

Witches' Flame

FADE IN:

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - DIRT ROAD - DAY

SUPER: The Great Depression 1932

A dirty and drab landscape. A ribbon of baked mud cuts the flat lands in half. The dust in the sky obscures the sun.

From above, the land looks like an open wound.

TOM HAMILTON, 45, strong back and sharp features, strides between two dried out fields. He carries a burlap sack.

His grimy face betrays no emotion.

A small town ahead.

EXT. TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

Tom proceeds past buildings scoured by the wind and grit. His footprints blow away after each step.

Three RUFFIANS, desperation etched in their faces.

RUFFIAN #1 saunters toward Tom.

RUFFIAN #1
Empty your pockets, give us the bag
and you can keep walking.

Tom tightens his grip.

TOM
I don't think so.

The ruffians circle.

Tom places the bag on the ground and raises his fists.

The ruffians rush Tom and hit him with a flurry of solid punches. The fight goes back and forth until Tom ends it with a few solid punches of his own.

Three ruffians down. Tom picks up the bag and limps a few feet away. He stops.

TOM
Damn.

He returns, digs in his pocket, pulls out a coin and puts it in the hand of dazed RUFFIAN #1.

TOM
Sometimes, strangers are just good
folk you haven't met yet.

EXT. WIDE OPEN - DIRT ROAD - DAY

The town lies behind.

Tom limps a little less, stops, touches his jaw. He spits then squints at the foothills ahead. He trudges on.

The bag nestles against Tom's back, tucked in his belt.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DIRT ROAD - DAY

Tom shades his eyes as he examines the initial incline.

Nothing but dried up foliage and a few scraggy bushes. He swallows hard, licks his lips and shuffles a few more steps

The sun hangs at midday, no shade.

He forces his feet to make way to a brush and lies down. He closes his eyes and snores within moments.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DIRT ROAD - LATER

Tom wakes with a snort. He checks the late afternoon sun and dusts himself off. He wipes his mouth.

As Tom battles the incline, the landscape changes from brown to green.

Not just green, a vibrant green. Trees, leaves, brush and drops of dew. A verdant oasis.

Tom grows more incredulous as he rounds a curve.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - BEAUMONT SUMMER HOME - DAY

A house of simple design yet extraordinary size presides over the top of the hill -- the crown of the lush foliage.

EXT. BEAUMONT SUMMER HOME - PORCH - DAY

The painted wood glows in the last light of the day.

Tom walks as if in a dream up the stairs.

A pitcher of lemonade waits on a small table.

ARISSA BEAUMONT, 22, a stunning figure from the rear, bends over the railing and does not hear Tom.

She shifts her body as if to get a view of the woods.

He gazes at the lemonade and another look at her derriere. He makes a hopeless gurgle.

Anissa turns toward the noise.

Tom melts at her beauty -- her radiant hair, full lips, clear eyes.

TOM

The beauty of Helen of Troy
launched a thousand ships but your
beauty would bring them back.

Tom looks surprised at his words.

ARISSA

I hope the sailors aren't hungry.

Tom thinks a moment on her response. Smiles.

TOM

Tom Hamilton.

ARISSA

Arissa Beaumont.

Tom looks at the pitcher of lemonade. She pours a glass. He savors it to the last drop.

CORBIN STEADWORTH, 28, a gentleman, strolls out of the house.

CORBIN

Always good to see a new face.

Corbin shakes Tom's hand. He winks at Tom as Tom opens his hand and finds a coin. Tom shrugs, sticks it in his pant pocket.

Arissa curls into Corbin's outstretched arm.

ARISSA
Tom, this is my fiance, Corbin
Steadworth.

She pecks him on the cheek.

TOM
Congratulations.

Corbin keeps his arm around Arissa.

ARISSA
We'll be married in two weeks. The
help and guests arrive next week.

TOM
This is a magical place to have a
wedding --

Corbin releases Arissa, guides Tom towards the steps.

CORBIN
We don't want to keep you from your
travels. Stop on your way back.

ARISSA
Corbin, let's invite Mr. Hamilton
to dine with us and stay the night.

She strides into the house, cheerful.

ARISSA (O.S.)
It's my house for another two
weeks.

Corbin offers a gentleman's smile.

CORBIN
When a lady commands, a gentleman
complies.

INT. BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A candle provides light. Tom pulls his shirt off to reveal a
musclcd torso.

He splashes water on his face from a bucket and uncovers a
handsome face. He also uncovers a small tattoo of a stout
tree on his upper chest.

The burlap bag sits within easy grasp.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tom, Corbin and Arissa sit at one end of a large table. Several candles provide light.

Tom groans with satisfaction after the meal.

TOM
I think the sailors would be well pleased.

Arissa clears the plates.

Corbin stares out the window.

TOM
Have you noticed anything strange?

Corbin answers, distracted.

CORBIN
Nothing strange.

TOM
At night? In the woods?

Both Arissa and Corbin avoid eye contact.

TOM
What do you know about the witches' flame?

Arissa freezes. Corbin rattles his chair as he stands.

CORBIN
That's enough questions on foolish things. I'm going for a walk and then to bed.

ARISSA
Good night.

Corbin pecks her on the cheek and bows out.

Arissa looks at the door for a moment.

ARISSA
He tires so easily lately.

She shakes off her melancholy and grins at Tom.

ARISSA

You want the most fabulous dessert?

She pushes a bowl of apples toward Tom.

The apples have that vibrant quality. Shiny red, no blemishes, solid and sumptuous.

Tom watches Arissa as she bites into one. Her delighted look captivates him. She exaggerates her enjoyment as as juice runs down her chin.

She grabs an apple, holds it in front of Tom.

Tom moves his face closer to the fruit, opens his mouth to bite into the red skin.

Closer.

Tom grabs the apple.

TOM

What do you know about the witches' flame?

Arissa's melancholy returns.

ARISSA

The flame... is white... and floats in the darkest part of the woods.

Tom studies her face.

TOM

Did your mother choose this spot for your house?

ARISSA

Grandmother.

TOM

She was a good... woman?

ARISSA

Of course. No one said otherwise.

Tom scratches at the stubble on his face. Tired.

TOM

I may join Corbin on his walk. Do you know where his path is?

ARRISSA
He likes to be alone.

Tom tilts his head.

TOM
Thank you, Miss Beaumont.

Arissa stares out the same window Corbin looked out.

ARRISSA
Mr. Hamilton.

INT. ARISSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arissa sleeps alone in a bed. Her chest rises and falls with each breath. Her eyes open as she hears a door close.

She gets out of bed. She wears a dowdy gown which covers her from collar to calf but her figure still captivates.

INT. CORBIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arissa opens a door.

ARRISSA
Corbin?

The bed has not been slept in.

She gazes out the window, catches sight of a small white flame as it floats about the woods. For a moment, two figures chase the flame.

The flame reflects in her eyes.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The flame reflects in her eyes.

Arissa face is blank as she stands in the darkness.

A hooded figure, VERILY SOOTHSAYER, stands nearby and chants in a sultry female voice.

VERILY (O.S.)
Come, join your sisters. Come,
chase the flame.

Arissa's face glistens in the moon beams that penetrate the treetops. Entranced she moves toward the flame.

VERILY (O.S.)
Come, dance on moonbeams.

Arissa leaps and bounds. Higher and with wild abandon.

VERILY (O.S.)
Come, ride the night winds.

As if commanded, the wind blows her hair back and forth. She almost rises into air as she twirls to the voice's rhythm.

Arissa luxuriates in the rich darkness. The moist air settles around her like a jeweled cloak. Her damp hair clings to her head.

VERILY (O.S.)
Make love to the night.

The branches from several trees entwine around her supple body. Arissa moans in pleasure, hikes up her gown and embraces the tree as a lover.

In a clearing not from the house, the flame floats in mid air as it circles a stick. The flame flickers as the stick changes into a staff. A feminine hand lowers the staff.

Verily removes her hood and cloak to reveal a voluptuous timeless beauty.

The flame flutters to several spots at once as Verily watches Arissa writhe in pleasure. Arissa falls to the ground spent.

VERILY
You're welcome, sister.

INT. BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Tom sleeps underneath a blanket his bare chest exposed. The tattoo of the tree glows. Tom snaps awake. A moment of confusion.

Corbin strides inside, shouts. His eyes smolder.

CORBIN
Where's Arissa? I swear, if you've done anything to her --

The tree tattoo continues to glow on Tom's chest. Corbin's eyes widen as he sputters.

CORBIN
What in God's wide world --

Tom pulls on his shirt.

TOM
Quickly, outside. Arissa has given
herself to the flame. Damn, my
tired eyes!

Corbin bows his head in shame.

CORBIN
There's something... somebody...
out in the woods tonight.

Tom grabs the burlap bag and leads the way outside.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Tom and Corbin search for Arissa.

Tom closes his eyes and holds his hand over his tattoo. He
opens his eyes and gazes into the woods. He points.

TOM
That way.

Tom glances at Corbin.

TOM
What's her name?

Corbin hesitates.

A cloaked figure floats over the ground and lands in front
of the two men.

The pulled back hood reveals Verily. She nods to Corbin and
admires his body.

VERILY
Hello, Corbin.

Tom turns to Corbin.

TOM
A walk?!

Tom glares at Corbin's crestfallen face.

VERILY

Arissa had a wonderful time this evening.

Arissa staggers into the clearing. Her ragged gown doesn't look like it had a wonderful time. Scratches cover every exposed patch of skin.

CORBIN

Arissa?!

Corbin runs to her, grabs her as she faints. He scoops her up and heads to the house.

VERILY

Verily Soothsayer.

A note of panic from Corbin.

CORBIN

Tom, I need your help.

VERILY

Go help him. Protector of the land. She'll be healthy and glowing tomorrow.

TOM

She still has a choice to make. We need her.

VERILY

She will be asked soon. Go.

Verily floats off, Tom proceeds to the house.