelly!

Triumphantly, the Irishman bows. Once he straightens, from behind, a hand snaps out of the darkness and snatches his face. It's the freakish, clawed hand. The Irishman screeches as he's wrenched backward into the darkness. Flailing, he fires the revolver.

The bullet rips through the Tar Heel's knee, shattering bits of his kneecap straight through his skin. The Tar Heel drops, shrieking, while the Irishman disappears.

MASTER LOGGER (CONT'D)

Holy hell--

Unseen, the Irishman wails for help from the forest floor as the killer cackles. Then--*thwack!* The sickening noise of axe through skull and flesh. The killer shrieks with glee as blood sprays into the lantern light.

The apprentice is shocked--unmoving, hyperventilating. The master logger snatches him by the collar and tugs him into the dark, away from the Tar Heel. They huddle against a cedar, out of the light.

Still in his lantern light, the Tar Heel tries to stand but can't. His leg is in shreds. Sobbing:

TAR HEEL

Help me!

(beat)

Goddamnit, help me!

Whimpering, the apprentice glances at the master logger. The master logger cups his hand over the apprentice's mouth and shakes his head.

The cheerful whistling resumes. A pair of legs in pinstripe trousers hop into the light. The shoes are polished oxfords--not a speck of mud on them. We can see the bottom of a medical apron, splattered with fresh blood. Skipping a step, and hardly touching the ground, the legs trail the Tar Heel, who's struggling with all his might to crawl into the dark.

TAR HEEL (CONT'D)

Please . . . leave me alone!

Still huddled behind the tree, the apprentice squirms in the master logger's grip. Off-screen behind them:

TAR HEEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I just--can't stand. Please--

Thwack! The Tar Heel shares the Irishman's fate to more laughter. The butchering continues, as if for pleasure. *Thwack! Thwack!*

Crake! An axe shatters the Tar Heel's lantern, snuffing out its light. Then--*crake!*--the master logger's lantern is smashed. All goes dark.

The master logger and apprentice share a glance. *Crunch* eight feet behind the men--the evil still unseen. Now singing, toying with them:

VOICE

"Hush, little baby, don't say a word."

Crrink! Crrank! of the killer's sharpening axe.

MASTER LOGGER

Run--

The men stand and sprint for their lives, the master logger leading the way--over mossy rocks and deadwood and through huckleberry shrubs. Branches grab at them as they stumble down a steep valley slope.

EXT. FOREST CURTAIN - NIGHT

Exhausted, they stop in a clearing just a few feet beyond the forest, hunched over and clutching their knees. They spot a dirt access road nearby, lit by a shack's security light.

The master logger slaps his apprentice's shoulder.

LOGGER

Jesus, kid. Think anyone'll believe that story?

A twig snaps behind them.

VOICE

How about this one?

The master logger swivels around as--*crack!* An axe blade smashes into his skull, splitting it in two like a pistachio. Blood and brain matter spray onto the apprentice's face.

The apprentice utters a primal scream, falling backward to the ground, while chunks of his boss's skull slip off his lips. The towering KILLER hops over the convulsing logger.

KILLER

Pardon.

The apprentice scrambles to his feet. Backing away, he peers up at the killer, whose face is almost entirely concealed by a stylish bowler hat. All we glimpse is an unforgettable, freakishly stretched grin, like a Cheshire cat's--violet lips, black gums, enormous teeth like a horse's. A smile from hell, above a chin that glows like the moon.

APPRENTICE

Holy . . .
(turning for the road)
Help!!

Sound of the ghostly killer cackling at the fleeing apprentice. Drumbeat, cut to black.

EXT. RAINFOREST - LATE AFTERNOON

Aerial view of an endless Pacific Northwest rainforest. The lush sea of canopy extends to the horizon. No sign of civilization.

SUPER: Six Months Later.

As the camera descends through the upper canopy, we hear sawing and falling timber; bucking and rigging, throaty yells of indiscernible origin.

SUPER: The Gabriel Lumber Camp: 30 Miles East of Seattle, Washington. 1937.

Below the canopy, a horde of hardy LOGGERS are revealed, working urgently in the gorgeous, foggy forest. (Fog permeates this story.) Steam donkeys whistle. Logs whisk through the air on wires. The camera continues down to:

EXT. GABRIEL LOGGING CAMP - LATE AFTERNOON

A strapping young logger, LEO BANKS, 25, sits on a stool beside a western hemlock. He wears crippled reading glasses and is immersed in a children's textbook, Beginner's Astronomy, featuring a cover illustration of smiling planets.

Leo is lively, headstrong, and taller than most loggers. He wears a work shirt with suspenders, a cross necklace, and a newsboy cap. Dirt cakes his rough skin. His fingertips are bandaged by tape. When he flips a page, muttering:

LEO
Fascinating.

Cheers and shouts around him. Camera pulls back to reveal that Leo is sitting before a semicircle of spectating LOGGERS--fallers, buckers, skidders--each grasping cash bets.

At the hemlock next to Leo--separated by just a worktable--we discover HANS, a German behemoth with boulders for biceps. Hans powerfully chops a notch into the trunk while belting out a German fight song.

ROGER, 50s, a stately logging veteran, steps forward from the other bettors, a ticking stopwatch in his grasp. He spits dip before flashing the stopwatch at Leo.

ROGER
Time! His head start is up, kid.

Leo earmarks the textbook. Standing, he places the book and his glasses on the worktable between him and Hans.

LEO

Did you boys know that a million
earths could fit inside the sun?
(off the loggers'
befuddled stares)
Wrong crowd. Point taken.

Roger exhibits his own cash bet.

ROGER

Cut the tree down, Copernicus. He's
already halfway through.

Leo rolls back a sheet of burlap on the table. It blankets
his glimmering, immaculate axe. He glances at Hans' progress.
The German has already started the back cut on his hemlock.

LEO

Don't tickle her too hard, rookie.
You're starting to bruise her.

When Hans strikes his back cut again, the trunk wobbles.

HANS

You give too much time for German
strength, *fräulein!* Ha!

Leo inspects his axe's razor-sharp edge. To the crowd:

LEO

I got some new books in, if any o'
you boys wanna learn something.
(sauntering to his tree)
Science, history, economics--

Leo swings his axe at the tree in a fluid, masterful motion.
Pop! The bit strikes the trunk with such violence that the
whole tree shakes. The camp vets chuckle. Hans pauses his
work, stunned. Leo winks at him.

LEO (CONT'D)

Even got books on how to log
properly.

Pop! Leo's bit strikes again, forming a gaping notch. Another
German ROOKIE with dollars in his fist glowers at Hans.

GERMAN ROOKIE

Schneller geschnitten, Hans!

Hans hurries back to work--*thud, thud*. Leo lines up on the
opposite side and--pop!--drives a deep back cut into the
trunk. The ground tremors as the trunk snaps.

LOGGER 1

Attaboy!

The loggers retreat and holler, "Timber!" as Leo's hemlock plummets. Those who bet on Leo cheer. The suckers curse and swig from contraband flasks.

Hans dumps his axe, furious, and starts toward Leo.

HANS

You hustled me.

LEO

(to the crowd)

Now can a scholar read in peace?

Smack! Hans punches Leo with devastating power.

LOGGERS

Ooh!

LOGGER 2

Kill that cocky bastard, Hans!

Leo regains himself with blood pouring down his eye socket. *Crack!* He strikes Hans with equal force, snapping the German's head back.

LOGGERS

Oooh!

Hans lunges, driving Leo backward into the worktable. The pair tumble over the table and splash in the cold mud. The others gather around as Hans pummels Leo.

The blare of a whistle breaks up the commotion. The camp's LUMBER FOREMAN steps into the fray--mousy and pale, clutching a clipboard. He gives off a creepy vibe, sporting a black upturned mustache. He wears what looks like a Navy captain's cap and uniform, and he smokes a CIGARILLO.

FOREMAN

Break it up! We're behind schedule,
you dumb animals.

The loggers hide their bets and flasks, as if with a prison guard. Hans and Leo stand, both drenched in blood and muck.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Banks. Big surprise.

(to the others)

Two dollars from all of you, for
gambling.

The impoverished men murmur at the hefty fine. Leo steps forward, blowing blood from his nose.

LEO
Bullshit. They got mouths to feed.

FOREMAN
Two more from you for swearing. And another three for fighting.

The crowd silences at the crippling fine.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
Another week's pay, vanished.
You'll either learn your place,
Banks, or you'll starve.

Chastened, Leo starts for the forest, snatching up his axe.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
Get back here! The owner wants to see you. Now, in the office.

INT. CAMP OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Leo idles around the regal office: Victorian wallpaper, high gloss oak chairs. A sonata plays on a record player. When Leo pokes a porcelain ballerina on a shelf, its arm breaks off. He slinks away, whistling.

Behind the owner's desk, he surveys a prominent OIL PAINTING of a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN. She wears a gown, with currents of blonde hair flowing over her shoulders. The nameplate reads: "Mrs. Marcy Gabriel. In Loving Memory. 1900-1936."

VOICE (O.S.)
We lose the ones we love the most.
It's maddening, isn't it?

Leo spins around. MR. GABRIEL, late 40's, enters the front door. He's a ruddy-cheeked businessman with glinty eyes and a friendly smile. He wears a worsted wool suit.

As they shake hands, Mr. Gabriel offers an embroidered hand towel from a side table before striding to his desk.

MR. GABRIEL
Roger says your old man was the best faller out here. From what I can tell, his son's just as good.

Stiffening, while wiping his face:

LEO
He was much better, sir.

MR. GABRIEL
Well, we sure could've used him.
Have a seat.

Leo sits facing the desk. Mr. Gabriel sits at his desk and rifles through a drawer.

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Leo, I'll cut right to it. I'd like you to work a double shift through the week.

Mr. Gabriel brings out a pipe and match.

LEO
--Nights, sir?

MR. GABRIEL
We've fallen behind. Some of these hooligans cut slower than the forest grows. I need our best veteran on the big saw 'round the clock.

Leo rubs his palms over his trousers. Lighting his pipe, Mr. Gabriel motions outside.

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)
You boys spooked by ghost stories?

LEO
No, sir.

MR. GABRIEL
Now, I dunno what just happened at those other two camps. But the cops assured me they were accidents.

LEO
It's the work itself that concerns me, sir. We've lost two men this year in daylight, and I've got a family that depends on me.

MR. GABRIEL
I understand, kid, believe me I do. And, I admit I'm new to this trade and still learning the ropes.

He exhibits a BILLING STATEMENT from the desk, stamped: "Final Notice."

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)

But I'm not new to business. I've got loans to repay, and a week to make this month's payment. If we're short come Sunday, you'll be a logger without a logging camp.

Gabriel removes a cash box from his desk drawer.

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)

Now then, my offer.

He reveals a crisp HUNDRED-DOLLAR BILL, placing it on the desk. Leo eyes it as if beholding a fortune.

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)

For saving my ass. One for each night, starting tomorrow. By Sunday, you'll be high on the hog.

Leo can't take his eyes off the bill.

MR. GABRIEL (CONT'D)

Buy that pretty girl of yours a brand-new something special.

EXT. LUMBERYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

A TRANSIT BUS branded "LIMITED SEATTLE" accelerates from a stop on the county road (CR 19) beyond camp, the only byway that cuts into this wilderness.

The chugging bus reveals behind it a young woman in a waitress apron: ELLIE JAMES, 24. At first blush she seems a fish out of water in this muddy wilderness--her wavy hair is pinned back, she wears drop earrings and lipstick, and below her apron she wears a knit day dress. But as she crosses CR 19, she carries herself with the hardiness of someone who's had to fight for every inch. She clutches a food container along with a few used BOOKS bound by twine.

She passes the newly repainted camp sign and continues down the camp drive. In the nearby trees, a throng of fallers pause their work to gawk at her. A NEW FALLER:

NEW FALLER

Sweet Jesus. Is that Leo's girl?

VET FALLER

Yup.