

SMOTE
by
Justin Moss

Produced by:
FlyBoy Films
2883 S. Mendenhall, Ste 6
Memphis, TN 38115
Matt Beickert
(901) 550-6582

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER- SUNSET

The sun sinks below the horizon, casting an orange hue over the Mississippi. The last rays of light reflect brightly off of downtown Memphis as barges slowly churn by. Everything moves slowly, lazily.

A RIVER MAN in a JON BOAT, shadowy and silhouetted by the setting sun, motors his way to the west bank, where...

EXT. WEST BANK OF THE MISSISSIPPI- SUNSET

Amidst the thick foliage, RICHIE SCRUGGS (15, fancies himself mature for is age) steadies his camera on his subject (off-screen). Richie tries to conceal his proud smile with some difficulty.

RICHIE

This is great. This is so-

Something catches his attention, and with it, his composure.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Aw fff-CUT!

In the brush, **DOING WHAT**, stands JOSEPHINE 'JO' LAFONTAINE (22, vivacious and expressive). Though happy to be involved, she's clearly losing patience.

JO

Something's biting me-

RICHIE

DON'T MOVE! That's perfect.

JO

(frozen)

What now?

RICHIE

There's a plane.

Indeed, overhead, a plane makes its decent toward Memphis.

JO

So?

RICHIE

So, Jo, whenever a plane flies overhead, the crew, that's us, has to break. That's just the way it's done.

JO

I thought that was, like, so the sound didn't get all messed up.

Richie considers this, clearly for the first time, before giving a strong confident nod.

RICHIE

Yeah, I think that's right.

JO

But you said this was a silent film.

RICHIE

(fuck, she's right)

(Beat) Uh, you know what? I think we got what we need today. Sun's setting anyhow. Yeah we'd better pack up.

Embarrassed, Richie begins collapsing his tripod clumsily. Jo unfreezes.

JO

No, Richie, we can keep shooting. I didn't mean—

RICHIE

No it's OK, I've kept you long enough. If we stay out here any longer we'll get eaten alive.

Beat. The sound of CICADAS permeates the woody bank. Richie sits in the grass busily packing his equipment. Jo, sensing Richie's nervousness, changes the subject.

JO

You still gonna help me edit my tapes?

RICHIE

Oh yeah! Yes, no of course I will. I mean, I owe you for this so—

Jo, already taller than Richie, kneels down to his seat in the grass and rests a kind hand on his shoulder.

JO

No, Richie, you don't owe me. Friends help friends out, that's all.

RICHIE

(coy)
Friends?

JO

Yep, just friends.

RICHIE

Right, just friend.

They smile their casual, conciliatory smiles. Jo stands and begins pulling off her FAKE EYEBALLS AND LIPS.

JO

Ugh, feels so good to get this shit off my face. What is all this anyway?

RICHIE

Oh that's wood glue. I can't find any spirit gum-

JO

No not that smart ass, I mean-
...woodglue?

Richie shrugs.

JO (CONT'D)

I mean this movie you're shooting. What is it? What's all (gestures to herself/her costume) this?

RICHIE

Umm, I'm not entirely sure yet. I've got a good idea but right now I'm just sorta like, following my muse. I mean whatever, you know? When I'm famous they'll call this "my early work" and then someone else can tell me "what it means".

JO

(impressed)
Wow, I wish I had your smarts when I was in school.

Jo walks to her CAR (an old hatchback) as Richie absorbs the complement, up until the 'kid' part at least.

BZZT! His phone rings.

RICHIE

Hey Dad.

He turns towards the car to leave, but what he hears roots him in place.

I/E. JO'S CAR- DUSK

Jo sifts through a handful of papers, flashing glimpses of words such as "AUDITION" and "OPEN CASTING CALL". She stows them back in the glove box.

Through the window, she sees Richie, still some 30 yards away, totally motionless. She HONKS and rolls down the window.

JO

Richie, I'm dying of old aaaage!

Richie looks up, still on the phone, gaunt. He swallows hard.

JO (CONT'D)

Richie?

The sound of JET ENGINES swell as another plane passes through the sky directly overhead.

MILLARD (V.O.)

My dearest flock, it pains me to announce that last night, at about seven-anna-quarter o'clock, we lost a great shepherd of the faithful.

EXT. HALLELUJAH HILL- THE NEXT MORNING

A small but proud white clapboard church sits nestled in a clearing, surrounded by forest on most sides. Cars line the dirt and gravel road that leads into the clearing. Though well maintained, the splintering planks and warped wooden stairs belie its true age.

And contrary to its name, it is in fact **not perched on a hill.**

INT. HALLELUJAH HILL- MORNING

The church, practically full, holds roughly 50 members. The atmosphere is morose, yet totally silent apart from the somber sermon of REVEREND EUGENE MILLARD [ma'LARD] (early 50's, slick jet-black hair and sideburns).

MILLARD

Judith Jean Scruggs was many things to many people here.

(MORE)

MILLARD (CONT'D)

She was a being of extreme moral conviction, possessing a faith so profound it was almost frightening. She was a founding member of this church some 80 odd years ago, a heritage that lives on in her grandson, Garrison, and her great-grandson, Richie.

GARRISON SCRUGGS (50, big balding and bored) and his wife LYDIA (40's, well kept, the picture of composure) sit on either side of their son, Richie.

In the front row, a WREATH occupies the space once reserved for Judy Jean.

In short, she was the spiritual foundation of this congregation. Without Judy Jean and her tireless war against the Devil's dealings, we must all take care to be more wary of the evil that lies in our own hearts, and the hearts of all men. Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

Somber beat.

MILLARD

Which, of course, brings us to the matters at hand.

Millard's mood changes. Instantly he becomes more casual, more loose, as he conspicuously removes a folded page and reading glasses from his suit pocket. The congregation shifts uncomfortably.

LYDIA

(sotto, groan)

Christ, really? Today?

MILLARD

Normally we would wait until Sunday for this, but seeing as how Judy Jean is no longer around to do the honors, I felt it only appropriate to read it myself, in her memory.

Millard flattens the page with one swift, decisive stroke of the hand. In large red letters, the page reads SHAME LIST.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Here we go. SHAME on YOU, Darryl Jakubzyk, for raising the price of your dinner entrees this month. We're in a recession!

In the pews, DARRYL JAKUBZYK (LATE 50'S, weathered and sinewy) sneers as he loosens his BIG MOUTH BASS SHAPED NECKTIE.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

SHAME on YOU, Cynthia Doon, for taking the lords name in vain a reported *seventeen times*.

CYNTHIA DOON, (50'S, meek, homely, round) blushes with embarrassment and hangs her head in shame.

CYNTHIA

(penitent)

I'm sorry, it's just that I sprained my ankle-

MILLARD

Perhaps if you lost some weight they wouldn't have to work so hard, hmm? And finally, SHAME on YOU, Cody LaFontaine, for...

CODY LAFONTAINE, (13, lanky, stoic and pubescent) doesn't even bother raising his head, too busy texting and playing music through his headphones.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

...Pretty much everything. A'ight! Thus concludes today's service. You are adjourned. Now scam.

CLACK! Millard strikes the podium with a previously concealed GAVEL, causing several members to flinch. As everyone rises and turns to file out-

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Mr. and Mrs. Scruggs, a word if you'd be so kind.

Millard sweeps a welcoming arm towards his office door. Garrison and Lydia meet each other's gaze, careful to hide their irritation from their son.

INT. MILLARD'S OFFICE- DAY

The office is filled with Christian iconography, including a large catholic style CRUCIFIX with a particularly gory Jesus, centered on the wall behind Millard's desk.

Millard sits with his hands clasped.

MILLARD

How are things?

GARRISON

Oh, fine, fine. You know...*considering*...

Lydia makes a *yadda-yadda-yadda* gesture. Richie can't tear his eyes from the crucifix.

MILLARD

May I enquire as to your arrangements?

LYDIA

I don't think-

GARRISON

No, it's fine. We've decided to move forward as quickly as possible. She'll be interred tomorrow. We'd like you to preside, Eugene-

MILLARD

Reverend Millard.

GARRISON

-of course.

MILLARD

Why such haste?

LYDIA

She's not getting any deader.

GARRISON

To be frank, in accordance with my grandmother's *wishes*, her will cannot be read until after her funeral. Her lawyer made it clear she was very adamant on that point.

Millard SIGHS and rocks back in his chair. He kicks his feet up on the desk and begins to light a cigarette. Before he does, he offers one to each of the Scruggs in turn.

Garrison and Lydia take one, but as Richie reaches out Lydia slaps his hand away.

MILLARD

Do you believe in providence, Mr. Scruggs? I'm not talking baby-mama wins the lottery or satanist sets himself on fire. I'm talking real Hand of God shit.

GARRISON

Reverend, we're pretty busy-

MILLARD

(Interrupting)

BECAUSE I DO. (beat) Do you wanna know why?

Garrison and Lydia clearly do not want to know why, but Richie seems interested.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Go ahead, ask me.

RICHIE

Why do you believe in providence?

Millard grins his shit-eating grin. He stands and begins pacing, contemplating his words.

MILLARD

Last night, about 7:30, not a moment after you called to impart the terrible news of Judy Jean's passing, I received another call. I considered not answering, *wracked* with grief though I was, but by the grace of GOD, something compelled me to lift up the receiver.

He turns to the Scruggs. Here's the kicker.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Richie, how would you like your great granny to be in a documentary?

Richie eyes widen, his interest piqued.

GARRISON

What!

LYDIA

Excuse me?

RICHIE
A documentary?

MILLARD
I was contacted by a film crew-

GARRISON
Now hold on-

MILLARD
-Currently shooting a documentary
about "small town religion,"
whatever that means-

LYDIA
I'm not really comfortable-

MILLARD
They're in Little Rock right now,
and they'd love to come shoot
Hallelujah Hill. Now calm down, I
too resisted at first. But then I
saw this opportunity for what it
was. Providence. This is as clear a
sign from God as I've ever
witnessed. I believe it is his wish
that Judy Jean's good works be
immortalized on our mortal plain,
as well as the next, *in absentia*.

LYDIA
Reverend, I'm sorry but that's just
dumb.

RICHIE
Dumb! What? This is like the
greatest thing that's ever
happened!

Garrison and Lydia stare down Richie with frustration and
confusion. He collects his thoughts: This might be his only
chance to see a real film in action. He goes for it.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
You know, providence, God and
whatever. Mom, Dad, please.

GARRISON
Richie, I don't think you really
appreciate what's going on here-

RICHIE

No I really do! A film crew would come and give our church some exposure. All great grandma Judy every wanted was to spread her word of God. (beat) It's what she would have wanted.

He looks up sadly to his parents.

Millard's eyes smile.

MILLARD

So, Mr. and Mrs. Scruggs, shall we honor Judy Jean's memory, or stand in the way of providence?

All eyes on Garrison: Millard's cunning, Lydia's incredulity, Richie's pleading.

GARRISON

Fine! Fine, we'll make a show of it. Give her a grand send off. I'll bring the popcorn.

MILLARD

Praise Jesus! I knew you'd see the light. And that is why—

Millard produces a STACK OF CONTRACTS AND RELEASES from a desk drawer, and divvies them amongst the three Scruggs.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

I took care of all the preliminary arrangements. The crew arrives tomorrow, the funeral will take place the following day. Lovely plot, picked it out myself. Now if y'all could put your scribbles down on all of these we'll be in business.

They begin signing with varying levels of enthusiasm for Millard's scheme. What are they getting themselves into.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

(leading)

Would you like to see the headstone?

They all stop abruptly, but before anyone can reply, Millard holds of the photograph (not visible OS). Whatever it is, it is shocking enough to render the Scruggs totally speechless.

INT. SCRUGGS CAR- DAY

Richie sits in the back seat while his parents discuss the forms they've just signed.

LYDIA

Unbelievable. Look, it says right here they have the right to stay and shoot for a whole month!

GARRISON

Lydia-

LYDIA

And don't get me started on Millard!

GARRISON

I have no desire to.

LYDIA

That slimy pompous- you'd think she was HIS kin. Oh if she left him anything-

RICHIE

What's gonna happen to Grandma Judy's stuff?

Beat.

GARRISON

Well, we're not sure yet. But I called your uncle Spencer. He's headed up tomorrow night to help us pack up her house, arrange the funeral... (reaching for third thing) Grieve?

RICHIE

Seems like Reverend Millard had everything pretty much arranged.

LYDIA

Oh, don't get me STARTED on-

GARRISON

LYDIA! Don't worry, the hard part's over. We've been preparing for this for a long time. Let Millard have his show, we'll still get what's coming to us.

He puts his hand in Lydia's, placating her.

In the back, Richie fondles his camera, content as well.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER- SUNRISE.

Sunlight creeps over the city of Memphis, shadows receding and the sun bathes the river in the light of a new morning.

EXT. WRRD RADIO STATION- MORNING

A SLICK CAR screeches to a halt, dust flying, outside of the WRRD 'THE WORD' radio station. Out steps Millard, Sunday best, Aviators shining in the hot Arkansas sun.

INT. WRRD RADIO STATION

Millard strides down the hallway like he owns the place. He combs his hair as he walks. As a YOUNG WOMAN walks past him, he turns and lowers his glasses, checking her out without breaking stride. He WHISTLES to himself as he runs a comb through his hair.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

Millard blasts through the doors, ignoring the ILLUMINAED ON AIR sign. Inside the tech booth, we see the startled TECHNICIAN attempt to stand and stop him, but is too tangled in chords to move.

At the old CAN-STYLE microphone, a very SWEET OLD LADY, wrapping up her program.

SWEET OLD LADY
-Hyacinths, hydrangeas,
crysanthemums-or 'mums' for the lay-
gardener (giggle)-

Millard seizes mic and stares down the sweet old lady.

MILLARD
Madam, It's 9 am.

SWEET OLD LADY
Oh, Reverend! I was just wrapping-

MILLARD
How many times have we been through
this?

SWEET OLD LADY
Oh dear-

INT. TECH BOOTH

Inside the tech booth, the technician manages to get free, but finds his way blocked by TWO MEN, observing Millard.

INT. BROADCAST STUDIO

MILLARD

Now I've prayed, I've *prayed* for you, sister, but it's 9 am. People from far and wide are anticipating the word of God, and you're yammering on about plants. Tell me, how do you think the good Lord favors those who stifle his words?

SWEET OLD LADY

They're just plants! Forgive me!

MILLARD

Listen here you interloping reprobate. It's 9:01, if you're not out of here in 5 seconds I will cast you out. 4!

The old lady stands and scurries as quickly as her elderly feet can carry her.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

3!

Millard turns to the tech, still counting. The tech, terrified, gets the message and begins counting down with his fingers. Millard takes his seat at the microphone.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

2...Good morning brothers and sisters! The time is 9:02 in the AM. It is currently 87 degrees here on God's greenest Earth of West Memphis, A-R. You are listening to Reverend Eugene Millard, the prodigal host with the most here on WRRD 'The Word.' Now, let's talk God.

INT. TECH BOOTH

The tech sighs as he listens to Millard's broadcast. An arm clad in a THICK WHITE CORDUROY BLAZER taps him on the shoulder.

MAN #1

Is he always this charming?

The tech turns to the men, off screen.

TECH

(beat?)

Who the hell are y'all?

INT. RICHIE'S ROOM- DAY

Richie's room is plastered with movie posters (noticably *The Life of Brian*, *Oh Brother Where Art Thou*, *A Clockwork Orange*).

Richie sits at his computer, editing his footage of Jo from the riverbanks. He slowly jogs the footage of her back and forth, enraptured.

The DOORBELL RINGS, jolting him from his daydream.

I/E. SCRUGGS HOME- DAY

LYDIA (O.S.)

Richie! That's probably your uncle
Spencer!

Richie bounds down the stairs to the front door. He opens it to find-

THE FILM CREW. Six men and women in CARGO SHORTS and GRIP GLOVES stand on and around the Scruggs' front porch. Parked behind them is the GRIP TRUCK.

At the front of the pack stands the Director, GREGORY LIPTON, (tall and thin, 30's, cultured) perspiring inside his corduroy blazer, and his assistant, SHELBY (late 20's, also cultured). Richie is too excited to react properly.

The director smiles down and extends a long, thin hand to Richie.

LIPTON

Hey there champ! You must be
Richie.

Richie's hand slowly raises of it's own accord to shake, but before he can, Garrison and Lydia appear. Lipton notices them, withdraws his hand and sidesteps Richie.

LIPTON (CONT'D)

Ah! And you must be Garrison and Lydia. So nice to finally meet you.

He clasps their hands and shakes tersely.

LYDIA

And you are?

LIPTON

Gregory Lipton, Documentarian. And might I just offer my thanks and condolences to you and yours. I promise our interference will be minimal, and will no way disrespect the memory of your cherished relative.

GARRISON

Oh that's perfectly fine we disrespect her all the time.

LIPTON

(serious beat)

Ah! Comedy! That's fantastic. SHELBY, my assistant Shelby, everyone.

Shelby quickly steps past Richie as well.

SHELBY

Sorry little dude.

LIPTON

Shelby, I like this window, but the backlight might be too harsh. Could we bounce some away and put a fill in that corner.

Shelby scribbles the directions on a clip board as several more crew members file in. Richie's eyes light up at the sight of the film equipment, particularly the CAMERA.

As the crew begins setting up, moving furniture as they see fit, Lydia breaks off to supervise them.

LYDIA

Wait, where are you moving that?

GARRISON!

LIPTON

(cutting Garrison off)

We just met with Millard. Man he's something else, isn't he?

(MORE)

LIPTON (CONT'D)

So alive, so REAL. I hear your grandmother was much the same. It's a pity Millard had not called us sooner.

LYDIA

(wait, what?!)
Millard called-

LIPTON

SO! (CLAPS his hands together) Are you ready for your first interview?

CUT TO:

INT. SCRUGGS HOME- INTERVIEW- POV

The Scruggs sit on their couch, positions clearly staged. Richie's attention flits between the camera and the rest of the commotion out of frame.

At the bottom of the frame, text dissolves in, reading

GARRISON, LYDIA, AND RICHARD SCRUGGS/ HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBERS
FOR 15 YEARS

LIPTON (O.S.)

Tell me, how long have you attended services as Hallelujah Hill?

GARRISON

A little over 15 years now. When Lydia and I married, my grandmother Judy Jean requested we-

RICHIE

What's that?

Richie points to someone out of frame?

GARRISON

Richie, we're being interviewed.

RICHIE

Sorry.

LIPTON (O.S.)

So, prior to your marriage, you did not attend services with Judith Jean?

Garrison and Lydia meet eyes.

LYDIA

Well, at the time, Garrison's
father-

RICHIE

It's a light meter, isn't it?

Richie hops off the couch, unable to contain himself.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Oh man this is so freakin' slick.

LIPTON

Richie, could we please-

RICHIE

I'm shooting a film right now and
everything just looks so washed
out. What's ur ISO set at?

Richie walks towards the camera.

LYDIA

For the love of God, Richie.

RICHIE

Oh man, this camera's so fucking
COOL!

EXT. CYNTHIA'S HOME- ESTABLISHING

A typical southern home with a well kept garden out front.
Save for a TOOLSHED and some LAWN FLAMINGOS, it's nothing
spectacular, much like its inhabitant.

INT. CYNTHIA'S HOME- INTERVIEW- POV

Cynthia sits alone in a love seat. The color and atmosphere
of her living space can best be described as sepia-tone.
Oddly, a trophy or two can be seen displayed in the room.

Text reads: CYNTHIA DOON/ HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBER FOR 30 YEARS

CYNTHIA

I first met Judy Jean after my
husband, Eustace, passed away. He
was not a kind man, but when he
passed, it was like the light went
out of my life. I was afraid to
face the world alone. Judy Jean
found me at a Christian singles
event she was picketing.

(MORE)

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

She asked me if I loved Jesus. I said of course. And then she said "well good, because he's the ONLY man who could ever love a strumpet like you!"

She realizes her story might not be as uplifting as she had once pictured it.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(meek)

I...I didn't have much trouble with men after that.

EXT. DARRYL'S BAIT'N'BREAKFAST- ESTABLISHING

An old bait shop. Hand-painted across the windows in bright yellow lettering read's DARRYL'S BAIT'N'BREAKFAST.

INT. DARRYL'S BAIT'N'BREAKFAST- INTERVIEW- POV

Darryl leans indifferently against the cash register. A din of CRICKETS and various SCURRYING things fill the air.

Text reads: DARRYL JAKUBZYK/ HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBER FOR 40 YEARS

DARRYL

Most of us thought that old Bible-banger would never bite the big one. I always kinda figured she was the last plague of Egypt: done got sent to the wrong pyramid couple thousand odd years late. Then that Millard hell-raiser showed up 'bout 10 years back...from the way she fawned over him you'd think he washed Jesus's feet and wiped his ass too!

Beat. That was pretty rude.

EXT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- ESTABLISHING

The LaFontaine doublewide sits nestled in a shady clearing, no grass, just bare packed dirt. A bottle tree glistens over a couple worse-for-wear Samsonite lawn chairs, amongst other red-neck lawn paraphernalia.

INT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- INTERVIEW- POV

A tacky yet comfortable looking double-wide, decorated by someone with the illusion of taste.

We meet Jo's parents, BEAUREGARD AND FLORENCE LAFONTAINE, 40's, eccentric red-necks, a touch creole, made up with a bolo tie and Lee's press-ons, beam happily. Each have a beer in hand.

Text reads: BEAUREGARD AND FLORENCE LAFONTAINE, HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBERS FOR 13 YEARS.

FLORENCE

Oh I'm terribly sorry, would you like a beer?

Florence reaches into a red cooler beside the couch and tosses a brew at the crew. The camera jostles wildly as he catches the beer.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Careful not to drop it! I don't want you dentin' up my linoleum.

LIPTON

Tell me about Judy Jean Scruggs.

BEAUREGARD

Well we met Mrs. Scruggs some time 'round '95. My darlin' wife and I moved up here to start a farm. Inherited some land from my late uncle Gerard.

FLORENCE

So we shop around for a while, lookin' for the best government subsidies in the area, and you know what we find? Soybeans! Practically grow themselves.

BEAUREGARD

Been easy street ever since. We're doin' so well, the missus and I might even procure ourselves another double-wide!

LIPTON

Another?

FLORENCE

Yep, another. Imagine it will you? A *quadruple-wide*!

(MORE)

FLORENCE (CONT'D)
 (wistful sigh) 10 miles to Wal-Mart, 2 to the bait shop, 3 to a wonderful church with a pastor from Louisiana?

BEAUREGARD
 My kinda milk and honey.

LIPTON
 You seem remarkably comfortable on film.

FLORENCE
 Well that's no surprise. Our whole family just loves the camera. We were even on television for a while.

INSERT: TECHNICAL INSTITUTE OF TRADE TECHNOLOGIES COMMERCIAL

We hear upbeat, driving electric guitars over a montage of happy trade professionals, construction workers, mechanics, etc. We zoom in to several.

HARD HAT GUY
 TITT worked for me!

COMPUTER LADY
 TITT worked for me!

A heavily MOUSTACHIO'D SPOKESMAN walks on screen as the logo for Technical Institute of Trade Technologies (TITT) flies on screen.

MOUSTACHE SPOKESMAN
 Do you ever wish you could start an exciting new career with limitless possibilities? Do you want to break into a new and thriving job market? Well the Technical Institute of Trade Technologies is for you! Just listen to these actual alumni testimonials!

We see a very scraggly, ill looking man.

Screen reads: LIONEL PRICE, Bachelors in Industrial Fish Farm Management.

LIONEL

(stepped, dumb)

I used to be a bottom feeder, and addict, and a criminal, but tanks to TITT and the motivation it gave me, I 'urned my life 'round. Now who's the bottom feeder?

He gestures to the tank behind him and smiles, lessum teeth.

Next, we see Beauregard and Florence in front of their farm.

Text reads: Beauregard and Florence LaFontaine, Bachelors in Agricultural Irrigation Technologies and Livestock Waste Repurposing and Management Technologies.

BEAUREGARD

My wife and I wanted to start a new life, and now we care for 30 acres of new life. Thanks TITT!

FLORENCE

TITT gave me the confidence I needed to succeed, as a hard worker, and as a woman. Thanks TITT!

Back to Moustachio'd Man. Degree programs scroll on screen as he reads them.

MOUSTACHE SPOKESMAN

Still not convinced that TITT's what you're looking for? Call now for a free booklet detailing all of our fine degree programs, such as Engine Block Repair Technology, Master Key Smithery Technology, Zen Landscaping and Golf Course Groundskeeping Management Technologies, and Emerging Technology Technologies. Call now and receive these complimentary beer coozies, a \$5 value, yours FREE! Call TODAY!

Crazy ELECTRIC GUITAR OUTTRO as the phone number flashes.

INT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- INTERVIEW- POV

Florence taps her ring finger on her COOZIE for emphasis.

FLORENCE

We still get asked for autographs at the Wal-Mart. Luckily we can get our head-shots done right there in the store.

BEAUREGARD

Yea, we are truly blessed.

EXT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- DAY

The cameraman captures some B-roll as Lipton and Shelby stand by the grip truck. Lipton sweats profusely in his heavy coat.

LIPTON

That girl's around here somewhere, right?

SHELBY

I've got the church directory. Should I call-

LIPTON

SHELBY. Please. Shelby? Shelby.

Lipton puts a heavy hand on Shelby's shoulder and rubs the bridge of his nose perhaps a bit too exaggeratedly.

LIPTON (CONT'D)

You're enthusiastic about this project. I understand that. But these aren't just actors you can summon up for a shoot. These are real people. We must catch them in the moment, or we will not catch them at all. Remember that.

He stares Shelby down, unblinkingly, as though trying to communicate some deep psychic truth, before abruptly breaking away.

LIPTON (CONT'D)

Although I suppose it wouldn't hurt to know where she is...(off Shelby's look) *in the moment*.

Shelby tries hard not to roll his eyes as he lifts the cell-phone, already calling Jo.

We hear a **HILARIOUS RINGTONE**, somewhere nearby. Lipton signals the cameraman and SOUND GUY with a hand sign, leading the three men as they slowly creep around the corner of the doublewide.

Behind the doublewide, there is a small wooden porch. There sits Jo, turned away from the crew, smoking a joint in some comfortable running shorts and an oversized hoodie. She reads her phone, perplexed.

LIPTON (CONT'D)
Excuse me, Miss Josephine?

Jo holds the phone to her ear, confused.

SHELBY
(sotto)
Well, we caught her in the moment.

LIPTON
Well this is awkward. Miss?

Jo turns back towards the crew, and upon the instant she notices them-

JO
(startled)
HOLY SHI-

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- INTERVIEW- POV

Jo stands in front of the bottle tree, trying to mask her embarrassment and high with a huge, nervous pageant smile.

JO
(nervous)
You can edit that last part out right? (beat) Ok great. Alright lets take this in 3, 2...(all charm) Hey y'all! I'm Josephine LaFontaine, but you can call me Jo. I'm twenty-two years young southern belle from deep in the heart of Dixie!

LIPTON
Um, Jo-

But Jo doesn't notice, locked in a monologue she's rehearsed many times before.

JO
I may seem like a sweet down-home kinda girl, but you shouldn't underestimate me. I know what I want and I know how to get it.
(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Once I set my mind to something
ain't nothin' that can stop me!

LIPTON

Can we cu-

JO

So please consider me, Jo
LaFontaine for a part in...oh,
what's this show's name?

LIPTON

Miss LaFontaine, this isn't an
audition. It's an interview, for
the documentary?

Jo lets this sink in for a minute, before breaking into
silent giggles.

JO

Oh of COURSE! Pfft, DUH! Ah I'm so
embarrassed. Ok, shall we take it
from the top?

LIPTON

Sure, that'd be fine.

Jo takes a deep breath. Beat. She looks back to the camera,
same intense pageant smile. From out of nowhere, Cody wanders
into the shot, lugging a LARGE DUFFLE.

Text reads: JOSEPHINE LAFONTAINE, HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBER FOR
13 YEARS.

JO

Hey y'all! I'm Josephine
LaFontaine, but you-

CAMERAMAN

-Someone's in the shot boss.

LIPTON

CUUUT!

JO

(rushed)
STAY IN SCHOOL DON'T DO DRUGS!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAFONTAINE DOUBLEWIDE- ELSEWHERE- INTERVIEW- POV

Cody stands in front of the bottle tree, huge duffle bag resting at his feet. He stands motionless, save for his swiftly texting fingers, eyes downcast to his phone. He says nothing.

Text reads: CODY LAFONTAINE, HALLELUJAH HILL MEMBER FOR 13 YEARS.

INT. MILLARD'S OFFICE

Millard sits behind his desk, eagerly grinning like a boy about to open a present. Lipton and Shelby sit opposite.

MILLARD

Well? What did you think?

LIPTON

To be quite frank...I couldn't be more pleased.

Millard stands and CLAPS his hands sharply, causing Lipton and Shelby to flinch.

MILLARD

Hallelujah! I told you, I told you this place was worth a look.

SHELBY

(venturing)

'Ask and you shall receive.'

Millard swivels sharply and points a stern finger at Shelby.

MILLARD

That's good.

Millard returns to his seat and hastily scrawls 'Shelby's' line down.

Lipton stifles a snicker, but composes himself off of Shelby's look of pure incredulity.

LIPTON

One last bit of business. About the service tomorrow-

MILLARD

Say no more. I prophesy that my performance tomorrow will bring us a great tiding of good will from the Lord.

(MORE)

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Recognition, notoriety- (beat) You know, bein' the voice of God on the radio is fine and dandy, but I've always fancied myself more of a...television personality.

Millard swivels backwards to his wall of crosses and crucifixes.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

Eugene Millard, the Face of God.

Awkward beat. We hear a SNIFFLE. Lipton and Shelby tense: is he actually crying??

EXT. SCRUGGS HOME- DUSK

Harvest moon against a cool blue twilight. A YELLOW CAB cuts through the serenity, making its way to the Scruggs home. An imposing figure, clad in a long coat and hat, alights from the cab. He claps a rolling suitcase in one hand, and compulsively squeezes a ROUND CHIP of some sort in the other. This is SPENCER.

INT. SCRUGGS HOME- DUSK

Garrison opens the door, revealing his long-absent brother.

GARRISON

Spencer you old son-of-a-bitch! Get in here! Let me get your coat.

LYDIA

So good to see you again. You're looking quite healthy!

Hat and coat now off, we see Spencer for what he is: A thin, frail man in his late 40's, bespectacled and slightly balding- basically a deflated, defeated Garrison. He looks exceedingly nervous, and decidedly *not* healthy.

SPENCER

Thank you Lydia, it's health hard won. I'm proud to say I've been in control of my demons of addiction for over 3 months now.

GARRISON

And that's just the beginning! Brother, you've got a new lease on life.

Richie comes down the stairs, but stops short of being noticed. Spencer smiles up at his brother, but it flickers.

SPENCER
So she's really...

GARRISON
Yup. She's really-

Garrison crosses his throat. The adults share a laugh, but Richie can't really understand why.

SPENCER
(beat)
Have you heard from him yet?

GARRISON
(stony)
No, of course not.

Lydia finally notices Richie.

RICHIE
Richie! Quit your lurking and come meet your Uncle Spencer!

SPENCER
Oh wow, Richie! I haven't seen you since you were knee-high to a caterpillar. How old are you now? 20, 25?

More un-amusing adult humor, more laughing.

RICHIE
I'm 15.

SPENCER
(honest)
15? Oh. Fuck me I've been gone a long time.

HONK! The cab flashes its lights out front.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
Ah, um, I'm a little strapped for cash right now.

EXT. SCRUGGS HOUSE- NIGHT

Richie hands the driver a wad of cash and watches as he departs. But just as the cab pulls out of sight, another car pulls around the corner. It's Jo. She parks.

Richie tries to mask his excitement as he walks over to her car.

RICHIE
(cool)
Sup?

JO
You're so funny.

Not what he was looking for but OK. She steps out of her car with an armful of TAPES AND APPLICATION.

RICHIE
So how'd your interview go?

JO
My-Oh! Real good. *Really* good in fact. Nailed it. Yup. How was yours?

RICHIE
Mine? Oh well, you know, my parent's wouldn't shut up so it was hard for me to get a word in edgewise.

Right. They smile and nod, unable to read each other. Then-Jo remembers why she came.

JO
Want a beer?

Richie scans around for his parents before nodding excitedly. Jo tosses him one, but before he can hardly get his open-

Jo keys her beer and shotguns it like lightning. Skills.

She spreads the tapes and applications across the hood of her car, sorting them together as they should be. She leans over to identify them, much to Richie's delight.

JO (CONT'D)
OK, this one's for The Real World. Kinda dated I know but hey, cast a wide net. This is Survivor, this is Design Star, Top Chef-

RICHIE
You suck at cooking.

JO
All I need is one episode.

Beat. Richie looks happy, but Jo sees something else.

JO (CONT'D)
You ready for tomorrow?

RICHIE
What? Of course. Gramma Jean's gonna get the wonderful funeral she deserves. And, you know, the movie's cool too.

Jo smiles and stacks up the tapes.

JO
Yeah it is. Aight, let's take this one step at time. Hang on to these, edit them when you want, no rush. We'll resume my job hunt after all this is taken care of.

She hands Richie the tapes. He can hardly believe his luck when-

A kiss on the cheek. He's beside himself.

JO (CONT'D)
Things are about to change for us, Richie. I can feel it.

Richie stands rooted to the spot as Jo drives away into the night. The sound of her engine gives way, fading back to crickets and cicadas.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER- SUNRISE.

The sun rises over the flood plain, filtered through an overcast sky.

Again, we see the unidentifiable man in the jon boat.

EXT. HALLELUJAH HILL- THE NEXT MORNING

Cars fill the dirt lot. A rented SCHOOL BUS parked to the side, the driver idly smoking a cigarette.

MILLARD (V.O.)
Now, let us say a few words to commemorate the departed.

INT. HALLELUJAH HILL- MORNING

Garrison stands at the pulpit, preparing to eulogize. He is flanked by Millard on his left, and JUDY JEAN'S CASKET (closed), topped with a dour PORTRAIT of the stern and ancient woman, on the right.

He struggles to keep the sentiment in his voice.

GARRISON

Judith Jean Scruggs, my grandmother, was a very, devoted woman, putting her faith in God and Jesus before everything else in life. She never...wasted words on anything frivolous. I'll try to do the same. (Beat) I remember once as a child, I drew her a picture of Jesus, high-fiving a grizzly bear. She scolded me and said it was blasphemous, but I think deep down she might have liked it. Maybe.

He steps down.

In the pews, Lydia nudges Richie, signalling him to go up.

Reluctantly, Richie stands and ascends the stairs to the pulpit. He stares down at the casket of his great-grandmother, and then into the cold, dead eyes of her portrait.

MILLARD

My child, are you prepared?

Richie turns to see Millard looming over him.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

(sotto, growl)

You'd better be.

Richie looks out into the audience, noticing the familiar faces, finally settling on Lipton, Shelby, and the camera. Jo gives him a thumbs up. He smiles.

RICHIE

My Great Grandma Judy was only 91 when I was born. That may seem old to some of you, but that's all I ever knew of her.

(MORE)

RICHIE (CONT'D)

She may have been pretty set in her ways, she may have called the Civil War the "War of Northern Aggression", and she might have been a bit too honest communicating her thoughts about "Memphrica", but for these last 15 years she was my grandma, and even through her hardbound, Bible-leather exterior, I could tell that at least she loved me, and I'll miss her.

Darryl COUGHS/SCOFFS as Richie leaves the pulpit. Jo, seated behind him, punches him in the shoulder. Cody texts, wholly uninterested in the proceedings.

Millard SNAPS his fingers at someone in the front row. A few stand and scurry to set up an OLD ELECTRIC KEYBOARD.

An old ORGANIST, almost as old as Judy Jean, settles in. She begins flipping switches when-A MIDI YANKEE DOODLE begins blaring.

GARRISON

(to Richie)

I thought she wanted 'Freebird'.

The pews break into fits of choked laughter. Millard casts his sinful congregation an evil eye. The tittering stops abruptly. The organist finally manages to begin a proper DIRGE.

MILLARD

Damn Yanks.

INT. SCHOOL BUS- DAY- DOC CAM POV

Everyone packed tightly into the bus. Richie and Jo sit beside each other. The camera turns to Garrison.

LIPTON

How did Judith pass away exactly?

All eyes on Garrison. He sighs.

GARRISON

She had been drinking and got into a car accident.

LIPTON

She was one hundred and four!

GARRISON

Well we tried to take her license
but she wouldn't have it, and when
we tried to stick-put her in a
home, she threatened to cut us out
of her inheritance.

LYDIA

What were we supposed to do? Let
her move in with us?

Long beat as the question hangs. Cynthia reaches from the
seat behind them, placing a hand on Lydia's arm.

CYNTHIA

You did everything you could.

EXT. THE PLOT- DAY

The school bus parks in a very nice, very large cemetery.
Clouds drift lazily through the sky. A proper day for a
funeral.

The congregation alights from the bus to an open plot with
flowers and chairs prepared around it.

As the congregation takes their seats, Millard, Garrison,
Beauregard, Richie, Darryl, and Spencer walk to the back of
the bus, pop open the emergency door, and slide out Judy-
Jean's coffin.

They act as pallbearers for the 10 yard walk to the grave,
where they place the coffin on the lowering contraption and
take their seats.

Millard approaches the podium. Behind him, a bagpiper stamps
out his cigarette and begins to PLAY. Millard jumps at the
first note and turns on him.

MILLARD

Get out of here you vulture! You
merchant of death! This here woman
weren't no Scot! Go, begone!

The bagpiper scurries away in a panic. Millard gestures to
Darryl, who steps up to where the bagpiper stood, produces a
harmonica, and begins to PLAY.

Millard grips the podium with both hands and bows his head,
as if summoning all his powers before continuing. He looks to
the back of the seating area, there Lipton gives a big thumbs
up.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

(solemn)

We are gathered here today to honor the memory of one Judith Jean Scruggs, an amazing woman and a remarkable pillar of faith. As a child, Judith, Judy-Jean as her friends and family knew her, believed that God spoke to her through the radio. It is only fitting then, Lord, that you decide to take her from us late one spring night, driving home from a Planned Parenthood picket, during a Carrie Underwood power hour. It seems it was not in your divine plan for Jesus to take the wheel that night. Truly there is another angel in heaven singing your praises as we speak.

Millard pauses, glancing around the congregation, letting them know this next portion concerns them.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

But here on Earth, we have lost a little of Heaven's light, and believe me Lord we need every little bit we can get. The devil is everywhere, sin is everyday, and the fires of Hell burn hotter every minute. Judith was a saint, and you took her from us Lord. Surely you have spared these sinners, heathens and reprobates for a reason. Perhaps you are testing us. For no one here knows your love like Judy Jean, and I fear if they do not soon, then they will know the sting of Satan's burning pitchfork in their forsaken backsides for the rest of eternity. Your mercy knows its limits! But your wrath does not. And I fear it is being tested.

The congregation shifts uncomfortably in their seats. Lipton sits, spellbound. The wind has picked up with his rising passion.

MILLARD (CONT'D)

But don't worry Lord, so long as I am here, I shall guide your flock, and protect them and steer them away from your divine retribution.

(MORE)

MILLARD (CONT'D)
 For none of you, mark my words, NOT
 A ONE OF YOU is safe from the Wrath
of God!

Beat. Everyone looks around nervously, as if expecting something to happen. But nothing does.

MILLARD (CONT'D)
 In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

Lipton cuts filming and gestures so to Millard.

MILLARD (CONT'D)
 OK everyone, shows over. Back to
 the bus.

Everyone begins standing and gathering their things, relieved that this whole ordeal is finally over.

Millard turns to activate the lowering contraption, but the lever sticks. He struggles with it.

MILLARD (CONT'D)
 Come on you piece of-

KA-KOW! BRILLIANT LIGHT POURS THROUGH THE SCENE AS A BOLT OF LIGHTNING PIERCES THE HEAVENS, STRIKING MILLARD, COMBUSTING HIM, AND IGNITING THE CASKET.

THE SHOCK WAVE OF THE BLAST ROCKETS THROUGH THE MOURNERS. They struggle to their feet, coughing from the thick white smoke. Richie rubs his eyes to see-

A SMOKING PILE OF MILLARD'S CLOTHES AND REMAINS lays drooped across the top of the flaming casket, which finally begins lowering into the grave.

Lipton and Shelby charge coughing through the smoke to the casket. Several others are gathered around.

LIPTON
 Oh my God.

Beat. All eyes on Lipton, realizing what he might have just said. Slowly, everyone looks up to the overcast sky.

SCREAMS, PANIC. Everyone is too unimaginably shocked to think clearly.

DARRYL
 The bus! Everyone on the bus! The
 tires will ground us from God's
 fury!

I/E SCHOOL BUS- SIMULTANEOUS

The congregation floods the bus in panic, single file be damned.

BUS DRIVER
THE FUCK IS THIS?

VARIOUS
HURRY UP!/MOVE!/FUUUUUUUUUUCK!/
WHAT'S HAPPENING?!

CYNTHIA
Oh God oh God oh God oh God.

SPENCER
Oh jeez oh jeez oh jeez oh jeez.

GARRISON
(frantic)
Lydia? Richie?

Lydia clings to a crew member before noticing her husband.

GARRISON (CONT'D)
Have you seen Richie?

Lydia, tears streaming down her face, only manages to eke out a few GUTTURAL SOBS before-

RICHIE (O.S.)
Dad!

Richie, Cody, and Beauregard emerge up the bus steps, carrying the catatonic form of Jo. Her eyes open, mouth forming soundless words.

Florence appears behind, crying and reciting some French creole prayer.

FLORENCE
SOME FRENCH CREOLE PRAYER

They lie Jo down in the aisle near the front of the bus.

BUS DRIVER
You supposed to BURY the body!

RICHIE
She's not dead! Look.

Our main players all stare down at Jo's terrified, unfocused eyes.

Lipton films as Shelby looks skeptically out the window at the sky above.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Jo? Jo, can you hear me?

BEAUREGARD

Pudd'n, please say something.

JO

(Jo-isn't-here-right-now)

His eyes. They just...

She mimes two tiny explosions in front of her face.

CYNTHIA

Oh dear.

LIPTON

(re: Jo)

And how exactly did that make you
feel-

GARRISON

Get us back to Hallelujah Hill NOW!

TIRES SCREECH against the pavement as the bus peels away.

Meanwhile, in the background, we see the grave. The casket has reached the bottom. Only flames and smoke can be seen issuing from the earth.

A bulldozer lazily approaches, emptying its load of soil into the plot, smothering the flames and burying Millard's smoldering corpse along with Judy Jean.