

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

“The Monster” (1898)

Stephen Crane

(1871-1900)

from *Follywood* (2005)

They had no ending.

Sarah went back to the UCLA library, searched for an update to their story and got access to some recent battle reports from the front in Europe. She expanded her treatment into a screenplay, remaining faithful to the implications of the original story while extending its themes into a present true account of a faceless soldier, but they still had no ending.

Eisley called in Carlton Moss, a Negro screenwriter and actor who had collaborated with Orson Welles at the Federal Theater in Harlem and also had produced the documentary *The Negro Soldier*. Eisley wanted to make sure that all their language was correct. He wanted all the action and every single word of *The Monster* to be acceptable to Moss. He made an offer on the phone and Moss came to his office at the 20th Century Fox studio for a conference. In the month thereafter, Moss rewrote the screenplay, updating the Negro dialect and supplying an ending.

Sarah looked up from the manuscript in her lap. They were reading in their sunken knotty pine living room.

“Do you think Zanuck is ready for this?” she asked Ryan.

‘A march on city hall? A revolution?’

“It’s daring.”

“We’re at war, Sarah. Zanuck is a Republican, for God sake! I can accept most of this--except the ending. Zanuck would think I’m left of Phil Dunne! He’d think I’m a Communist!”

“Is that better than a Nazi?”

“It’s not good.”

“Isn’t Moss a Communist?”

“I didn’t think that would matter until I read his ending.”

‘Maybe we should go back to the original.’

“We fade out on a closeup of the wife sniffing about no one coming to tea? That’s literature, Sarah. Not a movie.”

“What about ending with Henry Johnson living alone in a shack by the town dump. The boy visits him there. He accepts him and they’re friends. That should work.”

“You think so?” he squinted with a wince.

“Don’t you?”

“Zanuck scares me. He can be such a bastard.”

“So can you, Ryan,” she teased.

“God, I hope so.”

Darryl F. Zanuck barely knew his name. The mogul had returned to command as head of production at Fox with so much scorn for decisions made during his sojourn at war that Eisley thought Zanuck might want to fire him. He submitted the screenplay of *The Monster* nevertheless, giving the writing credit to Sarah and to Carlton Moss. Three weeks later he got summoned by Zanuck. He wondered if it could be to discuss the screenplay or if he was about to get ordered off the lot. The constant fear of termination kept aggravating his ulcer. Before going in, he popped another pill.

Zanuck had reclaimed his throne room from William Goetz, a part owner whose career had derived largely from his marriage to a daughter of the powerful Louie B. Mayer of MGM. Upon his return from shooting a documentary of tank battles on the front in North Africa, the inspired Zanuck intimidated Goetz into moving to a different studio. Once again the king sat behind a huge desk at the far end of a long room paneled in wood and once again painted in places a deep metallic jungle green mixed for him on order, the green his mother painted her fingernails, the green he had applied as well to his telephone, his sauna, his house, his limousines and his polo mallet. On the high wall behind his desk hung zebra skins and wild

animal heads and other trophies from his safaris in Africa, the jungle green and wood creating an atmosphere of wilderness subdued yet vulnerable to ambush, savagery and sudden death. None of the heads appeared to be an actress.

At the end of the long room, a bronze bust of Zanuck larger than life stood on a pedestal above his desk. Hardback chairs lined the walls as if for bishops in audience with a pope. His desk was massive in the style popular among short moguls and dictators--imitation Mussolini--designed with a platform for the chair behind it to make supplicants feel small. Zanuck himself stood less than five and a half feet tall. He had suffered indignities. He got rejected initially by the Los Angeles Athletic Club because members, judging him by his name, assumed incorrectly that he was Jewish. The great man sat reclined in a high-topped chair with his back to Easley, reading, his dome exposed under flimsy light hair. His head looked small below the mounted animal heads and his own bust.

Easley walked the length of the room and came to a stop beside the chair in front of the desk. He stood for awhile looking up at the back of Zanuck's head. Then his gaze strayed over to the doorway to the room where, as everyone knew, almost every afternoon at four, the mogul's choice of short-contract actresses on the lot performed in an intimate supporting role. Easley tried not to think of his first wife Fay, he thought of his rabbits when he slit their throats. Zanuck had snagged rabbit teeth and any reference to teeth could pitch him into a cursing rage.

Tired of waiting, Easley said, "Yes sir?"

Zanuck made no response for awhile, then spoke without turning around, with a raspy impatience.

"You have no ending!"

Easley opened his mouth but decided not to argue.

Zanuck swung around and peered down at him like a hanging judge, dapper in a gray pinstriped flannel suit displaying broad lapels and a pink carnation in a buttonhole, with a weak blond mustache and those protruding teeth.

"People are sick of war pictures!"

"Yes, Mr. Zanuck--"

"--Call me Darryl!"

He had fired people for correcting him.

"Well Darryl, if I may. It's just that... I just don't see this as just a war picture."

"Oh, you don't!"

Easley smiled in deference.

"It's about human nature and fear. It's about facing reality."

"Have you ever been in combat?" Zanuck shouted.

"No sir."

"Well I have! That's reality and I faced it! Sit down."

"Yes sir."

Zanuck stood up clenching a cigar stub in his teeth. He came around the desk armed with his green polo mallet sawed off to a length suitable for knocking heads. He looked displeased.

"There's too many damn homecoming pictures!"

"None like this one."

"Don't you have any tit stuff?"

Easley gathered himself.

"You told us you don't want to make any more crap."

"Betty Grable isn't crap!" he yelled.

"No, I didn't mean--"

"--What the hell are you saying!" He swung his mallet into the air as if lining up a shot and Easley turned awkwardly in the chair so he would know when to duck. "I don't make crap! I make entertainment for the thinking man! Pictures with significance! Common problems, dullenemas and condrooms. Don't you ever think about that smooth round ass of Betty's? That's the most popular ass in the whole damn world! What are you, a pansy? Don't lie to me now, you son of a bitch!"

"Sure I have! Betty is swell!"

"But instead of filling the big screen with her beautiful smooth white ass, you want to show people a black monster! What's the matter with you, Easley? Jesus, I'm sick already!"

He swung the mallet.

"We won't show his face," Easley ducked. "We'll shoot past the back of his head and get the reactions of people."

"I know how they'll react! They'll vomit in the aisles! In the South they'll ban the picture!" He spun around and aimed the mallet as if about to throw it at him like a tomahawk. "You aren't making fun of those Negroes now, are you?"

"Carlton Moss doesn't think so. I don't want any prejudice."

"Everybody has prejudices."

"Mr. Zanuck-- Darryl, I brought this to you because you're the only one who has the guts to make it."

"People are going to laugh!" he shouted.

"Humor makes them human, it brings them to life."

"I know what humor does, Goddamn it!"

He circled around and Eisley had to turn sideways to watch him, preparing to dive out of the chair.

"Do you believe in this picture?"

"Yes sir, I sure do."

"Well that's not good enough." He abruptly turned his back. "I don't think you have a fire in your belly!"

"Oh, yes sir, I do! I sure do. I have to do this! My brother was a gunner on the Yorktown. At Midway he got his face blown off! That's how much I believe in this picture!"

Zanuck came toward him, twirling the mallet.

He bent so close that Eisley smelled his appetites, his stale cigar stub and cologne and the fetid breath through his nostril hairs, an imposing toothy face that could savage the dignity of a person like a tyrannosaur ripping a bite, with eyes that looked demonic in their fierce intensity, assessing the young director from under his foxy eyebrows.

Months later, after their screenplay had been revised again by studio writers, Zanuck began presiding over story conferences that went on without a break for hours, sometimes past midnight. He paced up and down his long green office, chewing a cigar and knocking ideas around with his mallet. Reginald Strutz always attended as producer along with other executives, a stenographer and writers Wardell Cornfeld and Kitty LaScala. Fox had the most centralized production system of any studio. Zanuck went over almost every detail in the script, making changes, demanding suggestions, arguing and pounding the mallet into his palm. He liked the currency of this story, but it needed an ending. At one point he paced through the doorway behind his desk and disappeared, leaving everyone to wait. Through a vigorous pouring sound, very prolonged, they looked aside at each other with bemused expressions. Then a toilet flushed. Zanuck returned with the mallet under one arm, zipping up his pants and resuming his commentary as if he had not left the room.

Eisley spoke up trying to save as much as he could of the writing by Carlton Moss, but the dialogue Moss added on the degraded living conditions of Negroes got cut. Zanuck purged anything he considered sentimentality. When Eisley broke the news to her, Sarah hated Zanuck's ending, though she supposed it would be popular. Moss disapproved of the changes to his version so much that he did not want his name on the picture.

"I'm not sure I do either," Sarah told Ryan.

"A screen credit would get you established, Sarah."

"His ending is awful!"

Zanuck went into production.

Eisley began shooting on sound stages, then he moved to a fake town and finally into the forest on the Fox backlots. Meanwhile, the second unit director shot footage of tank maneuvers at Fort Hood, Texas. Most of the battle scenes were shot on the studio ranch in the hills above Malibu, where a French village and a German town had been constructed. Sarah pointed out that usually, everything in a movie is supposed to be taken at face value, from heavies and heroes to false fronts, reinforcing a superficial view of life. Eisley had to admit that the looks of his stars were the same as their characters. Gregory Peck played the doctor with his reliable modest air, his straight nose and squared jaw, a face suitable for carving into a mountain yet capable of sensitive expressions, deepened by his gentle euphonious voice. Dorothy McGuire had the face and manner of an ideal wife and mother at the time, steadfast and sweet, the angel in the house yet human, vulnerable to the townspeople. The soft-spoken Woody Strode gave the lead role of Henry Johnson a dignity that set the tone of the picture, a former wide end for the UCLA football team with the build of a black god and a face expressing an almost unearthly purity of spirit.

The opening boom shot in black and white photography of big old houses in a town with maples shading the main street closed in on Henry Johnson in overalls, waxing the doctor's shiny new black car in the driveway of his mansion. As he rubs and polishes, Henry chats with the doctor's young son Jimmy, who

looks up to him. Jimmy peers down at his own white face reflected in the blackness. To evoke an atmosphere of ordinary small town life, slow and conventional, Eisley used standard setups, omitted closeups, did long takes, avoided moving the camera and shot at eye level, usually from a middle distance.

Henry Johnson strolls down the main street in his best clothes, his trousers checkered and his straw hat cocked at a jaunty angle. Cut to an interior shot from the perspective of white men in the barbershop looking out through the window as Henry passes, joking about his clothes and generalizing about his race. Henry tips his hat to the men and exchanges greetings with a friendly deference. At the doctor's house, he uses the knocker on the front door. Gregory Peck invites him inside. Henry pulls off his cap and tells the doctor that he will not be able to work for him anymore for awhile. He has enlisted in the Army.

The shoot only took Eisley six weeks and he looked forward to seeing the parts all edited together. Zanuck sat down in the front row of his projection room with Eisley beside him. A dozen executives, including one of Zanuck's polo pals and his ski coach, hired as producers, sat close behind the boss to echo his reactions to the rough cut. Having recently produced a documentary on tank warfare, Zanuck got excited by the tank sequences. He considered himself an expert on tanks, whereas Eisley had merely gone out to the studio ranch and ridden around in one tank over hill and dale until he got sick.

Customarily in war movies, extras died promptly, likeable supporting characters often got death speeches, and stars could not die. Zanuck wanted no death speeches. He said he wanted to be brutally realistic and true to the facts. Nevertheless, they showed no mangled children, the profanity of General Patton had to be edited, Woody Strode was too tall to be a tanker, the second unit footage gave the impression that tanks move a lot faster than they actually can in battle, the film did not convey well enough how cramped and hot and blind men are in a tank, and the horrible wounds that tankers suffer when shelled were not shown in deference to the industry censor and because Zanuck did not want to induce vomiting in the aisles. Fox newsreel footage of concentration camp horrors already had been released to the public, but here they included no skeletal prisoners in rags staring through the wire, no slave laborers tossing white naked bodies onto piles of loose bones in bags of skin with hair and faces that sometimes looked still alive, no bulldozers pushing corpses with floppy limbs and heads into long mass graves, not even a few bone fragments in an oven--no evidence of the depth, extent and smell of human depravity. After all, a movie had to be appealing. Otherwise, however, the story was true. The tank sequences documented the battle reports that Sarah read in the UCLA library. They used the names of the actual soldiers, except that Sergeant Warren G. H. Crecy, a short, quiet young man with a meek looking face who never used a swear word stronger than *damn*, was called Henry Johnson.

Wearing stars on his helmet and pearl-handled pistols on his hips, a flamboyant star among generals, George S. Patton, Jr. surveys dead soldiers and burned tanks on a battlefield in Italy, lamenting to his executive officer as he shakes his head. Closeup of Patton writing a letter to his wife, his words readable in lamplight. He needs reinforcements, but "a colored soldier cannot think fast enough to fight in armor." Cut to a troubled Patton at his headquarters soon afterward, ordering his executive officer to write a letter asking for an all-Negro tank battalion. Closeup of Patton standing on a hill at Fort Hood, Texas, looking through field binoculars at maneuvers by the 761st Tank Battalion, made up of Negro enlisted men and mostly white officers, known as the Black Panthers. His binoculars focus on young Sergeant Henry Johnson commanding a medium tank. Closeup of Johnson's goggled face, visible through the dust raised by over a hundred tanks rolling in formation.

In a fast-paced montage without dialogue, Henry and the other Negro tankers are shown living in tents, with white soldiers in the background living in wooden barracks. One of the few black officers in the battalion, a lieutenant named Jackie Robinson, is playing catch with a baseball. Henry and his buddies, sergeants Ruben Rivers and Big Sam Turley, take showers, put on pressed uniforms and walk past the Post Exchange where they are not allowed to shop with the white soldiers. Ruben is a confident looking kid with a modest build, light cocoa skin, a strong chin and sensitive lips. Big Sam is stocky and very black, with sad observant eyes. They catch a bus headed into town, taking seats in the back. Jackie Robinson gets on the bus and sits down in the front. When ordered by the driver, Robinson refuses to move to the back. A white military policeman steps aboard the bus. He takes Robinson away. Arriving in town, the three sergeants are ordered off by the driver before the bus reaches the station, where they are not permitted. Then they are refused service by three restaurants in descending order of quality.

The Black Panthers land in France eager for combat, but without tanks, and they seem to be forgotten. They are sent to work in the fields, digging up potatoes. Finally, their tanks arrive. Then their commanding officer comes in a jeep, wearing pearl-handled pistols and stars. He stands up in the jeep like a monument ten feet tall and sets his fists on his hips above the pistols. With the three sergeants standing in the front row

of the assembled tankers, General Patton welcomes them to the Third Army, speaking in a loud aggressive voice.

“Men, you’re the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army! I would never have asked for you if you weren’t good. I have nothing but the best in my Army. I don’t care what color you are as long as you go up there and kill those darn Krauts! Everyone has their eyes on you. Everyone is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is watching you. Don’t let them down!”

Dissolve to the mist of next morning, cold and wet.

Henry Johnson is rolling along a road in his ghostly tank as one of a column supporting the 26th Infantry Division, hearing the booms and tumult of battles raging ahead. General Patton rides past in his jeep along the column with a fierce exalted face under his helmet, wearing no raincoat, mean as hell, his black driver and his aides in the back allowed no raincoats either. At a crossroads where they stop and gather, Patton climbs up onto a tank in the rain. He points ahead toward the enemy, the Eleventh Panzer Division, legendary elite veterans waiting for them. He exhorts the Black Panthers, shaking his fist! His cursing is overwhelmed by shellfire in the forest!

They mount their tanks.

With his driver, his gunner and his loader seated under him, Henry Johnson wipes rain off his goggles and pulls them down in place. They lurch forward, clanking along the road past a column of infantry. The booms and explosive din of battle intensify ahead. They roll through a town called Moyenvic with crumbling walls, buildings half collapsed and roofs with shell holes. On the way to Vic-sur-Seille their progress is stalled at a roadblock defended by machine gun and mortar fire. They look out for enemy tanks and anti-tank guns. They are going to get hit. Henry is third in line in Able Company. Ruben Rivers climbs out of the lead tank in a hurry, exposing himself to fire. Tracer bullets arc toward them from the town and shells burst around them! Henry fires his big .50 caliber machine gun at the source of the tracers to cover for Ruben. Big Sam in the second tank is firing too. They fire their cannons, blasting away part of a house and exposing a tank that backs up quickly! Ruben attaches a cable to the obstacle across the road and drags it aside with his tank.

The column is moving again.

Late the next day in freezing rain and snow, Ruben and Henry are further back in the line when their advance on Morville runs into an anti-tank ditch. Tanks and artillery of the Eleventh Panzer Division have been waiting for them here, concealed among trees and behind the walls and snowy rubble of the town. They open up on the Panthers. Their shells come blasting into the American tanks approaching them along the road, burning the unseen crews alive inside! One by one they are knocking out tanks, walking up the line. Sam Turley’s tank explodes into flames! He scrambles out the hatch! The men who escape their burning tanks jump into the ditch, the freezing water, splashing and ducking from hot shell fragments raining down around them!

German artillery is locating the survivors. Sam quickly organizes them into a combat team and they crawl through the water to flank a machine gun. The Germans pick up and move their gun to a pile of rubble where they open up as soon as Sam shows his head above the ditch. Henry and Ruben pour intense fire onto the rubble and use their cannons but Sam and his men are pinned down from several different positions, with German infantry moving up toward them to toss grenades. Artillery shells are exploding all along the ditch! Sam waves the men back to the road. They splash and flounder back under heavy fire. They clamber up the ditch onto the road and run ducking. Sam stands up in full view, holding a machine gun with an ammo belt around his neck. He covers their backs. He plants his feet and sprays enemy positions, firing and firing as the barrel turns hot, firing and firing until he flinches and jerks as he is ripped through the middle by return fire, still firing as he falls to his knees and, still firing, crumples forward onto his face. The Panthers pull back to cover for now. As the firing ends, light snow begins to fall. It is quiet. The snow falls slowly at first, then heavily, turning Sam into a white mound.

In the morning, the engineers bridge the ditch. Then the infantry moves ahead through the snow with tanks in support. Some riflemen get pinned down and Henry roars ahead to their aid. He rolls his tank over Nazis in a machine gun hole, yelling out the name Big Sam! He blows out another nest with his cannon and is firing his machine gun at running Germans when his tank gets blown into a raging furnace!

He rolls out onto the ground.

In the battles that follow, with a new tank Henry destroys one German machine gun nest and anti-tank position after another, protecting his infantry with fusillades that rout the Krauts from concealment, killing more of the enemy than anyone in the battalion, usually without even using his cannon, firing his big .50 caliber machine gun with such quickness and accuracy from his elevated perspective that enemy machine

gunners intimidated by the looming mass and cannon of his tank are caught scrambling to reposition themselves.

Henry mows them down on the run.

Atop the lead tank, Ruben Rivers points the battalion in shootouts through the French towns of Obreck, Dedeline and Château Voue. Then he gets a call on his radio.

“Don’t go into Château Voue, Sergeant!” his white lieutenant orders him. “It’s too hot in there!”

“I’m sorry, sir. I’m already through that town.”

Ruben takes turns at the point with his white captain, David J. Williams II. He leads an assault at dawn, twelve tanks in a wedge. They come under attack by German dive bombers and lose four tanks. Ruben rolls on, leaving a battlefield strewn with blasted hulks, the moaning wounded and smells of the dead. At dusk, in the deathly stillness after battle, Henry Johnson is found by his driver still clutching the grip of his machine gun, covered with snow. The driver calls the loader, who helps him pry Henry away from the gun.

The column rolls on toward Guebling.

They rumble out of the snow and are roaring through mud and driving sleet when Ruben is blown out of his turret by a mine that tears off the right track and rolls his tank off the road! He is lying behind the tank, clutching one leg. His wound is not shown of course, not the hole where part of his knee had been, nor the broken leg bone protruding through his pants. The medics cleanse and dress the injury, splinting his leg. One says that he must be evacuated immediately, but Ruben refuses to be injected with morphine, he insists on staying alert. Captain Williams tells him to lie still, he will mark him with a Red Cross flag. Ruben struggles up to one foot and pushes past the Captain. Hopping and dragging his leg, he takes command of another tank.

Artillery shells come screaming in and fall around them and Captain Williams orders the men to disperse and take cover! The battalion engineers spend the day under heavy continuous fire building a bridge across the river that will permit the column to proceed into Guebling. The Germans are desperate to stop the construction but the Panthers hold them off with their tank cannons and the bridge is completed. Ruben leads them across. Coming around a curve, he engages an enemy tank along the road. He cripples it with one cannon shot. Then he hits another tank behind a wall. Two more tanks back away from a hillcrest and swing around to withdraw behind some trees with Ruben in pursuit.

The next morning a medic examines him. Dark red streaks are stretching up his leg from his wounded knee.

“No morphine,” he insists.

“Man, if you aren’t evacuated right now,” the medic tells him, “you’re going to lose your leg!”

Ruben leads the advance.

On the fourth day since his wounding, repeatedly having to put his weight on his broken leg, Ruben leads Able Company in an attack on the village of Bougaltruff. They come under heavy artillery, tank and machine gun fire. The gloomy sky lights up with tracer bullets arcing toward them!

Captain Williams peers through his field binoculars.

He spots a German tank hidden in the rubble about a hundred and fifty yards away, with more tanks behind it. His own five tanks are caught in the open. They are sitting ducks. Ruben locates German anti-tank guns and directs a barrage on them so intense that the Captain and the other Panthers are able to escape to cover. He keeps firing his machine gun, firing and firing until several tracers are seen arcing into his turret, registering him precisely as a target for high explosive shells. The first shot penetrates his tank and the fragments ricocheting inside the steel walls rip his crew to pieces and splatter his brains! A second shot blows through what is left of his head! This is not shown in the movie of course. Instead, over a pullback shot of Ruben’s burning tank, the deep inspirational voice of Paul Robeson begins to narrate, the bass baritone identified with *Ole Man River* giving to the words Black Panther battalion a resonance appropriate to an avenging scourge commanded by Almighty God!

The column rolls on, now with Henry Johnson atop the lead tank. Over shots of Henry engaged in battles, Robeson tells of the Panthers in the counter-offensive that followed the Battle of the Bulge, how at Tillet, Belgium, fighting continuously for two days against German panzer and infantry units, they forced the enemy to retreat, how they prevented the resupply of German forces encircling American troops at Bastogne, how they participated in assaults that breached the Siegfried Line, how they engaged elements of fourteen German divisions, liberated several concentration camps, helped take more than thirty towns and inflicted 130,000 enemy casualties while themselves losing over seventy tanks and nearly half their men.

With a calm determined face, Henry Johnson is approaching a blockade of tank obstacles across a street, big concrete pyramids, when his tank is hit by a white phosphorous shell that whites him out! The screen

fades into whiteness as Robeson concludes like a minister at the crescendo of a sermon accompanied by a gospel choir in the throes of a spiritual, declaring that the Black Panthers are among the first American troops to reach the united front at Steyr, Austria, where they cross over the river and join forces with the Soviet Army.

Something vague appears in the whiteness.

Like a tiny figure in a snowstorm, it is slowly defined at the middle of the screen, enlarging and darkening in the whiteness, thawing without melting. Gradually it is revealed to be a black soldier in uniform, shown from behind, a dignified and weary man carrying a suitcase along the road into the town where the movie began. Along the main street, an elderly white lady is horrified by the sight of him! She drops her handbag with a shriek and flees groping through the nearest door! Jimmy the doctor's son comes riding along on a bicycle toward the soldier until he gets a close look, then he wobbles and falls off. The soldier moves to help him get up, but Jimmy runs away. In the barbershop, the men are so alarmed that the barber calls the police.

Shown from behind, the soldier rings the doorbell of the doctor's house, on the street lined with maples. Dorothy McGuire opens the door. She blanches at the sight and faints to the floor. Gregory Peck comes rushing to her aid!

"It's me, Dr. Trescott. Henry Johnson."

"Henry? Oh my--!"

His wife gasps in his arms. He helps her get to her feet and she is trying to breathe, trying to smile.

"I've come back to my job, Dr. Trescott," Henry pulls off his service cap. "If you'll have me."

"Why," Gregory Peck is overwhelmed by the shock and blinks uncertainly, trying to find words. "Why yes, of course! Of course! We've missed you, Henry. Haven't we, dear."

"Oh. Oh yes! Yes, Henry."

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Trescott."

"I'm glad you made it, Henry," says the doctor.

Henry moves back into his old room over the garage.

He eats in the kitchen with the Negro cook and maid, Hattie McDaniel wearing a handkerchief around her head. She acts unimpressed by his face, or lack of one. The next morning he is out on the driveway in overalls washing the doctor's shiny black car, shocking people who pass. Mrs. Trescott watches through a window in dismay. When they have Judge Hagenthorpe over for dinner, from his house opposite theirs, Henry slips into the kitchen and overhears.

"No one wants to advance such ideas," the judge is saying. The meal is over and only two remain at the table. "But somehow I think that poor fellow would be better off dead."

The doctor shakes his head.

"Who knows?"

The judge reaches for his black cane with the ivory handle leaning close at hand. "Perhaps we may not talk with propriety of this kind of action, but I am induced to say that you are performing a questionable charity in caring for this Negro." He speaks with professional detachment. "As nearly as I can understand, he will hereafter be a monster, a perfect monster, and probably with an affected brain."

"Don't think I don't appreciate what you say, Judge. But--"

"--Well, it is hard for a man to know what to do."

"It is, yes."

"Look here, Trescott. I don't want you to think--"

"--No, certainly not."

"It was only that I thought-- Well, I thought that I might be able to suggest that--perhaps--your charity is a little dubious."

"Well, what would you do?" the doctor is perturbed. He takes a deep breath. "Would you kill him?"

"Trescott, you fool!" chides the old judge.

"Why man, he risked his life for us!"

Early the next day, standing in the driveway beside his polished black car, Dr. Trescott calls Henry down from his room over the garage. The veteran is shown from behind, wearing a clean pair of carpenter's overalls.

"Henry," says the doctor with a face that looks ashamed. "I've got you a room with Alec Jones. A private room. You'll have everything you want to eat and a good place to sleep. I hope you get along there all right. I'll pay all your expenses and come to see you as often as I can."

Henry responds with a weary laugh.

"Your car looks good all polished, don't it, Doc."

"I'm taking you to stay with Alec Jones, Henry, and I--"

--The dark man chuckles.

"No suh, massah Trescott, suh. Alec Jones don't have no big Packard to wash and polish. No suh. He sure don't."

"Get your bag, Henry."

"Sure, Doc."

Outside of town, the doctor knocks at a shack.

Alec Jones opens his door aghast and trembling, with his hair frizzed out to the sides like a thorn bush. His wife shrieks and his six children try to hide behind the stove.

Henry disappears.

Thereafter, he is sighted now and then around town, avoiding contact like a runaway slave, occasionally terrifying people who happen upon him in a dark alley or a bush. At a children's birthday party, when a little girl is frightened by an appearance at the window, scared little boys feel compelled to venture out against the monster. Then the father of the frightened child accuses Dr. Trescott of negligence. Many hold the doctor responsible for allowing the creature to roam the streets at large. He begins to lose patients. The men in the barbershop divide between some who agree with the doctor and others who lament that the darn thing had been allowed to live in the first place.

On a porch along Watermelon Alley, among the paralytic shacks of the Negro community, the Farraguts are chatting and calling to neighbors on other porches. The fat Mrs. Farragut sits in the squeaky old porch swing, fanning herself and talking to her younger daughter Bella, the lean-faced beauty sitting on the bottom step, played by Lena Horne. Her little boy is perched on a railing. Her older daughter is Butterfly McQueen, a plump girl with a very high childlike voice, sitting in sweet dominion on the top step. The monster suddenly appears before them, wearing a straw hat and checkered pants! With a sweep of his hat, he makes a low bow. Then he straightens and claps the straw hat on his head at a jaunty angle. At the sight of him, all are horrified! The boy loses his grip and falls off the porch out of sight, the fat Mrs. Farragut dives over the railing and the plump Butterfly runs shrieking into the house and through and out the back door and scales a high board fence!

Bella is crawling up the steps.

"Don't bother about me, Miss Farragut," says the monster politely. "No indeed. I just dropped by to ask if you're well this evening, Miss Farragut."

The girl casts a terrified glance behind her, trying to crawl up the steps backwards. She reaches the top and scrambles around into the house. The monster pulls off his hat and follows her inside with a fashionable amble. Bella cowers in a corner of the room as the creature sits down in a chair and crosses his legs with the hat on his knee like an elegant gentleman.

"Please don't bother yourself so, Miss Farragut. I just dropped in to ask if you won't do me the proud honor of accepting my humble invitation to the church dance, Miss Farragut."

Sobbing wretchedly, Bella tries to crawl away. The monster stands up and blocks her path. Holding his hat, he looks down on her, "I'm asking if you would do me the proud honor of your company on that occasion, Miss Farragut."

With a last outburst of despair, shuddering and wailing, poor Bella collapses face down on the floor.

"Is that a yes, Miss Farragut?"

Angry voices are approaching outside.

The rejected suitor is shown running away through the twilight, weaving and ducking hurled rocks. On the main street, he is chased by a white crowd that does not want to get too close, until the police chief intervenes and puts the offender in jail.

Dr. Trescott comes to obtain his release.

"You know how a crowd gets," the chief tells him, shaking his head. "It's like--it can get just like--"

--Yes, I know."

After this, the creature hides under rubbish in the town dump, suspected of petty crimes and demonic possession. Some call him the Devil. Hattie McDaniel with the handkerchief around her head brings him meals in a basket. Sometimes in the evenings he sits on a crate overlooking the dump, crooning and moaning to himself, while Jimmy and other boys dare each other to run up and touch him on the back. One evening Grace Trescott is discovered by her husband the doctor huddled in an armchair crying, her tea table set for twelve, snubbed by all but one of her invited lady guests. Then Judge Hagenthorpe leads a

delegation of citizens who call upon Dr. Trescott. They urge him not to kill his practice and to dispose of the public nuisance one way or another.

Dr. Trescott finds Henry at the dump, sitting on his crate. He pulls up an empty box, sits down and tries to find words. Henry is wearing a black veil that covers his face. The doctor persuades him to undergo an operation. It will be risky. He has never attempted anything so difficult nor of this magnitude before.

Fade to whiteness.

This time two spots emerge from the white, gradually coming into focus as with returning vision, two eyes in the whiteness of bandages. Slowly, carefully, the doctor unwraps the bandages until a dark brown face is revealed. It is the face of Henry Johnson restored. Voices congratulate him! He looks exactly like Woody Strode. He is a handsome man, with prominent cheekbones and introspective eyes that appear to have seen everything, white around the dark pupils yet calm, expressing powerful feelings under control. In closeup, his face is wise and sad. Dr. Trescott, delighted by the operation, gives the patient a hand mirror. Henry gazes at himself for a long moment without reaction. Then a faint ironic smile begins to appear, as slowly as a face emerging from a snowstorm.

In the last story conference, Easley persuaded Zanuck to drop his idea of a welcoming parade for the hero. They decided to end instead with Henry shown from the front, walking out of town along the main street carrying his suitcase, wearing plain clothes and a flat old touring cap. Afterward, Easley tried to explain to Sarah that he could not give her credit for the ending or Zanuck never would have bought it.

“You mean I get no credit at all?”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. The studio writers got priority.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

He tried to put the best face on it he could.

“I didn’t think they’d exclude you entirely. I guess you’ll have to get established first.”

“Well how do I do that?”

Henry Johnson walks out of town.

Looking out from the barbershop, the white men exchange greetings with him as he passes. Henry touches his cap without deference. After he has moved on, the men express admiration for the doctor’s achievement in making him look just like he did before. At the corner, Henry boards a bus. The camera watches him through a window. He sits down in the front. The white bus driver gets up wearily and points to the back, shaking his finger. Henry remains seated. Losing patience, the driver barges off the bus to the sidewalk and looks around for a cop.

Finally he throws up his hands. He turns around and gets back on board and into his seat. He shuts the door. The bus pulls away and rolls out of town as the camera, watching as if with omniscient detachment, pulls back into the brightening sky.

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Chapter 7
Follywood (2005)