

Tod Browning's Freaks - screenplay - Transcript of the 1932 cult horror classic film about circus sideshow freaks by the director of Dracula - screenplay - Tod Browning's Freaks

THERE NEVER WAS, before or since, a movie like FREAKS, a 1932 film by horror-master Tod Browning (director of Bela Lugosi's DRACULA), and, safe to say, there probably never will be again.

Today it is a cult classic, but in its day FREAKS was considered too horrifying, and public outrage forced it to be withdrawn from distribution.

The sideshow "freaks" were all played by persons with real deformities. No special-effects makeup was used, except in one brief scene at the end of the movie.

The lengthy prologue that scrolls up the screen at the beginning of the film includes these lines

"Never again will such a story be filmed, as modern science and teratology is rapidly eliminating such blunders of nature from the world."

But it is powerful progress of another sort that closed the door on this genre of entertainment

a new-spawned mutant of society called "political correctness."

Tod Browning's Freaks - screenplay

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~ F R E A K S ~

The main title of the film is a paper sign, which is torn away by a circus sideshow barker.

BARKER

We didn't lie to you, folks. We told you we had living, breathing, monstrosities. You'll laugh at them, shudder at them, and yet, but for the accident of birth, you might be even as they are.

The camera reveals an attentive group of patrons standing. On the wall is a sign "Sword Swallower," and in the background we glimpse some indistinct figures seated, as if on display.

They did not ask to be brought into the world, but into the world they came. Their code is a law unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all. (He leads the crowd to a fenced pit, whose contents are hidden from the camera.) And now, folks, if you'll just step this way, you are about to witness the most amazing, the most astounding, living monstrosity of all time. (A woman screams.) Friends, she was once a beautiful woman. A royal prince shot himself for love of her. She was known as the peacock of the air...

Flashback to a beautiful woman performing on a trapeze. On the ground a pair of little people, male and female, dressed in formal attire, watch from behind a curtain. The female midget, Frieda, says something in German to her companion, Hans.

HANS

She's the most beautiful big woman I have ever seen.

FRIEDA

Why, Hans, how you talk! I should be jealous pretty soon.

HANS

Ah, don't be silly.

FRIEDA

Don't be silly? I think this woman's making eyes at my Hans. Of course, I ain't jealous.

HANS

Oh, Frieda, my dear, I have eyes for only one woman--the woman I ask to be my wife.

A shot of the aerialist performing.

A shot of the strongman wrestling a bull.

A costumed performer holding a pony's reigns calls to Frieda. She walks over to him and they converse in German. The aerialist comes behind the curtain near Hans. She is twice as tall as Hans. She notices him eyeing her and pretends to accidentally drop her cape, which Hans retrieves. Frieda watches. When he lifts the cape for her, the aerialist turns her back to him, smiles, and waits for him to drape it on her shoulders.

HANS

Are you laughing at me?

AERIALIST

Why no, monsieur.

HANS

Then I'm glad.

AERIALIST

Why should I laugh at you?

HANS

Most big people do. They don't realize I'm a man, with the same feelings they have.

The aerialist kneels to allow Hans to place the cloak on her shoulders. When he does, she grabs his hands and pulls him so his cheek is next to hers.

AERIALIST

Thank you. You are so kind, monsieur.

Frieda watches with annoyance. The aerialist walks over to Frieda, who is sitting side-saddle on her pony, and touches her ruffled dress.

AERIALIST

Nice, nice.

FRIEDA

(waving her away) Don't, don't. (She motions her assistant to lead the pony away.)

AERIALIST

(to Hans) You must come to see me sometime, and we'll have a little wine together. (She pinches his cheek. He thanks her. He is clearly smitten.)

SCENE

A WOODED ESTATE ON THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE

Two men are walking down a path. One, Jon, is employed by the other, Dubois, owner of the estate. We hear them speaking excitedly before we see them.

DUBOIS

...only your imagination.

JON

But Monsieur Dubois, at first, I could not believe my own eyes. A lot of horrible, twisted things crawling, whining, globbering.

DUBOIS

Really, Jon, what were you drinking last night?

JON

Nothing, monsieur, I assure you. (We see what appears to be a family group in the distance.) Oh, monsieur, there must be a law in France to smother such things at birth, or lock them up.

DUBOIS

All right, Jon, if there's anything like you say on my grounds we'll have it removed.

They suddenly freeze and stare at what is ahead. A group of circus "freaks" are singing and dancing in a circle, while one lies on the ground playing a harmonica. There are four "pinheads," a "half-boy," a "human skeleton," a "human worm," and a dwarf. When they see the two men approach, they run to their mistress, a normal woman, for protection, as Jon yells at them.

JON

Go away all of you! Don't you know trespassing's the same as stealing.

THE WOMAN

Oh, I'm sorry, monsieur. I am Madame Tetrallini. These are children of my circus.

JON

Children! Monsters!

DUBOIS

Oh, you're a circus. I understand.

MME. TETRALLINI

So you see, monsieur, when I have a chance I like to take them into the sunshine and let them play like children. That is what most of them are--children.

DUBOIS

Children...children. Please forget the mistake, madame. You are welcome to remain. Au revoir. Come, Jon.

MME. TETRALLINI

Thanks a thousand, monsieur. (The freaks continue to huddle around her as the men leave.) Oh, shame, shame, shame. How many times have I told you not to be frightened. Have I not told you God looks after all his children?

SCENE

THE CIRCUS BACKLOT

Mme. Tetrallini returns with her charges. As she passes, some acrobats greet her with mock politeness.

FIRST ACROBAT

(after she passes) There she goes taking them off to exercise. Nurse to a lot of mangy freaks.

The acrobats see the "half woman - half man" approaching from the other side. His/her gender separation is sharply drawn vertically down the center of his/her body.

SECOND ACROBAT

(imitating the barker's pitch) Ah ha! Just as they are represented on the banners, you will meet them on the inside--living, breathing monstrosities Josephine-Joseph, half woman, half man.

FIRST ACROBAT

Have a cigar, Joseph?

SECOND ACROBAT

You dropped your lipstick, Josephine.

FIRST ACROBAT

Don't get her sore or he'll punch you in the nose.

Josephine-Joseph ignores them.

A woman is ushering some trained seals into their cage.

VOICE OFF CAMERA

You're all wrong. I didn't d-d-do it.

STRONGMAN

What are you trying to do, be funny?

The strongman and Roscoe, a female impersonator, enter. Roscoe is in drag.

ROSCOE

(removing his wig) Ah, you just d-don't understand.

STRONGMAN

A Roman lady getting off the bull and scratching yourself!

ROSCOE

Well, c-can't a Roman lady itch?

STRONGMAN

(helping Roscoe out of his dress) Why don't you take a bath.

ROSCOE

I did, but it's the bull that needs the b-b-bath.

Josephine-Joseph walks by and "Josephine" turns and looks back at the strongman admiringly.

ROSCOE

I think she likes you...but he d-don't.

Strongman laughs.

SCENE

AT THE CURTAIN

Having completed her act, Cleopatra, the aerialist, enters from the other side of the curtain, and walks to where Hans waits for her.

CLEOPATRA

Oh Hans, those flowers you sent to me--they were beautiful!

HANS

But none as beautiful as you.

CLEOPATRA

Oh, thank you. (She kneels.) And Hans, I don't like to ask, but may I have the

loan of another thousand franks until my money from Paris arrives?

HANS

With pleasure, fraeulein.

CLEOPATRA

Thank you. (She kisses him on the cheek.)

HANS

I'll bring it to your wagon tonight.

SCENE

INSIDE A CIRCUS WAGON

The strongman stands by in his costume, shorts and a studded vest, while a pretty young woman angrily gathers her belongings.

STRONGMAN

Oh forget it, forget it. Maybe I was just fooling.

GIRL

Fooling? Fooling, huh? "Come little girl, I want to take care of you." Oh, and I fell for that!

STRONGMAN

Ah forget it, forget it. (watching her) So you're quitting? Is that it?

GIRL

Maybe I'm only fooling.

STRONGMAN

Well you're not quitting me, 'cause I'm kicking you out!

GIRL

Oh?

STRONGMAN

Oh no you don't. (He grabs an atomizer from her hand.) I gave you this.

GIRL

Why you cheap...! Oh! (She storms past him.)

STRONGMAN

And don't you come around crying tonight, trying to get back in. I'm through wasting my time and money on dames like you.

GIRL

(turning to face him from the doorway) Yeah, you're time, but my money! (She turns and leaves.)

STRONGMAN

(to himself) Ungrateful little tramp. (He sprays his bare chest with perfume and smiles with self-approval.)

The girl, Venus, is an animal trainer. Carrying her belongings outside, she storms past a clown who is removing his makeup, stops and turns to face him.

VENUS

Well, what are you staring at? (She walks back to him.) Didn't you ever see a lady move before? (He takes off his false nose.) I guess you been listening to every word he said. That's it. That's it, go ahead and laugh. It's funny ain't it. (He just stares at her.) Yeah. Women are funny, ain't they. (He removes his bald top.) They're all tramps, ain't they. Yeah. Except when you can get money from them.

The clown spreads cold cream on his face as Venus goes into her trailer. Suddenly, he turns and, grabbing a towel, runs to her trailer.

CLOWN

Well, I'll be...Say, who do you think you are, shooting off your hat. (He goes inside. The walls of the wagon are decorated with trinkets and glamour photos.) Hey, this is Phroso--Phroso you're talking to! Not any of those lugs you been chasing around with. Now you listen to me--

VENUS

Oh, I didn't mean you. I had to take it out on somebody.

PHROSO

Yeah, you dames is all alike. You sharp shoot your cheeks, and how you squeal when you get what's coming to you. (She sits down and starts to cry.) Aw, easy. Take it easy. Cut it!

VENUS

It's my own fault. What gets me so cockeyed sore at myself is that I fell for that big bunch of beef.

PHROSO

So you finally got wise to yourself, did you? (He wipes his face and hands.) Funny thing about you women, most of you don't get wise soon enough. You wait until you're so old nobody wants you.

VENUS

Nobody does most of the time.

PHROSO

Yeah, you ought to be tickled to death you're washed up with him. You're not so hard to look at. Give yourself a couple. You'll make the grade. Your break is coming.

VENUS

Coming! Gone, you mean.

PHROSO

Oh, now your gonna sit there feeling sorry for yourself.

VENUS

Oh, no I ain't. (She stands.) Don't you ever accuse me of that!

PHROSO

All right! All right!...But one thing. Don't go around filling your hide with a lot of booze, celebrating, 'cause fun what's got that way never done no one no good. Get me?

VENUS

I got you...Say you're a pretty good kid.

PHROSO

You're darn right I am. You should've caught me before my operation.

He goes outside. A pair of female Siamese twins, who are joined at the hip, comes walking by. They say hello to Phroso.

PHROSO

Well, well, well! Tomorrow night's the big night, hey ladies?

VIOLET

Yes, my sister's getting married.

DAISY
(sarcastically) And I'm thrilled to death.

VIOLET
She thrills at anything.

PHROSO
Oh, Roscoe's a good kid.

DAISY
She's only joking. She'll like him lots after she knows him better.

PHROSO
Oh, that reminds me. Close your eyes, Violet. Go ahead, close them. (She does, and he touches Daisy's shoulder.) What did I do?

VIOLET
You pinched Daisy's arm.

Roscoe is nearby, watching.

PHROSO
Well, what do you know about that!

ROSCOE
Oh, D-Daisy.

VIOLET
Her master's voice is calling. (They go over to Roscoe.)

ROSCOE
(to Daisy) Getting fresh, ay? Well, I don't like it one b-b-b-

VIOLET
Well, come on. Come on. You'll have to hurry. We haven't much time.

ROSCOE
(to Daisy) So you were flirting with that cheap clown, were you?

DAISY
No, I wasn't.

VIOLET
All he was doing was a trick with me.

ROSCOE
You shut up. I'm m-marrying your sister, n-not you. (to Daisy) I saw him getting familiar with you.

VIOLET
Oh come on, Daisy.

ROSCOE
Oh no you d-don't. She's gonna stay right here!

VIOLET
No she isn't! I gotta go. (They leave.)

ROSCOE
Oh, phooey! You're always using that for an excu- for an excu- for an ali-b-b-bi.

SCENE
EXTERIOR, LATER

Hercules, the strongman, walks across the circus backlot, singing. He is in his street clothes. He hears a tapping sound and turns to see. Cleopatra leans out of her trailer window.

CLEOPATRA

(seductively) Where are you going? (He walks over to the window, smiling broadly.) Well, you don't look around me so much.

HERCULES

Oh yes, I have seen you.

CLEOPATRA

So that's how it is. You got to be coy. Well? (As he leans up to kiss her, she withdraws. He goes to the door.) Ah! Come on in. (She puts on a flowery robe over her black slip. Cleopatra's trailer is larger than the others. The woodwork is elaborately carved.) Help yourself to a drink.

HERCULES

Ah! That is fine. (He pours a drink.)

CLEOPATRA

Do you like eating something?

HERCULES

Always. (He hands her a glass. They toast and drink.)

CLEOPATRA

(holding up an egg) How many?

HERCULES

Oh, I'm not very hungry--about six.

She cracks it and puts it into a pan. Then she faces him, and strikes a suggestive pose, as her robe falls open.

CLEOPATRA

How do you like them?

HERCULES

Not bad. (Suddenly, he grabs her roughly.)

CLEOPATRA

(laughing) Oh, but you are strong! You're squeezing me to death.

HERCULES

And you like it.

CLEOPATRA

Oh! You're taking my breath away!

They kiss. Josephine-Joseph is watching at the doorway. When Cleopatra sees her/him, her smile drops immediately. Hercules shouts and runs out after her/him. Josephine-Joseph is leaning against the wagon. Josephine powders her nose.

HERCULES

Now here's something for your eye! (He punches Joseph. Cleopatra laughs.)

SCENE

EXTERIOR

Hans and Frieda are sitting at a table alongside a trailer.

FRIEDA

But Hans, mein lieblich, you have not been listening to a word I have been saying. (She taps his arm.) Hans!

HANS

Yes, Frieda.

FRIEDA

You have not been listening to me.

HANS

Yes I have, Frieda, I have.

FRIEDA

Then what was I saying?

HANS

You were saying-- You were saying-- What were you saying?

FRIEDA

I was saying tonight you must not smoke such a big cigar. Your voice was very bad in tonight's show.

HANS

Please, Frieda, don't tell me what to do! When I want a cigar, I smoke a cigar! I want no orders from a woman!

FRIEDA

Ah, Hans, this is the first time since we have been engaged you have spoken to me so. Why is it?

HANS

(touching her arm) Oh, Frijy, I'm sorry. I-- Ah, here's our coffee.

A fat woman, comes and places two cups before them. Her manner is as if she were serving two little children.

HANS

Five lumps of sugar in each.

SCENE

IN CLEOPATRA'S WAGON

Cleo is in her robe, peeling a potato. Hercules, in street clothes, is eating an apple and looking over a basket of fruit.

HERCULES

Say, the little imp spent some francs on this.

CLEO

Yes, he did, very. We're doing very well. (He sits and eats an apple. She walks over to him.) But I don't like fruit.

HERCULES

You should eat a lot. It's good for you.

CLEO

Next time I tell him I like champagne. (A knock on the door.) Who is it?

HANS

Hans.

CLEO

(She smiles, motions to Hercules to be quiet, and goes to the window.) Who?

HANS

Hans.

CLEO

Oh, my darling, your basket of fruit was lovely. But I am--uh--(She winks at Hercules.) I'm taking a nap. Can't you come back later?

HANS

Yes, fraeulein.

CLEO

Oh, thank you, dear. (Cleo and Hercules laugh silently.) Shhh, you'll spoil everything if he hears you.

Hercules falls back on the bed, laughing. She kneels beside him and they embrace and kiss.

SCENE

EXTERIOR

Venus sits on the steps of a wagon, sewing. Frieda is hanging clothes on a clothesline.

VENUS

What's the matter? You ain't singing as usual.

FRIEDA

Oh, this morning I have such a big washing to do.

VENUS

How's Hans? (No answer.) I said--uh--how's Hans?

FRIEDA

Oh, Hans is fine. Thank you, he's fine.

VENUS

Frieda, something's wrong. What is it?

FRIEDA

Oh, nothing... (She walks over to Venus) ...only--well--that Cleopatra woman--my Hans--oh, I cannot tell you.

VENUS

She's still after Hans, ain't she.

FRIEDA

Yeah. Always she's smiling by him.

VENUS

Yeah, well if she smiles by somebody I know, she'll have to buy herself a new set of teeth.

FRIEDA

But why is it we women always have got to worry?

VENUS

Oh, it's always been that way. I guess it always will be.

FRIEDA

Yeah. And by me she has no shame. Always when I can hear it, she says to him, "Many thanks, my darling, for the flowers. Thanks, my darling, for this," and

"Thanks, my darling, for that." Always something he is give her.

VENUS

Oh, don't you worry, Frieda, he doesn't love her--that big horse.

FRIEDA

Yes, but she keeps after him. That's why I worry. (She goes back to her wash.)

SCENE

UNDER THE TENT

Hans stands gazing admiringly at Cleopatra, who sits in the bleachers. Hercules and the two acrobats are playing cards. They are intent on goading Hans.

ACROBAT

(to Hercules) Why not pink tights, you know, with spangles all around. It'll show her figure off more.

HERCULES

No. Nein. No tights, without tights. You know that stuff--they're flimsy--what you call that stuff? We'll see her through it.

ACROBAT

Why not like Lady Godiva?

HERCULES

Yeah, that's it, we'll have her ride the feathered white horse. (They laugh.)

HANS

(losing control) What have you in your sawdust heads! (Cleopatra suddenly moans. Hans rushes over.) What's the matter! What's the matter!

CLEOPATRA

Oh, I think I sprained my shoulder last night. Give a rub, will you? (She pushes her blouse off her shoulder and Hans rubs her back. She and the men smirk at each other.) Further, further, down, down, over, over. Oh, it's so good to be rubbed.

THE MEN

(extending cards, in unison) Our card, lady.

CLEOPATRA

What for?

THE MEN

A fellow rubber from Berlin.

Hans angrily shouts at them in German. They laugh.

SCENE

EXTERIOR

PHROSO

(about to get into costume) That reminds me, I had a swell dream about you last night.

VENUS

(interested) Oh, you did?

PHROSO

Yeah. You were standing in a bathing suit on a rock, you know, like a statue, and the wind was blowing through your hair, and the waves were washing around

you, and your figure--how it stood out. It looked great. Say, you have got a good figure.

VENUS

Oh, do you think so?

PHROSO

Sure...

JOHNNY

(From off camera) Hey Phroso! (Johnny is the half-boy. He is a handsome, charming young man who has no body below his waist. He enters walking with his arms.) Did you try that gag I told you about?

PHROSO

Yeah, I did, and it was a wow. Get up here, Johnny and I'll show it to you. (Johnny climbs the trailer steps as Phroso goes off camera.) I did everything you told me and it laid 'em right in the sawdust. Watch this. Venus, watch this.

JOHNNY

Hello, Venus.

VENUS

Hello, Johnny. Say, Phroso, what else did you dream?

PHROSO

Then the dream changed and we was in Paris.

VENUS

Paris!

PHROSO

Yeah, at the opera, right in the front box. We were all dressed up.

VENUS

Oh gee, what'd I have on?

PHROSO

And did I look swell. Everybody was pointing at me. They were saying, "That's Phroso, the clown." And was I embarrassed. (Phroso is now in an oversized clown tuxedo.)

VENUS

Well, did they say anything about me?

PHROSO

(coming back out) Sure, sure.

VENUS

What'd they say?

PHROSO

Hit me. (He hands her an oversized mallet.) Go ahead, hit me. (Venus' smile has dropped.) On the head. (She takes the mallet and hits him over the head. His head disappears into his collar. He flails about, shrieking. Then his head pops out again.) Oh, that's how it is. You don't think it's funny? It's sad, is it? Well, it was just panicking 'em--that's how sad it is.

OFF CAMERA

Phroso! Phroso! (One of the pinheads runs up to Phroso and whispers in his ear.)

PHROSO

No! When? (He and the pinhead run off. He calls back to Johnny and Venus.) Come on! Come on, Venus, the bearded lady's baby's born!

Inside a wagon several freaks are gathered around the bearded lady, who lies in bed. Johnny comes in and balances himself on one hand on the bedpost. An armless girl lifts the cover with her foot to show the baby.

PHROSO

Oh, ain't it beautiful! What is it?

ARMLESS GIRL

A girl.

PHROSO

Oh boy, that's great--and it's gonna have a beard.

SCENE

EXTERIOR

The human skeleton (an impossibly skinny man) brings a box of cigars over to the men playing cards.

ACROBAT

Ah, how's the proud father?

SKELETON

Fine.

ACROBAT

What was it?

SKELETON

Girl.

ACROBAT

Better luck next time. You might get a couple of Smith Brothers.

SKELETON

I'm trying. (Laughter. The skeleton walks over to a couple of dwarfs sitting nearby.)

SCENE

INTERIOR

The Siamese twins are making their bed.

DAISY

Please, Violet, please don't quarrel with him any more.

VIOLET

Oh well, if he's going to say anything, let him say it. Don't let him "p-p-p" for an hour. (Roscoe enters, hearing the last remark.)

ROSCOE

Say, you're going to do as I say. I'm the b-b-boss of my home.

VIOLET

Half of it, you mean.

DAISY

Please, please, Violet.

ROSCOE

(putting on a tie) Listen here, I d-don't want those tramps you g-go with hanging around my wife.

VIOLET

Oh, be quiet! Hook up our dress.

ROSCOE

(as he does so) Oh, your d-dress. I'll hook it up and something else. And another thing, you gotta cut out getting d-drunk every night, too.

VIOLET

Is that so?

ROSCOE

Yeah. I'm not gonna have my wife laying in b-bed half a day with your hangover.

VIOLET

Come on, Daisy, let's get out of here.

ROSCOE

Oh no she d-don't. She's gonna stay right here.

VIOLET

Come on, I gotta go. (They exit.)

ROSCOE

Ah, phooey! You're always using that for an excu- excu- for an alib-b-bi.

SCENE

INTERIOR

A dwarf is humming as he pours two drinks. His name is Angelino. The armless girl, Frances, sits nearby.

FRANCES

Cleopatra ain't one of us. Why, we're just filthy things to her. She'd spit on Hans if he wasn't giving her presents.

ANGELINO

Let her try it. Let her try doing anything to one of us.

FRANCES

You're right. She don't know us. But she'll find out.

ANGELINO

There you are. (He places a drink between her toes. He toasts and they drink.)

[The midgets, Frieda and Hans, are proportionally small, including their heads and faces, so they resemble children. Only the age lines in their faces, seen close up, reveal their age. The dwarfs, on the other hand, have almost normal sized heads and bodies, with very short limbs.]

SCENE

EXTERIOR

The "human worm" lies on a ledge as Rollo, the acrobat, brags about his act. The human worm (a.k.a. the "living torso") is a black man with no arms or legs. He is bald and wears loop earrings. While Rollo talks, the worm opens a matchbox, takes out a match, lights it, lights a cigarette and smokes--all done by manipulation with his lips and teeth.

ROLLO

I kinda peeked out the corner of my eye and caught Mme. Tetrallini giving us the once over. I guess she knows she's got a good act--one of the best in the business. It isn't only our act that gets them. We've got personality. We know how to sell the stuff. Same way in the last town. Never heard such applause in your life. Let me tell you something that everybody around here don't know.

We're only killing time with this circus. We've got bigger time to follow. And we can do it too. Well, catch our act tomorrow night. We've got something new.

WORM

(calling after him as Rollo leaves) Anything I can do in the act, bro?

SCENE

EXTERIOR

Phroso is washing up as a pinhead approaches and taps him.

PHROSO

Oh, Schlitzey, what a pretty dress. Oh, how beautiful you look tonight. (Venus, in a spangled costume, watches from the sidelines.) You're just a man's woman. You know what I mean? Huh? You. (Schlitzey is delighted.) If you're a good girl, when I get to Paris I'm gonna buy you a big hat, with a long beautiful feather on it. (Two more pinheads enter, arm-in-arm, and greet Phroso.) Oh, hello, Elvira. Hello, Jenny-Lee. Hasn't Schlitzey got a beautiful dress? Isn't that pretty?

[The pinheads are small women with heads that come to a point at the top. They are bald except for a tuft of hair at the top with a bow on it. Their faces are comically homely, and they are mentally retarded. They are cheerful, affectionate creatures.]

(to Jenny-Lee) When I get to Paris I'm gonna buy her a big hat with a long feather on it. And if you're a good girl, when I get to Paris I'm gonna buy you a hat with a bigger feather on it. (Schlitzey says something unintelligible, as if scolding Phroso.) Why, Schlitzey, what's the matter? (She comes over and slaps him playfully on the chest.) Oh, I'm sorry, Schlitzey. (She finishes scolding him and leaves. Venus climbs the steps to her trailer.)

SCENE

EXTERIOR

Frances, the armless girl, and Molina, a pinhead, are seated at a table, eating. Molina is older than the other pinheads. She also differs from them in that she has hair on her head, a long nose, a somewhat higher I.Q., and a sober demeanor.

MOLINA

Did you see him? He's out there again tonight.

FRANCES

He followed you from the last town.

MOLINA

I know it, and if Eddie sees us there'll be a fight.

FRANCES

Why? It's not your fault.

Rollo enters.

ROLLO

Ah, there you are, Frances. Thought you'd gone to bed.

FRANCES

Hello, Rollo.

ROLLO

Well, hear that crowd out there again tonight? I bet you thought the tent was on fire, huh? Well, it wasn't. Just the Rollo Brothers panicking 'em again. (While Rollo talks, Frances feeds herself and drinks with her foot.) But then we do it in every town. We're so used to it, it's getting monotonous. Hey, come on and

take a look at our act tomorrow night.

SCENE

INTERIOR

Fade from Frances' drink to close up of a drink being mixed. Camera pans to reveal first Cleopatra, half-reclining in bed, then Hans, who is serving them both.

CLEO

Careful! Careful! Don't waste any of it. (as she brings it to her lips) Look how it sparkles.

HANS

Like your eyes, dancing, gay, with bubbles.

CLEO

Oh, it's delicious. Mmmm. Nice, nice.

HANS

It comes by the finest vineyards of France.

CLEO

Have you sent for it specially for me?

HANS

(toasting) For the most beautiful woman in all the world.

CLEO

Darling! (They drink.)

SCENE

EXTERIOR

Phroso is sitting in a bathtub, apparently naked, rubbing himself with a cloth. Venus comes out of her trailer and walks over to him. She is dressed to go out.

PHROSO

Hello there, baby. Hey, where you been so long?

VENUS

You're a funny guy, Phroso. (She walks up to the tub.) Sometimes you panic me.

PHROSO

Don't I know it. I panic the world, because I use my noodle. (Venus leans on the tub.) I think up funny gags. I make the world laugh. With me, clowning is an art. (She is peering closely into the tub.) Hey, why the hat? The head cold?

VENUS

Thought you and me had a date to go out.

PHROSO

Oh! I forgot all about it. Well, I'm into this now. I gotta go through with it. (He appears to be vigorously scrubbing his legs.)

VENUS

Well, make it snappy, will ya. I'm all dolled up for the occasion.

PHROSO

Sorry, kid, can't do it now. (Suddenly he dips forward out of sight and slips out from the tub's false bottom. He stands. He is wearing pants.) We'll make it some other time, huh? (She sulks.) Aw, don't feel that way about it. I just got this idea all of a sudden and I gotta finish it. Funny gag, isn't it? (He is attaching a wire-spoked wheel to the base of the tub.)

VENUS

Yeah. I'm laughing myself sick.

PHROSO

Aw, say, come on. (He gets up and goes to her.) Honey. Hey. Come on, come on, come on. Now, now, now, now. (She smiles.) That's much better. (He kisses her.)

VENUS

That's the first time you ever done that!

PHROSO

Ain't the first time I felt like doing it.

VENUS

Yeah?

PHROSO

Oh, Venus. (They embrace and kiss again.) I don't mind telling you I wanted to do this for a long time.

VENUS

(whispering in his ear) So've I, Phroso.

PHROSO

Well, we're all set now, hey Venus?

VENUS

(softly) Yeah.

PHROSO

(bursting) We're all set now!

SCENE

EXTERIOR

A handsome suitor holds Violet's hand as they sit together, while Daisy reads a book.

VADJEZ

Please. Please do. Don't you want to make me happy?

VIOLET

Yes...but I don't know what to say.

VADJEZ

Just say yes, dear. Will you?

VIOLET

Yes.

VADJEZ

Oh, Violet. (They embrace and kiss. Daisy lifts her head and smiles in ecstasy.)

SCENE

EXTERIOR

PHROSO

(still working on his tub) What are you kicking about? You got a good wife. You're happy.

ROSCOE

Oh, that sister-in-law of mine--she wants to sit up half the n-night r-reading.

PHROSO
Gee, that's tough.

ROSCOE
Tough! You b-b- (He suddenly stops and stares. He pokes Phroso, who turns and looks. Cleopatra and Hans are saying goodnight. Hans kisses her hand, then descends the wagon steps and walks away.)

ROSCOE
Cleo's gone on a d-d-diet! (Phroso laughs loudly.)

SCENE
EXTERIOR

VADJEZ
It's awfully sweet of you to say that.

DAISY
(shaking his hand) And I know Violet will be happy. Oh, here's Roscoe. (He enters.) This is Mr. Vadjez.

ROSCOE
Glad to meetcha. (They shake hands.)

DAISY
Violet and he are engaged to be married.

ROSCOE
Oh, yeah?

VADJEZ
Yes, and you must come to see us sometime.

ROSCOE
Thanks. You must come to v-v-v- come to see us sometime, too.

VADJEZ
I certainly will. Thanks.

SCENE
EXTERIOR

Frieda approaches Hans' wagon hesitantly. She knocks, then backs away.

HANS
Who is it?

FRIEDA
It's Frieda, Hans. (He opens the door.) May I come in?

HANS
Yes, Frieda. (She enters and sits.)

FRIEDA
Now that I'm here, I don't know how to say it--how to make you understand. (on the verge of tears) If you knew how I feel, Hans, to come to you about her.

HANS
Oh, Frieda, I'm so sorry. I don't want to hurt you.

FRIEDA
If you could be happy, Hans, I would not care.

HANS

But I am happy, Frieda. Never in my life was I so happy.

FRIEDA

No, Hans. You think it only. For you she cannot bring happiness.

HANS

Ah, Frieda, you don't know! (He walks away.)

FRIEDA

But I do, Hans.

HANS

You think because she's so beautiful and I'm just a mi-

FRIEDA

(cutting him off) Don't, Hans! To me you're a man. But to her you're only something to laugh at. The whole circus, they make fun by you and her.

HANS

Let them laugh, the swine! I love her. They can't hurt me.

FRIEDA

But they hurt me.

HANS

Frieda, I have been a coward. I should have come to you in the beginning. Please forgive me?

FRIEDA

Yes, Hans, I forgive you. It is only that you should be happy I want. (She turns to go.)

HANS

Frieda, you won't worry now, will you?

FRIEDA

(without looking back) No, I won't worry. (She exits.)

SCENE

INTERIOR

Close up of a necklace, as Cleo hands it to Hercules

CLEO

Nice, very nice, hmm?

HERCULES

It's platinum! Hey, where do you think the little pollywog is getting his money? (They laugh.)

CLEO

Being so particular! (He hands her a drink as she sits on the bed.) What do you care where the money comes from. (She drinks.) How much is it worth?

HERCULES

We got five hundred for the bracelet--but this looks like thousands!

CLEO

I think next time I'll take a fur coat.

HERCULES

Say, that little ape's got ideas about you.

CLEO

Jealous?

HERCULES

Me? I'll squash him like a bug. (A knock at the door turns their heads.)

CLEO

That's his knock. I'll get rid of him. Go, quickly! (He goes into the next room, taking the liquor with him.) Come in. (Frieda enters.) What do you want?

FRIEDA

(She slowly walks over to Cleo.) Its about Hans.

CLEO

Well? I'm listening.

FRIEDA

It's behind his back, everybody's laughing, because he's in love with you.

CLEO

Go on.

FRIEDA

I know you just make fun. But Hans, he does not know this. If he finds out, never again will he be happy.

CLEO

What makes you think that I'm just making fun?

FRIEDA

Your face--so beautiful--

CLEO

--and Hans is so little, so cute, eh? Well, maybe I'm going to marry him!

FRIEDA

If you marry, it will be at you they laugh and stare!

CLEO

Of course. Nothing like being different. Cleopatra, queen of the air, married to a dwarf! (laughs)

FRIEDA

A dwarf!

CLEO

A dwarf.

FRIEDA

Then it's not for Hans you care! It's the money!

CLEO

Money. You...little mind reader.

FRIEDA

Ah, he has told you of the fortune he has inherited. (Cleo's eyes light up.) Always he warned me to tell no one until after we leave the circus.

CLEO

A fortune...and fancy you knowing about it too. Well, I can't be angry at him for that.

FRIEDA

No! No! You cannot do this!

CLEO
No? Hmm, you wait and see.

FRIEDA
Please, you can't. (Hopeless, she exits. Cleo jumps up as Hercules reenters.)

HERCULES
A fortune! I bet the little lame's worth billions!

CLEO
A fortune! Can you beat that! A fortune! And I have him like that. (snaps her fingers)

HERCULES
A fool he ain't. He knew enough to keep his mouth shut.

CLEO
I could marry him. Yes! He would marry me. (Hercules laughs. Camera pans in on Cleo, who has become deadly serious.) Midgets...are not strong...They could get sick.

HERCULES
(quietly) How?

CLEO
It could be done...slowly.

SCENE
IN THE BIG TENT

Caption on screen
"The Wedding Feast."

All the freaks are seated about a huge table set up under the big top. Koo Koo, a pinhead, is dancing on the table to a harmonica played by the human skeleton. She wears tights and a feathered jacket, a big feather atop her head, and large round eyeglasses. She shimmies as the crowd laughs and drinks, including Cleo and Hercules, who are seated next to each other. Cleo's hand reaches under the table and pours something from a vile into a bottle of wine. She then lifts the bottle and pours a drink for Hans, who sits on her left, wearing a tuxedo.

CLEO
(exuberantly) Oh, come on, my little precious, let's drink. Be happy! Drink! (As they toast and drink, Roscoe taps the table with a wooden spoon to gain attention.)

ROSCOE
Hey, K-Koo Koo, give somebody else a chance! (Everyone laughs.) All right, professor.

PROFESSOR
A waltz, please. (He inserts the entire length of a sword's blade down his throat. Madame Tetrallini and Schlitzey laugh and applaud. Frieda, sitting next to them, is somber.)

ANGELINO
Show him up, Volcano! (The fire-eater places a flaming torch in his mouth. Elvira and Jenny-Lee laugh with glee and clap.)

CLEO
Our wedding night! (laughs) What a thrill!

HANS
(slightly tipsy) Never before did I think I should be so lucky.

CLEO

Lucky! (laughs) I'm the lucky one, my little Hans.

HANS

My Cleo's happy...happy.

CLEO

Happy? (She laughs, as Frieda watches sadly.) I'm so happy I even could kiss you, (to Hercules) you big homely brute! (Cleo and Hercules kiss passionately. Hans' face drops. Mme. Tetrallini tries to comfort Frieda.) Ah, my little green-eyed monster. (to Hans, laughing) My husband is jealous! (Frieda is crying.) He loves me! (Frieda gets up and leaves. Mme. Tetrallini looks on the scene disdainfully, then hurls an epithet at Cleo and runs after Frieda.)

CLEO

Come, my little lover. Drink to the happiness of your loving wife. (Schlitzey laughs.)

ANGELINO

Attention! Attention! We'll make her one of us. A loving cup! A loving cup!

Josephine-Joseph, Frances, Johnny, Koo Koo, and the others pound the table and chant, as Angelino stands on the table top and pours from a bottle into the loving cup.

ALL FREAKS

(chanting) We accept her--one of us--gooble, gobble--we accept her--one of us--gooble, gobble...

HERCULES

They're going to make you one of them, my peacock! (He laughs. But Cleo stops laughing and stiffly rises from her chair. Angelino is walking back and forth across the tabletop giving the others sips from the loving cup. He trots over to Cleo, drinks from the cup himself, then offers it to her. She takes it in her hand.)

CLEO

(shouting) YOU!...DIRTY!...SLIMY!...FREAKS! (There is silence.)
FREAKS!...FREAKS!...GET OUT OF HERE! (She throws the drink at them.)

HERCULES

Get out! You heard her! Get out! (laughs. They all slowly leave.)

CLEO

You filth! Make me one of you, will you! (to Hans)
) Well, what are you going to do? What are you a man or a baby!

HANS

Please! Please! You make me ashamed.

CLEO

Ashamed! You! Holy Christmas! (She sits next to him.) What must I do? Must I play games with you? Must Mamma take you horsey-back ride?

HERCULES

Ha, ha, that's it! Horsey-back ride! (Laughing, he gets up, goes over and picks up Hans.) Come, come, my little fly speck. Momma is going to take you horsey-back ride. (Cleo laughs as Hercules places Hans on her shoulders. She gets up and dances around the table in her silken white wedding gown, bouncing Hans on her shoulders.) Geddy-up! Geddy-up! (Hercules grabs a trumpet from one of the departing freaks and runs after her, tooting it. Hans covers his face in shame.)

SCENE

INTERIOR

Cleo sits on the bed. Hans stands, his hand to his forehead. Hercules hovers over Hans in dark silhouette.

HERCULES

Ah forget it, Hans. She is sorry. I am sorry. Didn't I told you she was drunk? Didn't I told you we was only having a little fun?

HANS

Please. I- I understand...everything. (He wipes his face with a handkerchief.)

HERCULES

No, you don't. I tell you, there's nothing between me and Cleo.

CLEO

Oh, be quiet! Haven't you done enough damage for one night! Don't you realize what I'm being accused of?

HERCULES

I ain't going to be blamed for something I have not done.

HANS

I don't blame you, Cleo. I don't blame Hercules. (Angelino appears at the window.) Only me, myself.

HERCULES

Now you're talking like a man. Ha, ha. (He slaps Hans on the back, causing him to fall against Cleo's lap.)

CLEO

(to Hercules) You fool! (Hercules takes a drink.)

HANS

Always I should have known you would only laugh at me. (He wipes his face.)

CLEO

My sweet, I'd rather fall from the trapeze and break my neck, than hurt your feelings. Do you understand now? It was only a joke.

HANS

Our wedding--a joke? Now I know how funny it is. Hans, the midget. (laughs) I'm the fool! Everywhere they're laughing. Laughing! Laughing! Laughing! Oh! (He puts his hand to his head and faints to the floor.)

HERCULES

You give him too much.

CLEO

No, I haven't. I know what I am doing. (She stands.) Come on. Pick him up. (Hercules puts down his drink, lifts Hans and hands him to Cleo, who carries him out and across to her trailer. The human worm watches from behind a wagon wheel.)

SCENE

HANS' WAGON

Outside, various circus people watch and wait. Inside, Cleo and the doctor are seated at the foot of the bed where Hans lies. Mme. Tetrallini watches from the inner doorway.

MME. TETRALLINI

Doctor, what is it? What caused it? (Others are seen peering from beyond the front door.)

DOCTOR

Poison. (Mme. Tetrallini and Cleo exchange hostile looks.) A bad case of ptomaine poisoning. (Mme. Tetrallini continues to look at Cleo with suspicion.)

CLEO

Doctor, did I do wrong then, giving him mustard water?

DOCTOR

No. Probably it saved his life. (Angelino is seen at the window.)

Outside, Frieda sits at her trailer door, with Venus standing beside her.

FRIEDA

Never before did he drink like that. But she kept making him and making him.

VENUS

(sarcastically) Drink, huh?

Hercules stands with his leg up on a wagon step. He looks worried. He steps away and disappears behind the wagon. Across the way a group of freaks sits quietly watching. Venus approaches Hercules behind the wagon.

VENUS

You better get Cleo to tell the doctor what she put in that wine last night.

HERCULES

What you talking about, eh?

VENUS

The stuff she put in the wine!

HERCULES

You're crazy.

VENUS

Yeah? Well, you can't get away with it. I'll tell the coppers.

HERCULES

So, hey, tell on your own people?

VENUS

My people are decent circus folks. Not dirty rats what would kill a freak to get his money.

HERCULES

Dirty little...(He grabs her as she turns to leave, but he sees the freaks watching and lets her go.) Ah, your imagination's getting the best of you.

VENUS

Yeah? Maybe it is. But coppers don't have imagination, so I've been told. Don't make me have to go to 'em. (She leaves.)

SCENE

EVENING

Several freaks are standing watch. Hercules comes out of his wagon, in costume. Roscoe is standing there, in women's dress, holding his wig in his hands. They do not speak. After an awkward moment, Roscoe leaves. Beneath a wagon the human worm edges across the ground. Other freaks huddle under a wagon. Hercules laces his boot.

Inside Hans' wagon, Cleo, in her trapeze outfit, is putting away a glass. Hans is in bed.

HANS
Cleo.

CLEO
Yes?

HANS
It has been the fifth night we have been married--a week since I have said all those things to you.

CLEO
(going over to him) Don't, don't.

HANS
Never can I forgive myself for what I've said.

CLEO
(stroking his head) I've forgotten. Nothing matters, except for you to be well.

HANS
(patting her hand) How good you are by me, Cleo. (Angelino watches at the window.)

CLEO
I must fix your medicine, or I'll be late.

She goes into the other room and prepares his medicine. From the window, Angelino watches her add something to it from a little bottle. She returns to Hans and feeds him a spoonful, which he passively accepts. When she leaves the room, Hans eyes open and he leans forward and spits the medicine into a handkerchief. She puts the medicine away and returns.

CLEO
I'll be soon back, my little. Don't be lonely.

HANS
I'll never forget what you are doing for me, Cleo.

CLEO
But it's what I want to do, my darling. Now, now I must hurry.

HANS
Cleo.

CLEO
Yes?

HANS
(very weakly) Will you leave the door open, please?

CLEO
Yes, my darling.

As she walks across the court to her wagon, Johnny crosses her path walking with his arms. Under the steps she is about to climb she sees other freaks lurking. She quickly goes in. Angelino slips into Hans' wagon and walks over to him.

HANS
Tonight.

ANGELINO

They will be ready.

HANS

All right. You come to my wagon. (Angelino nods and leaves. Hans lies back and grins, mockingly.) I must hurry now and fix your medicine, my darling, or I will be late...(His smile drops.)...dirty...slimy...freaks.

SCENE

NIGHT

Thunder.

Beneath the line of wagons Johnny propels himself swiftly across the ground on his arms.

Lightning.

Beyond him we see the legs of men busy with preparations to set the circus to traveling again.

Johnny comes to the underside of a wagon where a group of freaks waits.

JOHNNY

He's waiting.

ANGELENO

Fine...fine.

Fade to a shot of wagons being pulled by horses through a violent storm. Inside one of the wagons Josephine-Joseph turns from the window to face the others.

JOSEPHINE-JOSEPH

Soon we go. (She turns back to the window.)

In his wagon, Hercules puts on a hat, blows out his lantern, and then leaps from the moving vehicle.

Thunder.

In another wagon, Frieda and Phroso sit talking.

PHROSO

Ah, you're imagining things.

FRIEDA

No. Then I hear Hercules tell Cleo, "Venus knows too much."

PHROSO

Hercules? Venus?

FRIEDA

Yes.

PHROSO

Oh, ho! Thanks, Frieda. (He puts on his hat and leaves.)

In Hans' room Johnny and a couple of dwarfs are gathered about his bed, as one of them plays an eerie melody on the flute. Outside, the storm rages. Cleo enters from the galley.

CLEO

My little, you must go to sleep. Your friends better go now.

HANS

I like them here.

CLEO

No, no, no, Hans. They can come back tomorrow. I will give you your medicine and get you off to sleep. Go, go on, all of you, quick, quick. (As she goes to get his medicine, Hans abruptly swings his feet around and sits up. She returns with the spoonful of medicine and stops short.) What's this?

HANS

Give me the little black bottle.

Lightning flashes.

She backs away. One of the dwarfs casually pulls out a switchblade and polishes it. Johnny takes a gun from his pocket and wipes it with his handkerchief. Cleo drops the spoon.

HANS

(extending his hand) The bottle. (She pulls it out of her pocket and gives it to him.) You got this full of poison--to kill.

In the rain a figure climbs onto the rear of a moving wagon. Inside, Venus turns to see Hercules breaking in. She backs away, grabbing a crowbar for defense. As Hercules crawls in, Phroso leaps onto the wagon and jumps him from behind. They roll into the wagon and struggle, as the wagon rocks wildly from the bumpy ride.

VENUS

Phroso!

PHROSO

Get out, Venus!

Another wagon hits a rut and tips into a ditch. A scream. Cleo climbs from the tilted wagon and runs screaming into the woods. Little figures scramble out and run after her.

In the other wagon Phroso again cries out to Venus to get out. She calls for help at the window. Hercules and Phroso struggle wildly. Outside, Mme. Tetrallini runs about, shouting frantically. Hercules grabs Venus. Phroso jumps on him and they fall out of the wagon. In the mud below, Hercules is on top of Phroso, choking him. Suddenly a thrown knife strikes Hercules. Phroso gets away. Writhing in pain, Hercules looks up to see freaks crawling and slithering towards him from every direction in the pouring rain, with knives in their hands and in their teeth.

In the woods, Cleo is running and screaming, pursued by her revengers. Her scream fades, as the early scene of the sideshow barker standing over the enclosed pit, surrounded by circus patrons, reappears.

BARKER

How she got that way will never be known. Some say a jealous lover. Others, that it was the code of the freaks. Others, the storm. Believe it or not, there she is.

In the pit is a creature with no human body beneath her head. A feathered, bird-like belly bulges from her frilly circus jacket. She support herself on shaky arms, as Johnny did with more grace, and her face is scarred, deformed, and has a dead expression. From her mouth comes a wild squawking sound, in keeping with her chicken-like appearance.

SCENE

INTERIOR OF A MANSION LIBRARY

Hans paces the floor. A butler enters.

BUTLER

But, sir, they insist on seeing you.

HANS

You know how I feel. I'm seeing no one. Have I not told you, Fritz? Send them away.

BUTLER

Very good, sir. (He turns to exit as Phroso forces his way in.)

HANS

I can see no one.

BUTLER

Excuse me, sir, you can't come in.

PHROSO

Can't I?

BUTLER

No, sir, I have my orders.

PHROSO

Well, I'm in ain't I? (to Hans) Oh, yes you can, Hansy old boy. There's someone you just gotta see. (He enters, followed by Venus and Frieda.)

HANS

(to Frieda) Why did you come here?

FRIEDA

Please, Hans, don't be angry. Venus and Phroso have been so kind by me.

HANS

Please, go away...I can't see no one. (He turns away.)

FRIEDA

But Hans, you tried to stop them. It was only the poison you wanted. It wasn't your fault. (She approaches him. Venus pokes Phroso and they smile and leave.) Don't...don't worry, Hans. Come to me, my lieber. Don't cry. (She sits and strokes his head as he sinks into her lap.) Don't, Hans. Don't cry. I love you. I love you.

~ THE END ~