

The doors swing open.

JOE, a construction worker, enters while in a bit of a rush. He spots his co-workers.

JOE
Hey! Phil! Harold! Guess who's coming?

PHIL
What? What's happening?

JOE
Guess who I saw coming this way?

PHIL
Who?

JOE
Johnny Bear.

ALEX
Is he? Well, all right.

PHIL
Johnny Bear? Johnny Bear is coming now?

HAROLD
Johnny Bear? Who's Johnny Bear?

JOE
You don't know? You really don't know who Johnny Bear is?

ALEX
You're in for a treat, then.

PHIL
He wasn't here last time. It's, I mean he's, kind of hard to explain. He's a, a....

JOE
Hey! He's here! Look.

The doors swing open and JOHNNY BEAR enters. He walks with a strange, jerky, lumbering stride and laughs for no reason.

A fly buzzes about his grotesque, distorted, unwashed and uncomprehending face. His body is huge and blockish. His clothes are comically dirty and not of his size.

The Crowd turns to him in anticipation. After a little while, he makes his way over to FAT CARL.

JOHNNY'S muddy, gray boots make tracks through the sawdust on the floor. He speaks to no one in particular.

JOHNNY
Whiskey? Whiskey? Whiskey?

PHIL slides a quarter along to FAT CARL, who fills up a glass of whiskey.

HAROLD and ALEX watch. HAROLD whispers to ALEX.

HAROLD
He's buying for him? That *never* happens for anybody. What the devil-

ALEX
Shh. Listen.

JOHNNY gulps down the whiskey, then goes to the middle of the room. The Crowd watches him in anticipation.

JOHNNY starts talking, but the voices we hear aren't his own. They're the voices of HAROLD and MAE that we heard earlier while they were walking at night in the previous scene. It's as if he recorded them, but it's coming from JOHNNY's mouth.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD
Did you hear something?

JOHNNY AS MAE
What?

JOHNNY AS HAROLD
Thought I heard a rustle in the trees.

HAROLD looks shocked.

JOHNNY AS MAE
It is just the wind, or some animal. Nothing at all to worry about. Come, sit for a little while. This is my favorite spot in the whole of Loma.

HAROLD turns to ALEX in shock. JOHNNY BEAR continues his scene in the background.

HAROLD
Mae! That's Mae's voice! Exactly! That's me talking to her!

ALEX
Ssh! Just listen.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD
But you are too beautiful to live in a dirty little town like this.

"She" laughs, as does everyone else in the bar on hearing such a cornball line.

The crowd laughs out loud as they notice HAROLD's confusion and figure out it's his voice.

HAROLD turns red.

JOHNNY AS MAE
You just tell me that.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD
What?

JOHNNY AS MAE

Just two weeks in town, two weeks! And already you say such things. Two weeks after you meet me already you know how beautiful I am, eh?

“She” laughs softly. Some men in the bar snicker at that line.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD

Yes I do. I’ve seen enough to know that there are far better, far more beautiful things inside you than anything else this place has to offer.

The men in the bar laugh out loud with that line. One tries to quiet another, with respect for HAROLD.

HAROLD shakes his head slowly.

JOHNNY BEAR continues.

JOHNNY AS MAE

That’s sweet.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD

But it’s true, I swear it. These here stars have got no comparison to the way you’re lookin’ right now.

Everyone busts up laughing with that. They can’t help it. It’s too corny.

HAROLD looks like he wants to sink below the floor.

JOHNNY AS MAE

I’m just enough of a silly girl to almost fall for a stupid line like that. Come on, let’s go.

JOHNNY AS HAROLD

Where?

JOHNNY AS MAE

The fog will close in soon, and I should be heading home now. My mama...

JOHNNY BEAR breaks concentration and looks at FAT CARL.

JOHNNY

Whiskey? Whiskey for Johnny?

The room breaks out in applause. A great show at the expense of HAROLD.

A quarter is slid down the length of the bar to CARL, who fills another glass.

JOHNNY gulps down the whiskey, way too quickly.

Some construction workers are still snickering over the scene to each other.

MAN #1

Ha ha ha. How’d that go? That first one?

MAN #2

“You are much too beautiful to be livin’ in a dirty little town like this.”

MAN #1

Oh my lord.

He pounds the table helplessly. They laugh heartily.

HAROLD looks at them with bewildered anger. They notice his glare, look at him and laugh even harder than before.

JOHNNY BEAR, falls with a thud. He starts to go to sleep under a table in back. Things go back to normal, more or less.

ALEX looks upon HAROLD with both compassion and amusement.

HAROLD

Alex? What in the hell was that we just saw?

ALEX

First time, huh? Some first time.

HAROLD

Yes, what in God’s name is he?

ALEX

If you’re worrying about Mae’s reputation, don’t. Johnny Bear has followed Mae before.

JOE

Just be glad she don’t have any brothers. Ha, ha, ha...

ALEX

Quiet, Joe.

HAROLD

But how did he hear us? I didn’t see him.

ALEX

No one sees or hears Johnny Bear when he’s on business.

ALEX looks at the sleeping JOHNNY BEAR.

JOHNNY BEAR snores loudly.

ALEX (OS)

He can move like no movement at all. Know what our young men do when they go out with girls? They take a dog along. Dogs are afraid of Johnny and they can smell him coming.

A fly lands on JOHNNY’s head. He shakes it off without waking up.

HAROLD and ALEX continue talking.

HAROLD

But good God! Those voices-

ALEX

I know. Some of us wrote up to the university about Johnny, and a young man came down. He took a look and then he told us about Blind Tom. Ever hear of him?

HAROLD

You mean the negro piano player? Yes, I've heard of him.

INSERT-BLIND TOM FLASHBACK

INT. CONCERT HALL-DAY

BLIND TOM is a black man and half-wit. He plays the piano with an expressionless face. He is dressed like a parody of a classy piano player but he is playing beautifully. He finishes and puts his hands in his lap and stares blankly, fiddling with his tie. Some UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS take notes in the background.

ALEX (VO)

Well, Blind Tom was a half-wit. He could hardly talk but he could imitate anything he heard on the piano.

A FINE PIANIST plays a very difficult piece on the piano. He is dressed nicely. BLIND TOM is sitting by, looking out a window.

A PROFESSOR nudges TOM to make sure he's listening.

ALEX (VO)

They tried him with these fine musicians and he reproduced not only the music but every little personal emphasis and style.

BLIND TOM plays the piano. A carbon copy of the first pianist.

THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS take notes and discuss this find amongst themselves.

ALEX (VO)

To catch him they made little mistakes, and he played those mistakes, exactly. He photographed the playing in the tiniest detail.

THE FINE PIANIST plays a passage with an obvious mistake in it. He grimaces at the mistake.

BLIND TOM has no reaction. He plays the exact same passage with the same mistake in it obliviously.

THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS write something down on their notebooks.

BLIND TOM finishes the piece and then stares out into nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. BUFFALO BAR-DAY

THE YOUNG PROFESSOR is explaining JOHNNY's ability to ALEX.

ALEX (VO)

The man said Johnny Bear is the same, only he can photograph words and voices, and spit him out just like he heard it.

BACK TO:

ALEX rolls a cigarette as he finishes the story. Offers one to HAROLD, who refuses.

ALEX

He tested Johnny with a long passage in Greek and Johnny did it exactly. He doesn't know the words he's saying, he just says them. He hasn't brains enough to make anything up, so you know what he says is what he heard. He's so good at what he does, if you close your eyes, it isn't Johnny that you see, it's whoever he's doing.

HAROLD

I know. When he did Mae's voice I almost called out her name.

HAROLD looks at JOHNNY BEAR, who is still napping, and starting to snore loudly.

HAROLD

All right, but why does he do it? Why is he interested in listening if he doesn't understand?

ALEX lights his cigarette.

ALEX

He ain't interested. But he loves whiskey. He knows if he listens in windows and comes here and repeats what he hears, someone will give him whiskey if it's interesting. He tries to palm off Mrs. Ratz' conversation in the store, or.... or Jerry Noland arguing with his mother, but he knows he can't get whiskey for such things.

HAROLD

It's funny somebody hasn't shot him while he was peeking in windows.

ALEX

Lots of people have tried, but you can't see him. He's too good. You don't want to be heard? You keep your windows closed, and even then you talk in a whisper.

PHIL enters the picture.

PHIL

Hey, quite a show, wasn't it Harold?

PHIL laughs annoyingly.

PHIL
Oh, come on. Don't look so sour. Here. I'll buy you one.

ALEX
Yeah. Come have a drink.

HAROLD gets up as they walk to bar.

FAT CARL turns to them.

FAT CARL
What'll it be?

No answer. CARL pours three whiskeys, winks at HAROLD.

FAT CARL
Got you, didn't he?

HAROLD
Take a dog next time.

They drink. PHIL pays for the round.

HAROLD
Yeah. That's what I'll do.

MAN #2 (OS)
Hey! He's getting up agin!

JOHNNY BEAR awakens. He stumbles to his feet. People pay attention.

JOHNNY
Whiskey? Whiskey?

No one pays. The crowd heckles him. HAROLD looks around.

JOE
Come on, Johnny. Let's hear what you got. Then we'll give ya whiskey.

JOHNNY starts an imitation.

JOHNNY AS ANGRY WOMAN
I tell you it was all bone. Twenty cents a pound, and half bone.

JOHNNY AS BUTCHER
Yes, ma'am. I didn't know it. I'll give you some sausage to make up for that. How 'bout that? All right?

JOHNNY AS ANGRY WOMAN
Okay, but don't let it happen again. Honestly. Do you do you expect me to not notice when you do that?

JOHNNY AS BUTCHER

I tell you, it was a mistake, ma'am. I'm sorry.

THE CROWD isn't very interested as JOHNNY continues. They groan audibly and voice their boredom.

JOHNNY

Whiskey? Whiskey for Johnny?

MAN #1

Aw, come on, Johnny! That was boring!

MR. RATZ

You can't expect whiskey for that.

PHIL pounds his glass on the table.

JOE

No whiskey. No whiskey for Johnny.

MAN #2

You can do better than that!

JOHNNY BEAR tries again. He stands stiffly, as if looking out a window, hands on the sill.

HAROLD

What's he doing?

ALEX

Ssh! Looking out a window. Listen.

JOHNNY BEAR talks in a cold, proper, female voice. It's the voice of EMALIN, a town aristocrat.

JOHNNY AS EMALIN

I can't quite understand it. Are you some kind of monster?

Another female voice answers from JOHNNY's mouth, a voice low and hoarse with misery. This is AMY, EMALIN's sister.

JOHNNY AS AMY

Maybe I am a monster. I can't help it. I can't help it.

JOHNNY AS EMALIN

You *must* help it. Why, you'd be better dead.

JOHNNY starts sobbing in AMY's voice.

The crowd is stunned at what they're hearing. They didn't expect anything this serious.

PHIL and HAROLD look at each other, confused.

ALEX recognizes these voices, we see the shock in his face.

ALEX

Miss Amy. My God, that's Miss Amy.

HAROLD

Who?

ALEX

Ssh!

JOHNNY BEAR stops crying. He starts more dialogue.

CLOSE-HAROLD

As JOHNNY starts again, HAROLD closes his eyes, listening only to JOHNNY's voices, and forming the images of these people in his mind.

POV-HAROLD: AMY AND EMALIN

INT. AMY HAWKINS' BEDROOM-NIGHT (HAROLD'S IMAGINATION)

He imagines a richly appointed bedroom. EMALIN and AMY are around 50 and 40 respectively. Both graceful and cultured, though no longer beautiful.

EMALIN is standing by the window, looking out. Her posture is perfect. Her face is without visible emotion.

AMY is lying on the bed, hugging a pillow and crying. She looks disheveled. After a while, she speaks through her tears.

AMY

(Sobbing)
Have.... Ha- Hav-

EMALIN

Enunciate, Amy. For God's sake.

AMY

Haven't you ever felt that way, Emalin?

EMALIN

Certainly not.

AMY

Never in the night? Not ever--Ever in your life?

EMALIN walks toward AMY.

EMALIN

If I had, if ever I had, I would have cut that part of me out and thrown it away. Now stop your whining, Amy. I won't stand for it. Remember who you are. Remember who *we* are.

EMALIN walks away. AMY is stunned and in tears.

EMALIN

If you don't get control of your nerves, I'll see about having some medical treatment for you. Now go to your prayers.

EMALIN slams the door shut.

BACK TO BAR:

CLOSE-HAROLD

He opens his eyes. Looks at JOHNNY BEAR, who is smiling obliviously.

JOHNNY BEAR

Whiskey?

The bar patrons look ashamed at witnessing that scene. Two men advance without a word and put down one coin each.

FAT CARL fills two glasses, which JOHNNY gulps down.

FAT CARL fills one again. JOHNNY drinks the last one, smiles, and staggers out the door.

FAT CARL looks more sullen than usual.

HAROLD looks at FAT CARL. FAT CARL never gives anyone anything on the house, so he knows how much JOHNNY moved him.

HAROLD turns to ALEX, who stares out at JOHNNY in a confused rage. The room is silent and still.

ALEX rushes out of the Buffalo Bar without a word. HAROLD gets up and follows.

EXT. LOMA'S MAIN STREET-NIGHT

HAROLD calls out to ALEX, who is walking at a terrific pace. HAROLD eventually catches up.

HAROLD

Alex! Alex! Wait up. What was it? What was that all about?

ALEX

Go away.

HAROLD

Did you see that? Fat Carl. He gave that freak three glasses when they only paid for two. What's that goddamn important?

ALEX stops, thinks a moment, and turns to ALEX.

ALEX

Oh, damn it, Harold. Listen. Every town has its aristocrats, its family who's just better than everyone else. Emalin and Amy Hawkins are ours. They're... their father was a congressman.

ALEX starts walking again and keeps talking.

ALEX

I don't like this. Johnny Bear shouldn't do it. Why! They feed him. Those men shouldn't give him whiskey. He'll haunt that house now.... Now he knows he can get whiskey for it. God damn him.

ALEX throws rocks up against a tree.

HAROLD

What, are they relatives of yours?

ALEX

No, they have the farm next to mine. Some Chinese farm it on shares. But they-- why, they ain't like other people.

ALEX stops to explain this.

ALEX

You see, Harold, it's hard to explain. It's like they're symbols. They're what we tell our kids when we want to-- well, to describe good people.

HAROLD

Well, nothing Johnny Bear said would hurt them, would it?

ALEX

I don't know. I don't know what it means. I mean, I kind of know. Oh! Christ. Go on home. I didn't bring my car. I'm going to walk.

ALEX walks away and gets swallowed by the squirming mist.

HAROLD walks the other way, and mist envelops the screen.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONSTRUCTION GROUNDS-DAY

The machines work noisily as the local animals run away from all of the commotion.

The men working on the crew haul some heavy equipment as the machines spew exhaust into the blue sky.

The digger cuts a path through the bog.

Workers wipe sweat off their brow as the off work whistle blows. The men quickly and quietly disperse.

EXT. ROAD-DAY

HAROLD is walking back towards home. A car horn beeps.

ALEX approaches from the other direction driving a Model T Ford. It's the first car we've seen thus far. He waves and stops the car by HAROLD. They shout over the engine noise.

ALEX

I was just going to the dredger to get you. I knocked off a couple of chickens this morning. Thought you might like to come over and help out with them.

HAROLD

Sure.

ALEX

Hop in. My sister is fryin' them as we speak.

HAROLD climbs into the car. The car pulls out and turns around.

INT. ALEX'S CAR-DAY

The car moves past a large house enclosed by a high, thick hedge. This house is part of the Hawkins' estate, it's surrounded by farmland.

ALEX

Remember the Hawkinses?

HAROLD

Of course I remember.

ALEX

That's their house.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF HAWKINS' HOUSE-DAY

The top of the house peeks over the hedge. The hedge, for the most part, shields the house from intrusion. There are also some iron gates out front which are locked.

ALEX

The hedge keeps the wind out.

HAROLD

It doesn't keep Johnny Bear out.

ALEX looks pissed off at the reference. He changes the subject and points to a whitewashed square building standing out in the field.

EXT. SHARE-CROPPER'S HOUSE-DAY

ALEX

That's where the Chink share-croppers live. Good workers. I wish I had some like them. You see them out at night a lot. They eat a great many things they have to catch at night.

EXT. HAWKINS' HOUSE-DAY

A horse and buggy appears from behind the hedge and heads in the opposite direction. Riding in the buggy are AMY and EMALIN.

ALEX pulls the car over to the side to let them past. The street is only wide enough for one vehicle.

The horse and buggy draw close. In it, the Hawkinses carry themselves like royalty, though distress does show in AMY's face. EMALIN's face is controlled by nature, AMY's face is held that way.

ALEX and HAROLD take off their hats and give a polite little bow as they go by.

AMY and EMALIN nod formally as their buggy passes.

ALEX
Good afternoon.

EMALIN
Hello, Alex. How do you do?

ALEX
Fine, ma'am. Thank you.

They move past ALEX's car and into the estate. ALEX restarts the car.

ALEX
Now, the one on the left-

HAROLD
Was Amy. The one on the right Emalin. Am I right?

ALEX
How did you know?

HAROLD
Johnny Bear. They look exactly like I expected them to after I heard their voices. Exactly.

ALEX looks pained. He shifts and the car lurches forward.

HAROLD is lost in thought.

HAROLD
Jesus, Johnny Bear is incredible. I never would've thought it was possible, but, Jesus. When Johnny is saying their voices, it isn't him that I saw, it was them. Close my eyes, and he ain't there. It's them. Jesus.

ALEX
You see what I meant about aristocrats? They're dignified people. Every town needs a few, you know?

HAROLD nods. The car drives off into the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S KITCHEN-DUSK

Chicken is frying in a cast iron skillet. ALEX's sister, SUE fries the chicken in butter, puts it on a plate, and serves it to the men. It looks delicious.

ALEX and HAROLD eat the fried chicken. Pure delight.

SUE
Here you go, boys.

HAROLD
Um, ummm.... This is sure, something. Thank you very much ma'am.

ALEX
Have you tried the biscuits, yet?

HAROLD
Have I ever. I tell you, Alex, and you too, Sue, this is the finest meal that I've had since I've arrived in this God forsaken place. My compliments to the chef.

SUE
Thank you.

HAROLD
Hard to believe that no man has come and snatched you up, yet. My Lord.

SUE
Oh, stop.

ALEX
You done yet?

HAROLD
Much as I'd love to, I couldn't eat another bite.

ALEX
Well then, come to the living room. I've got some brandy I'd like you to try.

HAROLD
No problem.

They exit, leaving SUE to clean up the dishes.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

A glass of brandy is poured.

ALEX
Another glass, Harold?

HAROLD
Please.

HAROLD hands ALEX a glass. ALEX fills it up. HAROLD drinks it in a gulp, puts it down, drained.

HAROLD

Hoo, boy. That is some real fine stuff you've got there. I can't see why you ever go into the Buffalo. That whiskey is downright undrinkable some nights.

ALEX

I know it is. But you don't go there for the booze, at least I don't. It's that everyone else is there, that's why you go. The Buffalo is the mind of Loma. It's our newspaper, our theatre, and our club.

HAROLD

You're right. It is all that, ain't it? And, of course, Johnny Bear.

ALEX

Him, too. Whatever it is, it sure ain't that whiskey.

HAROLD

I know. Fat Carl could be serving us anything an' we'd still go there. Just to hang around everyone else.

ALEX

No doubt about it.

HAROLD

Like our cook. He makes good food, sure, but there's just something about him you don't trust. I mean, he doesn't drink, and that's suspicious right there. The personality of a cook has so much more to do with a crew's happiness than the food.

ALEX

Is that so?

HAROLD

Yeah. Last crew I was in, the cook could've served us fried cement and we would've been happy. Now, that man had a gift.

ALEX

Just good people. That's all there is to it. Good people.

HAROLD

A universal rule to life, my friend. Yes it is.

A pause. HAROLD and ALEX look at each other, contemplate their glasses.

HAROLD

So, are we gonna go?

ALEX smiles.

ALEX

Now? Sure, I don't see why not.

HAROLD

Let's go, then.

ALEX

Sure enough.

They get up and head out the door.

ALEX

Hey, Sue! We're going to the Buffalo!

SUE is washing the dishes from supper.

SUE

All right. Have a good time, boys.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALEX'S CAR-NIGHT (MOVING)

They pass by the Hawkin's House and are nearly into the town center.

HAROLD and ALEX are singing a popular song together. ALEX breaks off suddenly as he sees something in the distance.

POV-ALEX

A pair of headlights shine in the distance.

ALEX jerks on the steering wheel, swerving the car over to block the road. He stops it there, catching HAROLD off guard. ALEX stares at the oncoming lights.

ALEX turns to a confused HAROLD.

ALEX

It's the doctor, DOC HOLMES.

The other car pulls over, as he can't get through. It's driven by DOCTOR HOLMES, the old doctor of this town.

ALEX stands up to shout over the engine noise.

ALEX

Say, Doc, I was going to ask you to take a look at my sister. She's got a swelling on her throat.

DOCTOR HOLMES

All right, Alex, I'll take a look. Pull out, will you? I'm in a hurry.

ALEX

Who's sick, Doc?

DOCTOR HOLMES

Why, Miss Amy had a little spell. Miss Emalin phoned in and asked me to hurry. Get out of the way, will you?