

Max's Traveling Circus

By

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BLACK SCREEN

A loud BOOM!

FADE IN

EXT. SKY - DAY

From a far, a small black speck rises diagonally toward us.

MAN (O.S.)
What is that?

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - ENTRANCE - DAY

A large crowd of PEOPLE track this object move. They squint, trying to identify it.

WOMAN
Did it...twirl?

They still keep their attention on it till --

MAN
Move!

As the man moves, the other PEOPLE in his area follow suit.

SMILEY (30s, a clown) lands and rolls into a one legged kneeling position.

With a big, pearly smile, he stands. Average height. Wears a star speckled jumpsuit too big for him.

From behind, MAX (40s, the ringmaster) comes and throws an arm around Smiley. Medium length dark hair. Smokes a cigarette through a long black filter.

MAX
Welcome. The name's Max.

Max hugs Smiley close. Smiley grimaces.

MAX
My good buddy Smiley.

Forcing a smile, Smiley waves.

MAX

There's lots of fun in store for
you.

Max releases Smiley and walks back. Smiley, regaining his natural smile, follows Max.

On the left, a water shooter game.

On the right, a cotton candy stand.

MAX

Never know what to expect.

A FIREBALL arises from the left side!

The FLAME BREATHER (50s, a un-groomed, potbellied, hairy chested man) wears a collar around his neck that keeps him chained to a pole.

Smiley frowns and waves a hand in front of his face.

Max continues walking. Smiley follows.

On the right, a bean tossing game.

On the left, a hot dog stand.

MAX

Anything could pop out.

Smiley ducks to the ground. Max catches a knife coming from the right side!

Showing the blade, Max throws it back to the sender.

Already juggling five knives, the BLACK JUGGLER (30s, muscular), catches the knife and adds it to his juggling. He also wears a collar that chains him to a pole.

Max walks. Smiley trails behind.

MAX

But that's the least of your
worries.

Max stops in front of a large red and white stripe tent. Smiley stops a few feet behind.

Impassiveness slowly dominates Smiley's cheerfulness.

Smiley performs a half back flip to a hand stand. Next, he removes one his left hand.

With his right hand, he removes his thumb, index finger, third finger and pinky finger.

He performs a push up with his middle finger before returning back on his feet.

Max throws an arm around Smiley whose slowly regaining his cheerfulness back.

MAX

Have fun.

Max puffs from his cigarette.

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - PATH - LATER

BEN (8) AND JULIE (9) walk.

BEN

When the clown came flying right front of us...

JULIE

That guy's crazy.

BEN

It was awesome. Or when that clown balanced himself on his middle finger. How do you think they did that dad?

DANIEL and ELENORE (both 30s) walk behind the kids.

DANIEL

Beats me.

BEN

You think we could ask?

ELENORE

They won't tell us. It's a secret.

JULIE

Can we ride the carousel?

BEN

That's girly.

JULIE

Duh.

BEN

Shut up.

ELENORE

What did I tell you about saying that?

Julie sticks her tongue out at Ben.

JULIE

Can we?

BEN

No mom.

ELENORE

We're going.

BEN

I don't want too.

DANIEL

What about you two girls go to the carousel and we boys go do something we like?

ELENORE

We're not separating.

DANIEL

You can call us.

ELENORE

This meet was upon my terms, Daniel. I say what we do and don't do. And you're not taking one of my kids.

DANIEL

They're my too Elenore.

ELENORE

Was, until the courts decide otherwise.

DANIEL

Being father doesn't have a expiration date.

ELENORE

They gave me custody over the children for a reason.

DANIEL
That doesn't...

BEN (O.S.)
A fun house! Can we go?!

JULIE (O.S.)
Please!

ELENORE
Let's go.

EXT. "THE DARK" FUN HOUSE - DAY

ANGELA (20) sits at the ticket booth, handling the transactions. She wears a neck collar that chains her to a pole.

There are three doors to enter the fun house.

She sends one FAMILY to door number one; she sends another FAMILY to door number two; she stops a YOUNG COUPLE from entering too early.

BOYFRIEND
What's wrong with door three?

ANGELA
Under construction. It won't take that long to enter. Two dollars please.

The boyfriend takes out his wallet.

GIRLFRIEND
I have it.

She easily takes out the two dollars.

BOYFRIEND
I'll pay you back later.

She hands it to Angela. Their fingers briefly touch. Taking it, Angela gives them their tickets.

ANGELA
(to girlfriend)
Watch your step.

Angela sends the couple through door number one.

As they walk, the girlfriend trips. Luckily, the boyfriend grabs her before she falls.

BOYFRIEND

You ok?

GIRLFRIEND

Yeah.

Looking down, she sees one of her shoes is untied. She ties it.

Back at the ticket booth, Daniel, Elenore, Ben and Julie move up.

ANGELA

4 dollars.

ELENORE

4 dollars?

ANGELA

A dollar for each person.

Daniel takes his wallet out.

BEN

Why do you wear a collar and chain?

ELENORE

Ben.

ANGELA

It's ok. It's a prop.

Daniel takes the four dollars out.

JULIE

(to Angela)

Does it bother?

ANGELA

No.

Daniel hands the four dollars to Angela. Through their exchange, their fingers briefly touch.

Angela shuts her eyes and shudders. The four dollars drop.

DANIEL

Are you alright?

Angela nods.

Ben and Julie pick up the four dollars.

Elenore observes Angela with suspicion.

ANGELA

Thank you.

Ben and Julie extend the four dollars to Angela. Looking at the family before her, she hesitates in taking it.

DANIEL

You sure you're ok?

Angela looks around. People walk about but no sign of any circus employees.

ANGELA

Get out of here.

DANIEL

Excuse me?

ANGELA

Leave. Go. This is place is bad.

ELENORE

Let's go.

Without a moment's hesitation, Elenore grabs Ben's and Julie's arms and walks off.

DANIEL

Elle! Elle.

Spying from a distance, Angela slowly regains composure.

The spy turns out to be Smiley watching from the crowd of people.

An OLDER MALE TEEN bumps into Smiley hard. Quick on his feet, Smiley avoids falling.

OLDER MALE TEEN

Watch where you're standing freak.

Smiley sees that the teen is not alone. He is with three other MALE TEENS.

OLDER MALE TEEN

I think you owe me an apology?

Smiley glares at him.

OLDER MALE TEEN

Are you deaf?

Smiley grins and raises a finger.

Positioning himself, he performs a back flip. Smiley's shoes connect with the teen's chin, knocking him out.

Smiley back flips away in a straight path, amazingly avoiding hitting anybody else.

Daniel chases after Elenore.

DANIEL
Elle!

Smiley passes Daniel.

DANIEL
(to Elenore)
Watch out!

Too late. SCREAMS! Daniel rushes over.

EXT. BALLOON DART GAME

Smiley, Elenore, Ben and Julie lie on the ground.

Daniel helps Ben, Elenore, and Julie stand.

Smiley simply kicks up to stand.

ELENORE
(to Smiley)
What's your problem?! You didn't see me walking with my kids?!

MAX (O.S.)
What happened, miss?

Max walks over and stands in between Elenore and Smiley.

ELENORE
He knocked into me and my kids.

Max turns to Smiley. Smiley communicates in sign language.

MAX
He accidentally back flipped into you. He apologizes for it.

Smiley retrieves Elenore's purse off the floor and returns it back to her.

She takes it.

ELENORE

Thanks.
(to Ben and Julie)
Let's go.

As they walk off --

MAX (O.S.)

Hold on, miss.

Elenore halts and turns.

Smiley hand signs.

MAX

To show his sincerity, he wants to
offer you tickets to "the Dark" fun
house.

Smiley extends his hand which holds four tickets. Number 3
is printed on them.

ELENORE

No thanks.

Elenore walks away with her children. Daniel trails behind.

Max and Smiley walk away.

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - PATH - DAY

Smiley hand signs.

MAX

I know.

Max looks to his right.

Following his gaze, Smiley sees Angela, sitting at the
ticket booth, handling a transaction with a couple.

Smiley looks back at Max.

MAX

Relieve Angela. Shut down the fun
house. Round up the guys. And let's
wait.

The two separate.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Cars are parked on the dirt side of the road. Elenore, Ben, Julie and Daniel pass many of them.

ELENORE
It's over.

DANIEL
What?

ELENORE
You got to spend time with your kids. I fulfilled my obligation.

DANIEL
C'mon Elle. The kids were having a great time.

BEN
Yeah.

ELENORE
How is getting injured by a clown fun?

JULIE
We're fine.

They stop at a sleek gray car.

ELENORE
Both of you be quiet.

Elenore rummages through her purse.

DANIEL
Did I tell the clown to back flip all the way and hit you?

ELENORE
You chose this weird place. Even the girl at the fun house told us to leave. You can stay but I'm taking my children and leaving. And there's nothing you can do about that.

Elenore pats her pants.

BEN
Can we go somewhere else with dad?

ELENORE

No. We are going home. We all had fun and that's it.

Elenore goes back to rummaging her purse.

JULIE

What's wrong?

Elenore stops searching.

ELENORE

(to Ben and Julie)

Do you remember where I put my keys?

DANIEL

It was in your purse. Can't find it? Don't you have a spare?

Elenore rubs her forehead.

DANIEL

Great.

The answer hits her automatically. She gives Daniel a dirty look.

ELENORE

Some circus you chose.

Grabbing Ben and Julie's arms, Elenore walks off towards the circus.

DANIEL

Where are...?!

He mumbles curses and runs after them.

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - PATH - DAY

Elenore, Ben, Julie, and Daniel walk.

BEN

We can walk along with you.

ELENORE

You'll go off.

JULIE

We promise that we won't.

ELENORE
Promise?

JULIE
Yes.

BEN
Yes.

Ben nods. Elenore releases them.

BEN
What...

Elenore walks.

Looking in the direction she's going, Ben spots Smiley standing among the crowd and jingling a set of keys.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Keep close.

Daniel, Ben, and Julie follow Elenore.

Seeing them approach, Smiley speed walks to the side.

Elenore, Daniel, Ben, and Julie give chase.

EXT. "THE DARK" FUN HOUSE - DAY

Door number three is open. Smiley enters.

The ticket booth is vacant. Daniel, Elenore, Julie, and Ben stop at the entrance.

ELENORE
(to Daniel)
Go in.

DANIEL
Excuse me?

ELENORE
Go in and get him.

Daniel stares at her.

ELENORE
You're a man. You can get him out.

INT. "THE DARK" FUN HOUSE - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

On a tv monitor, from a high angle, the four are present.

ELENORE
How do you expect to get the keys?

DANIEL
Chasing him in there is not going
to help.

ELENORE
Then?

DANIEL
How about talking to the owner of
this place?

Max watches them, smoking his cigarette through his black
filter.

ELENORE (O.S.)
Do you know where he's at?

DANIEL (O.S.)
Do you know how to ask?

Max stands and exits.

EXT. "THE DARK" FUN HOUSE - DAY

The four still stand around the entrance.

ELENORE
Go in and get him.

DANIEL
If you don't like being told what
to do, don't tell me what to do.

BEN
Stop!

JULIE
Everyone calm down.

MAX (O.S.)
Hi.

They turn to Max who stands to the side.

MAX
Is everything going well here?

ELENORE
The clown who knocked me over took
my keys.

MAX
How do you know it was him?

ELENORE
He showed us.

MAX
You don't say? Do you know where he
is?

ELENORE
In the fun house. And if someone
was manly enough to go in there and
get him.

DANIEL
Why don't you go in there, huh?

MAX
I don't think he's coming out. But
you two are entering.

Max turns to the four.

Slowly, their confused expressions turn to blank stares.

Max retrieves Elenore's purse, Daniel's wallet, Daniel's
keys, and Daniel's cellphone.

MAX
Thank you.

Daniel and Elenore enter into the fun house. The door shuts
behind them.

Max walks away with the kids.

INT. "THE DARK" FUN HOUSE - MAZE OF MIRRORS

Elenore BANGS on the door they came in.

ELENORE
Help!

Daniel looks forward.

ELENORE (O.S.)

Help!

DANIEL

Hey!

Catching her attention, Daniel points forward.

Smiley is reflected off every mirror.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Max, Ben, and Julie enter.

Ben and Julie sit at the sofa. Max kneels before them.

MAX

Now, I'm going to let you go if you follow the rules for these types of situations. Don't escape. Don't cry for help. Blah. Blah. Blah. I'm sure you know about that boring stuff. Do I have to mention what happens if you try to break them?

The door opens. He grins at a somber Angela.

MAX

Check them.

Angela kneels down and grabs the kids' hands. Max analyzes her face.

ANGELA

Clean.

Max waves her way. Angela leaves.

Max walks back and sits down in a revolving chair. Behind him is a desk covered with monitors and a lap top.

The blank stares dissipate from the kid's faces.

BEN

What did you...

Julie glances at Ben getting him to stop.

MAX

Let him complete the question. I promote dialogue.

BEN
What did you do to us?

MAX
Magic.

JULIE
What do you want?

MAX
I want your parents.

BEN
For?

MAX
To bring them together.

Max grins.

INT. MAZE OF MIRRORS

Elenore and Daniel stand stationary near the entrance.

MAX (O.S.)
You're kids are safe. Didn't want
them to mess up your examination.

Following the voice, they find speakers connected to the ceiling.

MAX
Both of you need to survive this
examination if you want to make it
out of here. If you don't, you can
take a wild guess. This
exam examines your cooperation.
Let's begin.

The mirrors move to the sides of the wall, clearing the room. Smiley is visible now in the center.

ELENORE
We're not doing it!

MAX
Do you want to see your children
again?

DANIEL
The clown doesn't seem that tough.

Smiley shakes his head and moves to the side.

From the back, the flame breather (chain-less and collar-less) walks up. He holds a alcohol bottle in his hand.

The flame breather takes a swig from his bottle but, doesn't swallow. He next pours the contents all over his body. Finally, lighting a match, he ignites himself on fire.

Daniel and Elenore are stunned by what they're seeing.

Getting into a fighting pose, the flame breather moves towards them.

Elenore moves back.

Daniel stays where he's at. The flame breather comes to him.

Daniel throws a punch. The flame breather blocks and touches his arm.

Daniel SCREAMS! The flame breather pummels Daniel with punches.

Daniel falls to the floor, but is not out.

The flame breather moves to Elenore. She cowers in the corner.

Daniel lunges at the flame breather. They fall to the floor, scuffling.

DANIEL

Elle!

The flame breather gets on top. Daniel's shirt is on fire!

BANG! A sneaker flies and connects with the side of the flame breather's head. The flame breather falls to the side.

Daniel rolls away.

The flame breather looks in the direction where the sneaker came from. BANG! A sneaker hits him in the face.

Shoe-less now, Elenore removes her shirt. Daniel rolls till the fire is out.

ELENORE

(to Daniel)

Listen, put your sneakers on your hands. I'm going to blind him.

Elenore removes Daniel's left sneaker.

The flame breather gets to one knee.

Elenore removes Daniel's right sneaker.

The flame breather stands.

Daniel places the sneakers on his hands.

Elenore throws the shirt over the flame breather's face.

ELENORE

Now!

Daniel does an uppercut, connecting with the flame breather's chin.

Daniel attacks the flame breather with punches. Elenore stays in the back.

MAX (O.S.)

Smiley.

Smiley walks over to Elenore.

She makes a run for it to Daniel but Smiley catches her.

A small scuffle ensues before Smiley takes control over her.

Daniel continues to pummel the fire breather.

Smiley moves Elenore in front of Daniel instantly getting his attention.

Smiley gestures Daniel to get off.

Daniel complies. The flame breather slowly gets up.

Smiley pushes Elenore to the flame breather. She receives a fireball to the face.

Smiley blocks Daniel's path and beckons him to fight.

Removing the sneakers, Daniel goes to work on Smiley. He punches Smiley's face and stomach, connecting with each shot. No effect.

Smiley's turn. One left hook. Daniel's knocked out.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Max grins.

MAX

Both of you are really quiet back there. Are you scheming against me?

He revolves around in his chair.

BEN

We have nothing to say.

MAX

Are those two your parents?

BEN

Yes.

MAX

Together or split up?

BEN

Split up.

MAX

Know why?

BEN

No.

Julie shakes her head "no".

MAX

So what were you all doing together today?

BEN

Today was supposed to be a family day.

MAX

Sorry.

BEN

Why can't you let us go? We promise that we won't tell.

MAX

I explained why.

BEN
It's not going to work.

MAX
We agree to disagree.

JULIE
I agree with my brother. They hate each other. You're causing them to separate more.

MAX
They going to learn how to.

BEN
Why us? Why not another family?

Max shrugs.

JULIE
Does it involve Angela?

ELENORE (O.S.)
Daniel!

MAX
To be continued.

Max turns back around.

BLACK

ELENORE
Daniel!

FADE IN

INT. ROOM

The lights turn on.

It's basketball court size room. Bare.

Elenore stands at one side. By the color and complexion of her face, Elenore suffers from second degree burns.

ELENORE
Daniel!

She wears the familiar collar we've come to recognize. However, the chain runs from the floor.

ELENORE

Daniel!

Up above, Daniel rests in a upright position in a tight cage.

ELENORE (O.S.)

Daniel!

DANIEL

Yeah!

ELENORE (O.S.)

Where are you?!

He looks around.

DANIEL

I'm in a cage...

Looks down. His eyes open wide as he sees --
how high he's up in the air!

Daniel quickly looks up.

ELENORE (O.S.)

Where are you?!

DANIEL

I'm hanging up in a cage!

ELENORE (O.S.)

What do you see?!

DANIEL

Hold...on!

ELENORE (O.S.)

What are you doing?!

Daniel closes his eyes,...

ELENORE (O.S.)

Are you trying to get out?!

BREATHES...

ELENORE (O.S.)

Daniel!

MUMBLES curses under his breath...

ELENORE (O.S.)
Talk to me?!

Opens his eyes and looks down.

Below, he sees Elenore chained to one side of the room.

At the other side of the room, he sees the black juggler (collar-less and chain-less) and Smiley. Smiley carries a bag.

ELENORE (O.S.)
Daniel!

DANIEL
The clown's with some black guy on
the other side!

ELENORE (O.S.)
What are they doing?!

Fishing through the bag, Smiley takes out a knife and hands it over to the black juggler.

MAX (O.S.)
This exam will examine your trust.
Watch closely.

The black juggler flips the knife in the air once, catches it, and throws it.

It brushes by Elenore's hair and hits the back wall.

ELENORE
What was that?!

LAUGHTER.

MAX (O.S.)
Begin!

Smiley takes out three knives and hands them over to the black juggler. The black juggler juggles.

Elenore moves back. But because of the chain, she doesn't reach the wall.

ELENORE
Daniel!

Up above in the cage, Daniel scowls.

ELENORE (O.S.)
Tell me what it was!

DANIEL
It's a knife!

Down below, Elenore freezes.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Calm down! We're going to get
through this! You need to listen to
me!

The black juggler is up to six knives.

Elenore sits down. Her head bent down, she WHIMPERS.

DANIEL (O.S.)
No! Get up! We're going to get out
of here!

The black juggler is up to seven knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Think of our children!

Elenore's WHIMPERS taper off.

DANIEL (O.S.)
We have two common goals here.

The black juggler juggles eight knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
The first one is get our children
out of here.

Nine knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Second, to kill that son of a bitch
whose doing this to us!

Ten knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
We can do this!

Eleven knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Our relationship is proof on how
much shit we can take.

Twelve knives.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Now...!

The black juggler throws a knife.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Left!

She complies.

The knife zooms past her hitting the back wall.

No reaction from the black juggler who continues to juggle.

Smiley, on the other hand, goes down on both knees. Bringing his forefinger and thumb close, he makes the face expression "so close".

Elenore stands.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Good!

ELENORE
I'm going to cut that fucker's
balls off!

DANIEL (O.S.)
You do that! Get ready!

MONTAGE - ELENORE DODGES THE THROWING KNIVES

She moves left,...

Right,...

Remains still,...

Dunks,....

END OF MONTAGE

The black juggler juggles four knives.

Elenore stands in a defensive basketball stance.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Almost there!

The black juggler throws two knives up. Catching two in his hand, he throws these together.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Still!

Elenore complies. The two knives thrown pass by Elenore.

The black juggler catches the two knives he threw up and throws them straight. One knife goes high while the other goes low.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Right!

Elenore complies.

DANIEL (O.S.)

That's it! No more!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Max smiles.

MAX

See. They passed.

BEN

We get to go.

MAX

One final test. Let's go and behave yourselves.

Ben, Julie, and Max exit.

INT. HUGE ROOM

Up above in the cage, Daniel celebrates till...

DANIEL

Shit!

The bottom of the cage drops. Daniel falls and lands rough on the floor.

ELENORE (O.S.)

Daniel?! Are you alright?!

DANIEL
My leg! I think it's broken. Jesus.

BEN (O.S.)
Dad!

JULIE (O.S.)
Mom!

Max stands at the corner. His hands are on Ben's and Julie's shoulder.

MAX
Bravo! Outstanding performance. I
knew you two could do it.

ELENORE
Who's that?

DANIEL
Max. He's got our children.

ELENORE
Ben, Julie, are you ok?

MAX
They're perfectly fine. What
wonderful angels you have.

ELENORE
You son of a bitch!

MAX
After what I've done for the both
of you? Do you know that your kids
doubted your ability to cooperate?
I was the only one who believed in
you and you succeeded my
expectations.

DANIEL
Where's the exit?

MAX
One final test. Sacrifice. Who
will go free? You two or...

Max taps the kids shoulders.

BEN
You said...?

MAX

I never mentioned who will go free.
I simply said that if you wanted to
live you will need to pass the
tests. You're reward was seeing
your children again which I'm
fulfilling. They're fine, in
healthy condition, not a hair out
of place...

Ben cocks his elbow forward and freezes in motion. He's face
is expressionless.

DANIEL (O.S.)

No!

Max LAUGHS.

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - BACK OF FUN HOUSE - NIGHT

A door opens. Ben and Julie walk out. Their faces are
expressionless.

Max, standing inside the fun house, watches them leave.

FADE

OUT

FADE IN ON

BLACK SCREEN

SUBTITLE: SEVERAL DAYS LATER

EXT. MAX'S CIRCUS - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A large crowd of PEOPLE stand around.

WOMAN

Look, someone's coming.

INT. MAX'S CIRCUS - PATH - NIGHT

From the large, red and white stripe tent, Max walks on a
straight path towards the crowd.

He reaches the water shooter game. From the left side, the
fire breather spits out a huge fireball at Max.

It stops inches away from touching Max.

Max reaches the bean tossing game. From the right side, the black juggler throws several knives at Max.

Max walks through without a knife hitting him.

Close to the entrance, Smiley pops out in front of him, boxing stance. Max flicks him and Smiley goes down.

Finally, Max makes it the entrance.

MAX

Welcome to my circus.

Points to himself.

MAX

Max.

Max walks back and stands next to Smiley, who kicks up to stand.

MAX

Smiley.

He leans on Smiley.

MAX

We have special show for you
tonight. A special guest is here.
The beautiful, handsome Danielle!

The two separate revealing...

DANIELLE, a half man, half woman creation. Dressed in a sleek suit, Daniel occupies the left. Dressed in a fancy dress, Elena occupies the right.

FADE OUT