

THE ROAD

Cast of Characters

SIR TIMOTHY HASSALL James Maxwell

LAVINIA, his wife Ann Bell

GIDEON COBB John Phillips

JETHRO, Cobb's servant Clifton Jones

SAM TOWLER Rodney Bewes

TETSY Meg Ritchie

LUKEY CHASE Victor Platt

BIG JEFF David King

PRODUCER John Elliot

DIRECTOR Christopher Morahan

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The Woods - a Clearing

It is approaching dusk of an autumn day. Leaves are turning brown on the crooked oak branches. A distant owl hoots. The camera tracks slowly forward.

The owl hoots again, closer.

The camera pans suddenly, to a close shot of a frightened man. He is a young countryman in coarse woollen shirt and leather jerkin. His eyes search the darkening trees. His hands are working feverishly to bind two twigs together with strands of grass, into the rough shape of a cross.

A dog barks somewhere nearby. He turns to look in that direction, grateful for the familiar sound.

The Woods - some hundreds of feet away

The dog barks again, close at hand.

Here a group of men are at work. Four of them are knotting stout ropes taut between the tree trunks to form a line that leads away out of sight, a couple of feet from the ground.

All are countrymen, roughly dressed.

And now another comes, his whiskered face topped by a tricorne hat. He is wearing a cast-off coat of the squire's, for Lukey Chase is one of the squire's servants and in charge of the work here.

He is followed by a lad with a sack, from which Lukey is selecting metallic oddments to hang on the ropes - old bells, jangling bits of harness and chain, scrap from a rural forge. Lukey tests the effect as he approaches, tugging at the rope.

The ironware clatters and jangles behind him all along the line. As he reaches the men working on the ropes, one of them turns to him - a huge fellow with a broad, beaming, gap-toothed face.

BIG JEFF: Hey, Lukey - you're gettin' a bit of a tune in it now!

Grunts of laughter from the rest. Lukey dissociates himself from the scheme.

LUKEY: I be just doin' what squire showed us.

BIG JEFF: Sort o' tune as spooks'd take to, I'd say. He reckon to charm 'em out, hey?

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LUKEY: You heard what he said, Jeff. (To the lad) What you got left there?

He delves in the sack and finds a rusty cowbell.

BIG JEFF: I only heard 'un say he were after spooks.

The mock-solemn faces of the others nod agreement.

LUKEY: Squire reckons to stop anybody comin' through here in the dark without us know.

He attaches the bell to the rope.

BIG JEFF: Ah, spooks'll just pass clean through a rope. Don't he know that? Pass through anythin', a spook can. Don't even tickle him.

LUKEY: 'Taint spooks he's settin' this up for, Jeff, it's jokers. We got plenty o' them hereabouts.

BIG JEFF (shaking with laughter): Oh, ah?

LUKEY: Any tricky lad come boltin' through'ere tonight - he'll set this lot off an' we'll have him. Now it's time to finish. Just take it as far as that thorn thicket and we'll do. (As they move) Hey, where's young Sam?

BIG JEFF (pointing): There, look. Just went off by hisself.

LUKEY: Young devil...

BIG JEFF: Reckon he's frikkened?

LUKEY: Frikkened o' squire, more like, for makin' it all up.

He ducks under a branch and makes for where Jeff pointed.

The Clearing

Sam is standing where he was, still listening and watching for something.

A wider shot shows this as a small clearing. In it is a fallen tree, a grotesque lightning-seared ruin with one end torn open. It is covered with flat plates of fungus.

There is a tiny squeal a short distance away in the darkening undergrowth. He starts, with the twig cross clutched to his chest. The thin sound is drowned by a series of sharp screeches that move rapidly away.

Lukey appears through the branches at his side.

LUKEY: Killin' early tonight, that owl.

SAM: Ay.

LUKEY: An old rat squealin' there...make some folk frikkened, they dunno what it were.

SAM: I know them noises. 'Tweren't like I heard that other time.

LUKEY (scrutinising him): Ay?

SAM: Lukey, I don't want to come back here tonight.

LUKEY: Tell that to the squire. Come on now...

The Roped Trees

The lad has strung the last scraps of chain and iron on the completed barrier. Men are picking up their bundles and coils of rope as Lukey and Sam join them.

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BIG JEFF: Hey, Lukey...reckon we all get a free drink on this?

LUKEY: Squire's promised it.

Grunts of approval as they start to move off.

BIG JEFF: I'll say this for squire. He may be soft in the head, but he's open in the hand...

They hurry off along the track. One of them whistles and calls to his dog.

Outside a Tavern

The last glow in the sky picks out an inn sign: "The Three Companions", pictured as a donkey, a dragoon and death, walking arm in arm.

The camera pans down. The windows of the tavern are lit. Outside the front door stands a large four-wheeled handcart with a long shaft. It is loaded with wooden boxes, planks and lanterns.

Beside it are two men.

One of them, in the decent dress of a rural gentleman, is Sir Timothy Hassall, Bt, squire of the district - tall and nervous, his face sensitive and uncertain. He lifts a wooden box from the cart and as he turns with it, the other man, a servant, makes to relieve him of the burden. But he is not to be trusted with it.

Sir Timothy makes for the tavern door, carrying the box carefully.

Inside the Tavern

The tavern is a crabbed little old place, no more than an occasional halt for passing coaches. Its customers come from the surrounding village, and there are half a dozen of them in the bar now, men in smocks or jerkins exchanging the day's slow gossip over tankards of ale.

They watch Sir Timothy pass through with his box. One man with his back turned is nudged out of the way by a neighbour.

MAN: Oh...sorry, squire.

SIR TIMOTHY: No matter, Gibbs. No matter.

He has almost reached the door of the private parlour at the back when it flies open. The landlord, a harrassed, grizzled man, emerges in a hurry.

SIR TIMOTHY: Careful!

LANDLORD: Beg pardon, squire! (Confusedly) I'll just get the logs.

SIR TIMOTHY: Logs? Surely I need no logs.

LANDLORD (nodding at the private room): He wants 'em!

A deep-throated roar from the room sends him on his way.

GIDEON COBB (off-stage): And brandy, landlord! Quick, now!

LANDLORD: Yes, sir.

Sir Timothy disappears into the private room, closing the door. The landlord hurries behind the bar and shouts to his daughter, Tetsy, the ugly-pretty girl of 18 who is serving ale there.

LANDLORD: Where's Jack? (She shrugs) Devil take him! Brandy then - quick! I must go for logs.

He shuffles out through a dark open doorway behind the bar and can be heard thumping about there and cursing. Tetsy finds the brandy bottle, looks for glasses. There is a ripple of renewed interest among the villagers.

FIRST VILLAGER: Makin' your ol' daddy jump, girl! (A nod at the private room) Who is he?

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TETSY: Mr Cobb.

FIRST VILLAGER: Who's Mr Cobb, then?

SECOND VILLAGER: Friend o' squire's.

FIRST VILLAGER: I can see that, but...

TETSY: He got off the London coach.

She polishes glasses.

SECOND VILLAGER: I seen 'em - him an' his black man.

FIRST VILLAGER: Black man?

TETSY (sharply): Shhh!

The door of the private room has opened. A tall negro is standing there. He is impeccably liveried as a gentleman's personal servant. His manner is cool and dignified. He calls in a voice that carries both culture and authority.

JETHRO: Where is the brandy for my master? (Seeing Tetsy with the bottle and glasses) Bring it.

She manages to nod, and he goes back into the room. She is plainly terrified.

TETSY (whispering): My mam says black men come from the Devil.

SECOND VILLAGER (grinning): He comes from London. Same thing, eh, Tetsy?

FIRST VILLAGER: 'Tis the fashion there, they say, to have a black boy in yer house, dressed up like a great dolly. All the rich men got one. An' ladies too!

Tetsy has brandy and three glasses on a tray. She calls into the dark doorway.

TETSY: Father, I've got the brandy.

LANDLORD (off-stage): Take it in, then.

TETSY: Eh? Me?

LANDLORD (off-stage): Yes, you!

Trembling, Tetsy makes for the private room and knocks. The door opens immediately and there is Jethro's face a foot from her own. She nearly drops the tray.

Inside the Private Room

There are three people in the private room. Sir Timothy is standing by the table, using what part of it is not covered with food to display the apparatus he has brought in - a couple of weirdly-eccentric, lop-sided jars with stubby off-shoots of tubing and stoppers, not unlike alchemists' alembics but with heavy, domed lids added.

He also has a crude electroscope in an ornamented case. Some of its internal parts are made of small bones, and it is topped with a mummified cat's head with whiskers.

Behind sits his wife Lavinia in an elegant riding habit. She is something of a beauty, not much over 20 and ambitious. Her clothes are London fashion. So is her imitated, malicious smile.

But dominating the room is Mr Gideon Cobb. Bulky and ugly, he carries himself with style. His fleshy face is neatly shaved and laced about at the neck. His clothing is plain but characterful in contrast to the absent-minded dullness of the squire's. It seems designed to set off the pugnacious force of his expression. He is a man accustomed to dominate, and takes it for granted that his hearers enjoy the experience.

Many of them do.

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He now has a collection of used plates in front of him, the remnant of a steak pie and an empty pudding bowl, with coffee jugs and cups. He is still gobbling spoonfuls of pudding from a plate, while Sir Timothy tries to explain his apparatus.

SIR TIMOTHY: ...and in jars like this I'm hoping to secure samples of the imponderable fluids which, if I am right...

Cobb swings round in his chair to shout through a mouthful of pudding.

COBB: Where are those damned logs? Send him in with them! I'm dying of cold.

Tray of brandy in hand, Jethro turns to disclose the girl in the open doorway. Seeing his mistake, Cobb guffaws.

COBB: Ah, my dear! Thought it was your villain of a father.

TETSY: He's getting the logs, sir.

Cobb on his feet and taking the brandy from Jethro.

COBB: Good. What's your name?

Tetsy with a rapid, unskilled curtsey.

TETSY: Tetsy, so please you.

Sir Timothy has swung round to his wife in a cold fury.

SIR TIMOTHY (whispering): Why did you ask him here?

Lavinia flicks him a look of faint amusement. Then the door is closing and Cobb is pouring himself brandy.

COBB: Mm, pretty. (To them) Will you join me? (Sir Timothy puts up his hand. Lavinia shakes her head, smiling. Cobb drinks) ...You're wise. At least it washes away the coffee. I really doubt that they've ever made coffee here before. I do.

LAVINIA: I must apologise again, Mr Cobb, for having put you to all this...

COBB: No, no. The coach was late.

LAVINIA: We had everything ready for you at the Hall. Timothy'd even been to the cellar to choose wines.

COBB: Wines? Not imponderable fluids? I'm honoured. (He laughs. She laughs. Sir Timothy is tight-lipped, and Cobb is quickly grave again) Sir, do you keep a chymical chamber at the Hall? A laboratory?

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes.

COBB: You've studied long?

SIR TIMOTHY: A number of years, mostly on my own.

COBB: Rewarding, heh?

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes, indeed.

LAVINIA: Often I scarce see him for a week. He's shut away there with his retorts and the whole parish may go rot.

COBB: Most singular - a squire that would sooner hunt a chymical element than a fox.

SIR TIMOTHY (hand on the jar again): Shall I go on?

COBB: Please.

SIR TIMOTHY: If tonight there should be a manifestation, I'd expect changes in the air, the release of - of imponderable fluids. Phlogiston caloric, even the electric fluid. Now, for the electric -

He draws forward the electroscope. At the same moment there is a bump on the door, which flies open. It is the landlord, with his

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arms full of logs.

LANDLORD: Here you are, sir.

SIR TIMOTHY: It's intolerable.

LANDLORD: Logs.

COBB: Throw them all on - I need a great blaze to thaw my vitals. If you'd dragged for ten hours behind those damned lame jades...

LAVINIA: I feel so guilty!

Cobb to the landlord as he builds up the fire.

COBB: And then make more coffee. (To the others) I don't know how he brews it - I've tasted naught like it in London.

LANDLORD (with modest pride): We have our ways, sir.

COBB (heavily): Ay. (To Lavinia) Coffee is the element I float in, madam, be it exquisite or vile. I chart my way through the flavours like the great whale in his sea. Now where did we meet in London - I'd swear it was at Mrs Brook's?

LAVINIA: It was.

COBB: There! I never forget a bean! The aroma...nay, the aura... of that Mrs Brook's. But you, squire...I think you were not there?

SIR TIMOTHY: No.

LAVINIA: I was up in town alone, visiting my cousin.

Cobb gives a faint smile as he glances from wife to husband.

COBB: No, sir, I think you were not.

The landlord turns from the fire and picks up the tray of plates.

LANDLORD: There, sir...that'll soon pick up.

COBB: Thank'ee.

Sir Timothy looks at his fob watch. He follows the landlord to the door and looks out.

SIR TIMOTHY: My men not returned?

LANDLORD: Not yet, sir.

SIR TIMOTHY: Be sure to let me know. Send Lukey to me.

LANDLORD: I will, squire.

He goes, shutting the door. Cobb has risen and is warming his back at the fire.

COBB: This witness of yours.

SIR TIMOTHY: Sam Towler.

COBB: He's with them?

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes. They've been roping off the area with alarm bells to detect intruders.

COBB: You mean hoaxers?

SIR TIMOTHY (unhappily): Yes.

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COBB: You admit it could all be an imposture, then?

SIR TIMOTHY: To keep an open mind, I must. But I think not. I think there is something here worth probing with all the means we have!

He claps his hands confidently on the alembic-like jars.

LAVINIA: Not forgetting pussy.

COBB: Ah, yes, the cat's head. (He peers at it) What does it do?

SIR TIMOTHY: Er - it may provide additional attraction for electrical fluid.

COBB: How?

SIR TIMOTHY: The whiskers.

COBB: Ah. And ornamental, in a way. In a way. Now, sir...you've formed your theory already - no, don't protest - I can see you're positively agog with it.

SIR TIMOTHY: In some sense, I...

COBB: A new proof of the existence of hobgoblins!

SIR TIMOTHY (protesting): No sir!

COBB: Then confound me, sir!

SIR TIMOTHY: Imagine - imagine that hereabouts in the far past there was some great catastrophic event.

COBB: Was there one?

LAVINIA: So they say.

COBB: What?

LAVINIA: That Queen Boadicea fled through these woods with her army.

COBB: Ah, Queen Boadicea.

SIR TIMOTHY: Wait, wait! An event of such spiritual force that it somehow imprinted itself on the very landscape.

He breaks off, listening.

LAVINIA: What is it?

SIR TIMOTHY: They're back!

He hurries to the door.

Inside the Tavern Bar

The working party is streaming in behind Lukey Chase. Sir Timothy meets them, calling to the landlord.

SIR TIMOTHY: Ale for these fellows! Two full tankards each, no more. I want cool heads tonight. (He ignores groans from Big Jeff and one or two others, and draws Lukey aside) Now, Lukey?

LUKEY: We finished, squire, sir.

SIR TIMOTHY: You'd metal enough?

LUKEY: Ay.

SIR TIMOTHY: Our guest was late, or I'd have come out again myself. Tell me, was anything heard or seen?

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Lukey frowns. Then, understanding, he shakes his head. The camera pans to the bar, where the new arrivals are being served. Tetsy slips from her work quickly round to Sam's side.

TETSY (whispering): Sam...they been talking about you. I was frikkened, love.

SAM: Eh? Who?

Inside the Private Room

Cobb is impatient. He pours more brandy, with a glance at Lavinia, who declines.

COBB: Where's this fellow, now?

LAVINIA: Towler?

COBB: Ay. Jethro, find him and we'll proceed.

Jethro goes to the door.

Inside the Tavern Bar

As before, those nearest turn to stare as Jethro appears. Further along there is a more pronounced reaction. Tetsy jerks Sam round to see the negro. So it is to him that Jethro speaks.

JETHRO: Sam Towler? (Faces turning to Sam confirm his guess. Jethro moves towards him) My master wishes to speak to you.

Tetsy clings to the young man, whispering in his ear.

TETSY: Don't go with him! His master ain't yourn...he can't make you.

JETHRO: Will you come, please?

Sir Timothy pushes through from where he has been talking to Lukey

SIR TIMOTHY: Now, now, this is well enough. Come along, lad. Bring your ale if you will. (Jethro goes before and holds the door for them. The squire calls to the rest:) Stay close. We leave within the half-hour.

Inside the Private Room

Cobb scrutinises the young man fiercely. Sam faces him, the tankard clutched in his hands.

SIR TIMOTHY: This is Sam.

COBB: Are you honest, Sam?

Sam turns to Sir Timothy indignantly.

SIR TIMOTHY: I can answer for him. He's worked in my stables for...how long?

SAM Since a young lad, sir.

COBB: So you can curry a hunter's coat, Sam? Wax a saddle and shine brasses? All honest things. But are you honest in the mind?

SAM: What's he mean, sir?

SIR TIMOTHY: Indeed, Mr Cobb -

COBB: Honest with yourself. Not many achieve it.

Seeing Sam's jaw set, Lavinia interposes.

LAVINIA: Sam...Mr Cobb has come from London to help us tonight. I think you should tell him your story.

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COBB (taking cue): Don't fear me, lad. I'm neither a judge nor a High Constable. I'm a philosopher. D'you know what that is?

SAM: Ay, sir, like the squire.

COBB: Not exactly like. As I have none of those remarkable chymical jars I am obliged merely to think. About the truth. (Lavinia shoots her husband a look as she passes, changing her seat for a better view of the proceedings) Come now.

Sam turns to Sir Timothy.

SAM: I think he'll mock me.

COBB: I mock nothing but folly and knavery. Let us be two good fellows - heh?...helping each other to illumination. Jethro, take notes.

Jethro sits, pulling from his tail pocket a portable inkwell and quill. There is paper on the table.

Inside the Tavern Bar

Tetsy is straining to hear what is going on in the private room. Watching her, the villagers grin.

LANDLORD: Tetsy...come away.

She glances at him, but does not move from the door.

BIG JEFF: Hey, Tetsy...they're feedin' him to the black man.

Inside the Private Room

Jethro is scribbling with his quill as Sam talks.

SAM: 'Twas last year, a couple of days after Michaelmas.

SIR TIMOTHY: Exactly a year ago tonight, the first day of October 1769. And that night you were out in the woods?

SAM: Yes, sir.

COBB: Why?

SAM: Just...just wandering about.

COBB: Alone?

SAM (after a moment): Yes.

COBB: How long?

SAM: Hours. It was full dark when I heard the noises.

COBB: The noises.

SAM: Weren't much at first; like some sort of whistles or squeaks, and I thought...birds. But 'tweren't birds.

COBB: What were they, then?

SAM: I dunno. Then they started to burst out more. Very loud. And between whiles there was quiet. And then...I was laid on the ground an' I could feel it startin' to shake...An' the noises come nearer, a-roarin' and a'rattlin' like naught I ever did hear. I was frikkened, sir.

COBB: Rattling...of what? Wheels? Chains?

SAM: Neither one, I don't think.

COBB: Can you imitate any of these sounds for us? With your mouth? (Sam frowns. He manages a low-pitched hum. He parts

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his lips and it comes out as a harsh buzzing. He stops abruptly, embarrassed, and clears his throat) Thank you. How did you set that down, Jethro?

JETHRO: "A kind of buzz or hum".

Cobb grunts approval.

SAM: There seemed to be voices too.

COBB: Human voices?

SAM: Ay, sir. Yelling and screeching. (The memory of it catches at him) And footsteps running...under the ground I was lyin' on!

Lavinia gives a tiny involuntary shiver. Jethro glances up from his notes at Sam.

Inside the Tavern Bar

Tetsy is pressed against the door listening. She grasps the doorknob.

Inside the Private Room

COBB: You mean they ran in the earth?

SAM: Right under me where I lay. But the queer thing was... they sounded like feet on cobbles.

JETHRO (writing): Footsteps on cobbles...

SIR TIMOTHY: There's nothing but turf and leaf mould throughout the woods.

COBB: And the voices?

SAM: They were all round me. I stopped up my ears like this but...oh, I tried, but it made no matter.

COBB: Could you pick out words?

SAM: None I could make sense on

SIR TIMOTHY: Latin, perhaps.

COBB: Were they in our tongue?

SAM: Some...some might have been...I can't tell now. (His voice grows increasingly high and distressed) But mainly it was all screams and screechings...near and far away too, like as if all the dead people was risin' out o' Hell an' coverin' the land! (Staring in front of him) An' then - it must have stopped, I don't recall. I run home an' when I seen the houses I cried. (He turns to Cobb as if dazed) The queerest of all ... nobody else had heard it!

COBB: No one?

SAM: I couldn't believe that, I couldn't!

The door is flung open. Tetsy runs to his side, clinging to him and shouting.

TETSY: Don't torment him!

SIR TIMOTHY: There's no harm, girl.

TETSY: Sir, you must stop them.

LAVINIA: She was listening.

TETSY: I had to! I couldn't help it.

LAVINIA: Get out of here.

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COBB: No, wait. Please.

Inside the Tavern Bar

The landlord comes round from the bar. Big Jeff, Lukey and others drift towards the open door of the private room.

COBB (off-stage): Now, Sam, I want you to tell me...

Inside the Private Room

COBB: ...For whom were you waiting in the woods that night? For her?

TETSY (before Sam can answer): Oh no, sir...we were not then ...not...

She breaks off, blushing.

COBB: I beg pardon. (To Sam) Some former sweetheart?

Sam nods unhappily.

TETSY (whispering to Sam): Was it Meg?

Sam nods again, not looking at her.

SAM: But she didn't come. Not that night.

COBB: Ah. You waited in vain. And there's our picture! An overwrought young man in a lonely place...his fancy hard at work...

LAVINIA: You mean he made it up?

SAM: I didn't, sir.

COBB: I'll tell you what you heard. You heard your own heartbeats throbbing against the ground. You heard the small creatures of the undergrowth.

SAM (positively): No, sir, no.

COBB: But chief of all, you heard your own memory. I'm told there's a local tale...(He glances at Lavinia)...about that queen of ancient times. He snaps his fingers, frowning.

SAM: Queen Boadicea.

COBB (trapping him):There...he knows it!

SAM: They say she come through these woods with her whole army in rout.

Inside the Tavern Bar

The watchers through the open doorway nod to each other. This is familiar ground.

Then they draw back a little, for Cobb is moving about the inner room, eyeing them. But his words are half-addressed to them, as a useful part of his audience.

COBB: All those sad barbarians, sweating the blue woad off their bodies as they fled. Tossing their spears away...

Inside the Private Room

COBB: ...Yelling and screaming in their terror. And behind them ... the trumpets and the drums, the rolling drums (he savours the word) of the Roman Army.

SIR TIMOTHY: It may well have happened.

COBB: Happened or not, it's what he learned at his mother's knee. See how the rascal's eyes shine! Oh, Sam, you'd make a writer, a veritable Grub Street romantic...if you'd only learned your A.B.C.! It's been in his mind since childhood, this fustian tale,

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and when he's in an emotional state it comes back to him and...there's your phantom army!

Sam turns, aware that Cobb is playing to some gallery behind him. He walks slowly towards the men in the doorway.

SAM (quietly): That wasn't what I heard.

COBB: What does he say.

Sam turns on him.

SAM: You try to show me as a fool, sir. But I've thought about this many a day, as honestly as you'd wish. (Jethro looks up from his note-taking, glances at his master. Cobb frowns too, at this returning of his own words) And I know. 'Tweren't that old queen and her people that I heard. (He turns to Sir Timothy) If they had come by here, they'd have had chariots - that's like carts, ain't it, sir?...and horses. (To Cobb) I've heard drums, too, and trumpets...in town when the soldiers came. (Finally) 'Twas none of these. None of em. (He pushes through those in the doorway) Let me by.

Everyone is staring at him. Even Cobb's complacent mask is disturbed.

Tetsy starts after Sam. Just through the doorway she meets her father's eye and halts.

Inside the Tavern Bar

Sam is walking slowly down the empty bar-room. All his concentration is directed within himself. He turns as the others come straggling after him.

SAM: I heard men running on a great cobbled road through them woods. But there's no road, nor ever has been.

SIR TIMOTHY (from doorway): That's true. It's always been forest land.

A momentary silence. Then Cobb is beside him, breaking the spell.

COBB: Come, sir, come...you realise what you're doing? You're adducing this very lack, this nothing...as if it supported his tale! (Sharply) Has no one else ever heard these sounds?

BIG JEFF: Job Mousley.

An amused murmur.

SIR TIMOTHY: An old poacher. Three years ago. He was in the woods on what must have been the same night of the year, but that signified naught until Sam here...

COBB: Where is this old man?

SIR TIMOTHY: He died. A week or two later.

COBB (heavily): Of shock, no doubt?

Some nods and mutterings.

LANDLORD: He was took mortal strange.

COBB: How disobliging of him. (He glances round) And there's no other witness of this remarkable annual uproar? You must all live within a mile or two. Nobody? (As heads are shaken, he turns to Sir Timothy) Yourself, sir? Your lady...your servants...(He looks down the bar)...with one exception.

Sam is at the window, peering out through the tiny panes at the darkening village street.

SIR TIMOTHY: It seems you have to be in the woods. (He looks at his watch again, calls out) We leave in ten minutes.

BIG JEFF: It'll be a cool night, sir.

SIR TIMOTHY: Very well...(To landlord)...Hot toddy for every man before we go. Small ones, though. (To Cobb) I take it, sir, you will not be with us?

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LAVINIA: Oh, he must. Who else will stand for common sense?

COBB: Thank'ee, madam.

LAVINIA: It was for that I invited Mr Cobb.

Cobb shows her back into the private room.

COBB: And for that only?

Inside the Private Room

LAVINIA: What do you mean, sir? When Sir Timothy told me he was going to investigate...(she suddenly breaks into a direct, disarming smile)...I thought you might...like to come...(He moves towards her. Conscious of Jethro's presence, she moves away. It is a kind of unskilled coquettishness, clumsy for lack of practice. She picks up Jethro's notes and after a glance casts him a look of mild surprise)...a neat hand! (She is conscious of both men, as just now she was conscious of Cobb and her husband. To Cobb) What did you think of him?

COBB: Your rustic? A head full of fright and old wives' tales!

Jethro watches him with an irony that is never far below the surface. Resentment at being taken for granted has taught him subtle ways to provoke, and to use them when Cobb is ruffled, as now.

JETHRO: He seemed...honest in the mind.

COBB: Did he so!

JETHRO (To Lavinia): When I was a child in Jamaica, Ma'am, the generality of people believed in such things.

COBB: His people were savages...slaves!

LAVINIA: That was no fault of theirs.

COBB: Who said it was?

LAVINIA: Without benefit of religion, what else could...?

COBB: They had religion enough! Demons, idols, voodoo.

JETHRO: Obeah, we called it, sir.

COBB: Obeah, then. Every possible consolation. What they lacked was the benefit of real...human...thought. (He stabs the words out) Of philosophy! (At Jethro) Which he lacks not!

JETHRO: I am most gratefully aware, sir...

COBB (To Lavinia): As you see, he's had more than a flunkey's training. He has a brain. I've made him use it.

JETHRO: I use it.

COBB: Demonstrate. Show the lady some excellence on this topic.

JETHRO (hesitantly): I have thought...(To Cobb) You may not approve of this...it is a matter of scale: our minds are limited, in a limitless universe. There may be forces whose nature we can in no way grasp - inaccessible to our finest philosophy.

COBB (flatly): Don't quote.

JETHRO: Did I?

COBB: "More things in heaven and earth, Horatio". Above all, don't quote a poet, a professional liar. (His anger rising) You have been taught some discipline of the mind, Jethro. Never, never betray that. I will not have those about me who would open doors to confusion and magic! (Breathing harder, he waves him away) Get out. Get out there and help them.

The door opens. It is Sir Timothy.

THE ROAD

JETHRO (stiffly): Sir...can I take these things out for you? The electroscope?

SIR TIMOTHY: You know what it is?

JETHRO: Yes. In spite of the cat.

SIR TIMOTHY: Er...Please take it.

Jethro picks it up deftly.

Inside the Tavern Bar

The men are crowding round the bar as Jethro passes. The landlord is serving hot toddy. Sam Towler is standing where he was, near the window. Tetsy is with him. She shrinks against him as Jethro passes.

LANDLORD (off-stage): Tetsy. Where are you, girl?

TETSY: Coming, father -

She runs to help him.

Outside the Tavern

Jethro comes out of the tavern. He glances about, goes to the handcart. He sets the electroscope into a pad of sacking, covers it and starts to strap it down.

Inside the Private Room

The landlord enters with a tray on which are a glass jug of steaming toddy and three glasses. He places it before Sir Timothy, who pours.

COBB: Jethro's an experiment - (To Sir Timothy) You see, I make them too. On the whole, he works.

SIR TIMOTHY: He's a man.

COBB: He is now. Almost. He was bought in slavery by an old friend of mine. His mind was a child's. Less, with nothing in it but a little darkness. I emptied it clean, poured in new impressions and the ideas they formed. Nothing old or false, no cant. I set him at all matters, to seek truth. Tested his brain against others in argument. And at last - that savage is the equal of any man in the kingdom.

SIR TIMOTHY: Then why do you not respect him?

COBB (astonished): Respect? Respect, sir, is no part or parcel of the matter. You might as sensibly ask me to respect him for the silver buckles I've put upon him.

SIR TIMOTHY: I can respect him.

Cobb stares at him. The ready guffaw does not come. He is uneasy at the working of something on another level. The way to deal with it is to demolish it.

COBB (roaring): Sir, you have a vice of politeness in you.

LAVINIA (laughing): Politeness a vice?

COBB: Nay, in many it is. Should he succeed this night, he'll beg pardon of the ghosts for raising 'em. (He laughs with Lavinia, raising his glass to Sir Timothy) Truth in toddy, sir. Well, here's to your enterprise -

Inside the Tavern Bar

The toddy is going down fast in the bar outside. There is a buzz of drink-warmed argument, at the centre of which are Big Jeff and Sam Towler.

BIG JEFF: And there's not even a gibbet round these parts.

THE ROAD

SAM: I know naught about that -

BIG JEFF: A gibbet's where you find 'em. Ay. Over to Palehouse Common, there was that old gibbet there, and the place was alive with 'em. (A wink at his neighbour on the other side) Every night, mark you, not just once a year -

The camera pans to Tetsy. She is crossing with a couple of tankards in her hand when something catches her attention. She goes to the door and looks out.

Outside the Tavern

Jethro is crouching beside the handcart. His manner has changed: His face is somehow loosened, the eyes wide and distant. He is crooning to himself a tune of deep and ancient sadness, the words forgotten.

He is oblivious of the girl watching him from the doorway.

Inside the Private Room

Sir Timothy is pulling on his greatcoat. Cobb picks his up and struggles with it.

COBB: Where's that damned cannibal of mine? Never where I need him.

LAVINIA: You speak so, Mr Cobb -

COBB (lost in the folds): And mean it too.

LAVINIA: Yet you fight against slavery -

COBB (emerging): Slavery has always existed, madam.

LAVINIA: You have written against it.

COBB: I have said it will come to an end. Not quite the same thing. Good or bad, it must end by being ridiculous. Machines will supplant it.

SIR TIMOTHY: Machines?

COBB: I've no possible doubt of it. The great steam pumps we see now - are going to have a million descendants. In a hundred years - in two, certainly - machines will do all the world's fetching and carrying. They'll be more obedient, loyal and industrious than any slaves in history. They'll carry men through the air and over the seas.

LAVINIA (disbelievingly): Mr Cobb -

COBB: They'll sow and reap for us - water the deserts - melt the polar snows -

LAVINIA: All this with steam?

COBB: There'll be far greater forces.

SIR TIMOTHY: The imponderables -

COBB (losing patience): No, sir. Powerful, real forces that actually exist - that must exist to bind this universe and to quicken it. The very sources of life. Man will find them in the end.

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes, I suppose so, as each of us contributes his -

COBB: My poor squire. Man will do it by using his mind utterly anew, plumbing the deepest levels of insight and reason - (He laughs) not by sniffing at those sorcerers' jars. (Injured, Sir Timothy snatches up the box of jars) The nose will not serve, sir, but to find a bad smell. (Lavinia laughs with him as Sir Timothy kicks the door open and goes) 'Tis the brain must do it.

Inside the Tavern Bar

Men turn, wiping their mouths, as the squire makes for the outer door. Lukey bobs responsibly forward and signs to the others. They surge towards the door.

THE ROAD

Outside the Tavern

Jethro scrambles to his feet as men straggle out of the tavern.

Inside the Tavern Bar

As Cobb and Lavinia follow, he catches her arm.

COBB: Is your carriage here?

LAVINIA: Yes, but we go to the woods on foot -

COBB: The woods. Are we really bound to this buffoonery?

LAVINIA: We?

COBB: You and I. When I think of those wines of yours back at the Hall -

LAVINIA (seeing the drift): Oh, no -

COBB: Lying untasted.

For a moment, Lavinia is torn. Then there is a scuttle of feet as Tetsy runs from the doorway behind the bar, pulling a shawl about her.

LAVINIA: Your world of machines - I think I should like that. (She watches Tetsy run on out, turns to him quickly) I can't. Not yet. We must go with the others. Please. (He nods, humoring her. As they go) Perhaps there'll even be philosophical machines.

COBB: To do our thinking? (Pleased by the notion) Ay. At least they'd not believe in bogeys.

He follows her out.

Outside the Tavern

Big Jeff is brandishing a pitchfork, stabbing ferociously at the air.

BIG JEFF: Take that, you headless old horror, you. (Laughing to Sir Timothy) I'll kill 'em dead all over again.

SIR TIMOTHY: Careful with that -

Lukey is issuing stout staffs and rakes and hoe-handles to the men.

BIG JEFF: An' nail 'em up like vermints to frikken their friends. How much'll you gimme for 'em, squire?

SIR TIMOTHY: A shilling a head.

BIG JEFF: Hey - what about the fellers as got none?

SIR TIMOTHY: Shilling a body. (Turns to Lukey) Has each man got a staff now?

Sam is the last to get one. As he turns with his, he finds Tetsy in front of him, the shawl pulled round her head.

TETSY: What's them for?

SAM: Oh - makes the lads feel braver. In case, like.

TETSY: Can I have one? Lukey -

SAM: You ain't comin'.

TETSY: I am then. Lukey -

SIR TIMOTHY: What's this about?

THE ROAD

SAM: She wants to come, sir.

TETSY (pointing to Lavinia): If Lady Hassall can go, I can. I don't get easy frikkened, sir -

SIR TIMOTHY: Faith, let her come. (Turning to the rest) Now remember all what I said - no shouting, no laughing, and keep your ears open. We're like to return no wiser than we are now - but let's be sure. If you do hear anything, come to me at once. Now - two men to light the way. Lukey and another -

Lukey and the lad pick up lighted lanterns while the others apply themselves to the long shaft and pull the cart round. Tetsy stays close to Sam's side.

Lantern in hand, Jethro joins his master, who is watching with Lavinia. As the cart rumbles and jolts on the cobbles:

LAVINIA: You really believe in those machines.

COBB: They can free man from his folly. I believe that, yes.

LAVINIA: How can they? He'll have made them.

Cobb gives her a quick grin of appreciation. Then Sir Timothy is beckoning and they move to join him. Jethro brings up the rear with his lantern.

The camera cranes up a high shot as the heavily laden cart is turned and moves slowly off. Again it takes in, close at hand, the inn sign with its "Three Companions".

The Woods - the Roped Trees

It is dark now in the wood. Two points of light bob in the distance. The creaking of the cart can be heard, then voices in sudden subdued argument, until, above the others:

BIG JEFF (off-stage): She's stuck against this root -

SIR TIMOTHY (off-stage): Right, pull this way. Heave now, lads - heave. Heave.

A jolting, exclamations of success, and the cart rumbles on again.

LAVINIA (off-stage): Oh, it's so muddy.

COBB (off-stage): Jethro - help the lady. I'll take the lantern.

The two points of light enlarge into the lanterns carried by Lukey Chase and the lad. They flicker across branches and ropes as Lukey comes running ahead.

LUKEY: This is the place, squire. Through here.

He moves on round the obstruction of a rope that zigzags between the trees. Sir Timothy follows and in the darkness Lukey has left behind him, collides with the rope. Bells jangle. Bits of harness rattle. He gives a muffled yell.

Lukey and the lad run back. The squire has gone headlong over the rope and is spluttering in the leaf mould. Lukey sets his lantern down and helps him.

Sir Timothy wipes the soil from his mouth.

SIR TIMOTHY: I - I didn't see the rope.

Cobb comes up with the third lantern. Just behind is Jethro, carrying Lavinia. She drops to her feet.

LAVINIA: Timothy. You're not hurt?

SIR TIMOTHY (as Lukey dusts him down): The bones seem sound, eh, Lukey?

COBB: Well, sir, you sprung your own trap.

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes, I - you see how it works? It sets off the alarm if anyone - (lamely) You saw.

THE ROAD

The cart is drawing up to them. Men are grinning, some laughing. Big Jeff to the next man, in a stage whisper:

BIG JEFF: Squire was just puttin' it to the test, like -

SIR TIMOTHY: Where's Sam Towler?

SAM (coming forward): Here, sir.

SIR TIMOTHY: Now show us the exact spot.

SAM: Yonder. By the fallen tree.

The Clearing

Waving the cart on, Lukey trots up and sets his lantern on the great fallen trunk.

SIR TIMOTHY: That'll serve, lads. (As the cart halts) Now to unload.

Straps are whipped asunder, coverings removed, boxes lifted down. Sir Timothy stands by to supervise the handling of the more fragile items.

Cobb looks about, frowning, swinging his lantern to cast light into the dark places of the undergrowth. Lavinia pulls her cloak tight. She looks with revulsion at the fungus on the dead tree.

LAVINIA: Loathsome. What is it?

Cobb tears off a piece. He shows it to Jethro.

JETHRO: Polyporus betulinus.

LAVINIA: He has Latin -

JETHRO: It is a poison plant.

COBB: In Jamaica they used it in their soup, no doubt.

JETHRO: No, only for obeah.

The smile is wiped from Cobb's face. There is a faint suggestion of one on Jethro's.

COBB: Go help there.

He points to the cart. Jethro does as he is bidden. Lavinia watches Cobb, puzzling him out.

Half a dozen planks are being unloaded. Jethro helps Lukey down with one. Other men swing down a big hamper.

Sir Timothy sets a tall, narrow box down by the tree. He opens it and extracts a wooden frame with glass tubing attached. He inspects the fancifully shaped thing briefly, then checks the other one in the box.

SIR TIMOTHY: Both intact. (To Cobb) Thermometers. It's said that supernatural events are marked by a great chilling of the air. I am ready to test that.

COBB (dryly): Good.

Sir Timothy turns quickly back to the cart, where Jethro and Lukey are lifting down heavy iron tripods.

SIR TIMOTHY: Now my tripods. Bear them over here - to the planks. (He hurries past Tetsy, who is busy lighting lanterns, to where the planks are being laid out on different sides of the clearing) This way - this way -

Behind, Cobb glowers.

COBB: Are you not to help him?

THE ROAD

LAVINIA: He's not taught me in these matters.

COBB: Say "either".

LAVINIA: Either. (Dimpling) Mr Cobb -

COBB: He'll be out after marsh damps or subjecting copper to the seven heats when he'd do better in bed. (She laughs) Why did you marry him? Grew up in the country - a vicar's daughter? I knew it. A match for the young squire, well, younger than some and a baronet - (She nods, her eyes growing hard) I've met a score of him - gentlemen amateurs with a nose for idle novelty - (He stares suddenly) God a mercy. Look at this. (Theatrical props are being unloaded. Two fanciful Roman helmets, plumed with feather boas and a cardboard shield. And a large scroll on wooden rollers. And a human skull) Yorick too. What company of actors had he these from?

LAVINIA: They passed in the spring, playing Julius Caesar.

COBB: And he sets the scene.

He roars with laughter. She glances at him. Her voice is sharp.

LAVINIA: Show him' (He looks at her) What he is!

COBB: Ah...

LAVINIA: You can!

COBB: A bargain? (She frowns. He studies her) I had a cat once. Her name was Tibb and she was a great killer. Yes, there was something about her -

LAVINIA: Her eyes?

COBB: The corner of her mouth.

With a sudden sweep of his arm he clears the fungus from part of the trunk. He lifts Lavinia by the waist and seats her upon it. She stares at him. As he turns away towards her husband, her smile flickers back.

Unloading the last things from the cart - two "Roman" swords and a horse's skull - Lukey glances at her. He catches Big Jeff's eye and grins.

The tripods have been set up in four places, straddling planks. They are a couple of feet high and two of them already contain the alembic-jars they are meant to take. On the plank below each sits a lighted lantern and the removed lid of the jar.

Sir Timothy is now arranging a third jar in its tripod. Sam stands by with a fourth in its box, while Tetsy has a lighted lantern. A lantern is already in place below where Sir Timothy is working, casting a bright upward glow on him as he moves the lid. Cobb comes up.

COBB: Surely you cannot catch imponderables in a jar? By their very nature they will escape through the very glass - that is if they exist at all.

SIR TIMOTHY: There may be something else.

COBB: Oh?

SIR TIMOTHY: Something heavier. (He places the lid carefully on the plank below) - An animal-magnetic fluid. I should call it that. Something like the magnetic fluid of iron, but exuded instead by living creatures!

COBB: Is this your own idea?

Sir Timothy is apparently unaware of any irony.

SIR TIMOTHY: Suppose it had the quality of lingering - say, where some violent action of the past had riven it into the earth - to issue forth again at certain times and under certain conditions. Times like the yearly cycle - (He is moving towards the last tripod. They follow) - at each anniversary of some great disaster. More especially near the century mark. Lantern, girl! (He signs to the staring Tetsy. She sets down the remaining lantern while he takes the jar from Sam's box) - As if part of the vital spirits of the people there had been torn away under the dreadful pressure of fear and death -

THE ROAD

TETSY (a hoarse cry): Part of their souls!

It chills them. Men look round. One drops the horse's skull. Lavinia jumps down from her place on the fallen tree. Cobb puts a reassuring arm round the shaking girl.

COBB: There, my dear. I think the squire means something more - more chemical than souls. Besides, Queen Boadicea may be officially doubted to have had any. She was a pagan. (He glances across at Lavinia, his wrist round Tetsy's waist for a moment more, till she frees herself and moves towards the scowling Sam) Your master's going to insist on the old queen, my lad. She fits his theory. So if she shows herself tonight, he'll bottle her up!

Sir Timothy rises from his work, scowling.

SIR TIMOTHY: If anything happens - (Seeing the mockery in Cobb's face) Oh, leave me be!

He turns away, but Cobb keeps with him, enjoying it now.

COBB: But you'll make it happen, sir - try at least. Or why all this?

He points to the "Roman" props. The skull is wearing one of the plumed helmets and has been stuck bizarrely on a post. The other helmet is fixed nearby, empty. The horse's skull is hung below the human one, while the swords and shields have been hooked on branches. The scroll is suspended open to reveal a Latin text. The effect is amateurishly occult.

COBB (continuing): Ancient Rome! The centurion and his horse!

SIR TIMOTHY: They might help to distil out the -

COBB: To chase her into your bottle! (He calls after the smarting Sir Timothy) But the text, sir! From Caesar! She was not born in Caesar's day -

By the cart, surrounded by the other men, Lukey Chase has some bizarre instruments - two long toasting forks, each soldered at the blunt end to a large coil of bright wire. The lad has a similar pair of forks and is handily putting the coils over his arm.

BIG JEFF: Lukey goin' to fight th' old devils with their own weapons!

Sir Timothy, sharply over the laughter:

SIR TIMOTHY: Come now! Who's your helper?

LUKEY (struggling with the coils): Him. I telled him what to do.

SIR TIMOTHY: Right. (Glancing up) Let him take that tree. And you, Lukey, this one.

The lad is the nimbler. He is up among the branches in a moment. Lukey fumbles for footholds, gasping.

BIG JEFF: Get after them devils, Lukey! (Feinting at him with the pitchfork) Like this!

LUKEY (scrambling up): Hey, hey!

Sir Timothy turns to find Cobb taking another of the forks from the cart. He relieves him of it.

SIR TIMOTHY: Yes, an ordinary toasting fork. Another of - my own ideas. (He passes it to Jethro - and the transfer is not lost on either master or man. Then a second fork-and-coil from the box) Wedge them there in the thorn bush. (Turns to call up into the trees) Are you ready? A high shot of Lukey in the tree, holding both forks away from him while he shakes the coils free. He peers across at the other tree.

LUKEY: Right, lad? Chuck 'em down!

He throws his coils down, unwinding as they fall.

Below, they watch the four coils come rustling down and Sir Timothy darts forward to grab them. He pays out the wire as he makes for a plank where six primitive Leyden Jars, and the cat-headed electroscope, have been set out in the light of a lantern. They are only a yard or so from the "Roman" oddities.

THE ROAD

Jethro meets him, unwinding the wires from the thorn bush.

JETHRO: Join to the electroscope?

SIR TIMOTHY: No, those to a Leyden Jar - (Realising he is taking the negro's knowledge for granted) Can you do that?

JETHRO: Yes, sir.

They work quickly, fixing the connections.

SIR TIMOTHY (joining a wire to the electroscope): I've made trial before with electrical discharges. During thunderstorms.

JETHRO: With kites, like Benjamin Franklin?

SIR TIMOTHY (pleased): That's right! Flying forks up into the storm - the fluid comes down the wet line. I got a bad burn once.

JETHRO: Shall we get burns tonight?

SIR TIMOTHY: I'd be glad to. (Suddenly confidential) With so many people here, it may excite the forces. And should these things, in a sense, focus them - (He indicates the "Roman" items. Jethro looks at them, unsure) You understand, don't you?

COBB'S VOICE: Well, Jethro? Do you?

He is standing a yard away.

Jethro rises. Standing by the skull with its theatrical helmet, he looks at one man to the other as if aware of having to make a judgment between them. Then Sir Timothy scrambles up, calling.

SIR TIMOTHY: Get the cart away now. I want it down there -

Cobb takes a pinch from a heavy silver snuff box.

COBB: Sir, a word. Before this addled attempt goes too far -

SIR TIMOTHY(waving at the cart): By the rope!

COBB: - and you're the laughing stock of the entire county. Think of your lady there. (This brings Sir Timothy round to face him) You're a singular fellow, sir - but do not set up to be an eccentric!

SIR TIMOTHY: Sir!

COBB (waving a hand round the clearing): Where did you get all this rubbish? From a bankrupt sorcerer? You don't know what half of it is!

SIR TIMOTHY (indignantly): I make serious observations.

COBB: The best of them are so crude you can prove whatever you fancy! That mice are generated by sour cheese - that sneezing endangers the monarchy -

SIR TIMOTHY (controlling himself): I'm not a fool, sir!

COBB: Then throw away the toys.

SIR TIMOTHY: I have an open mind.

COBB: Close it, sir. Close it to nonsense!

SIR TIMOTHY: Keep your voice down.

They move closer, towards Lavinia, who is drinking in every word.

COBB: If you want proof, I can tell you how to find it.

SIR TIMOTHY: Pray do.

THE ROAD

COBB: You need not seek it with quaint instruments. You have only to open your eyes - if you can - and see what is before you .

SIR TIMOTHY: That is too easy.

COBB (fiercely): It is not easy! It is so hard that only a handful in the land - or any land - have yet achieved it! They must scour their minds clean, ready for a new usage. Then turn their whole imagination right round - away from all the romantic fancies that delight it and then blur and deaden it. And bring that imagination to bear instead on the real world it has taken for granted, and see into it. And seek its deepest sense. The truth is all round us, but it is hard. (He looks from one to the other) And ordinary. And supreme.

Lavinia is enchanted simply with the sound of the words. Sam and the girl are listening nearby. Jethro sits on a box with his eyes to the ground. He has heard it before.

SIR TIMOTHY: Have you achieved this - cleansing of the brain?

COBB (confidently): Not wholly. But I shall.

SIR TIMOTHY: And how many others?

COBB: In time, a world-full. Man will change himself!

SIR TIMOTHY: I could not.

COBB: Then you will be left behind, sir. A mere bone in the rocks like a creature of the Great Flood. And all like you. The men of the future will be those who see things as they are.

LAVINIA (with a laugh of exhilaration): Go on, Timothy - argue! Refute him!

SIR TIMOTHY: How can I? He denounces fantasy, only to set up another one.

COBB: I give good sense for nonsense, new lamps for old!

LAVINIA: Bravo!

COBB: Come, sir - try the exchange? He will not.

LAVINIA: Let's leave poor Timothy in his rock and go on. I want to feel history sweeping me away like a great warm tide!

COBB: It will be the world of men - and women - with opened eyes. They'll be strong. They'll need no crutches of petty, tram-melling morality -

LAVINIA: Faith, is there morality now?

COBB (quickly): No, but they'll be spared the pretence. (She laughs, sensing how all this relates to the three of them.) They'll see each other as they truly exist, and count each other's needs and accept them. Even joyfully. But above all honestly. They may count our virtues vice and our vices natural wisdom. They'll judge all things afresh, by their own enlightenment.

SIR TIMOTHY: God will judge.

COBB: They will judge! They won't go in dread seeking heavenly marks for good behaviour, like tots in dame-school. They'll have grown up!

SIR TIMOTHY (shaking his head): There must be God, and justice -

COBB (roaring): Justice, sir, is a god - the god of misers! It defines the way we may snatch from each other and then guard our grabbings! You say justice and you exalt a golden blindfold lady. I see a gibbet and a thing hanging with eyes pecked out!

He snatches out his snuffbox and takes a great pinch.

LAVINIA: Oh, you're right - !

COBB: Law is for cowards and blockheads. For today's foul little world, not for theirs. They'll have no filth and cholera and killing for theft - who will steal in a world where every man's a prince? There'll be neither squire nor servant then.

JETHRO: Nor slave?

THE ROAD

COBB: Nor - slave. They'll have such riches that our great King George would look like a pauper. It's in the earth for the asking - and they'll have learned to ask, that's all. They'll build a world that's clean and ordered and swift. It'll come. It must.

LAVINIA: The world of machines.

COBB: Ay, great engines that could build you a pavilion of shining metal and keep your beauty perfect for a hundred years.

The directness of it, in Timothy's presence, is too much for her. She takes refuge in coquetry.

LAVINIA: Is this the new realism?

COBB: No disease, no cruelty, no want. All that man gains, man will give.

LAVINIA: Love, too?

COBB: Ay, that too. That most of all.

While his wife remains staring at Cobb, Sir Timothy turns away. Big Jeff and the other men have settled down on the ground or are leaning against trees. He looks at his watch and snaps it shut.

SIR TIMOTHY: You're not bound to stay. For those who do, there'll be food in an hour. (No one offers to leave. He turns) - You blind us with your Golden Age, Mr Cobb. Tell me, do you have no doubts?

COBB: Few.

SIR TIMOTHY: I have doubts. I doubt everything I do.

COBB (with a grunt of amusement): With reason! You're a fool to go on.

SIR TIMOTHY: I know that, but I must. I go slowly. I get knowledge grain by grain, as I come upon it. I go without direction, feeling my way. I test the ground and move aside if it won't bear me, and go on again.

COBB: Like a beetle.

SIR TIMOTHY: No, a man. (Cobb grunts. Sir Timothy regards him with a thin smile) - It's the only discovery I've made, Mr Cobb. Hassall's Law: Man can never move back.

For a moment a quick retort hovers on Cobb's lips. Then he frowns. He looks at Sir Timothy seriously for the first time, watching him as he goes to search among the ropes and boxes.

Sir Timothy rises with a gun in his hands, a wide-muzzled blunderbuss. Men turn idly to watch him. He sits on a box and prepares to load the weapon. Surprisingly, he is expert with it, his fingers deft with the powder-horn and ram-rod, caressing the gun.

He glances at Cobb, who has his eyes fixed on him. Sir Timothy's expression has altered. All the uncertainty and gentleness seem to have gone, as if the touch of the weapon despatched them.

SIR TIMOTHY (almost whispering): You will talk. And I will do.

The Roped Trees

It is a couple of hours later.

A low shot through the wheels of the cart. Men are moving about in the lighted area beyond. Two figures move into shot in the foreground, walking along just inside the rope barrier; Big Jeff and another man. Jeff has the pitchfork over his shoulder, and has an ale-mug in his hand.

BIG JEFF (peering outwards): Not even the owl now. He's gone to his bed. (He finishes his ale and shakes the last drops out into the darkness, calling) - Come along, my dears - show y'selves! There's gentry here awaitin' for yer!

After a moment of silence, he giggles. He claps the other man on the shoulder, shaking with increasingly convulsive laughter.

The Clearing

Sir Timothy is looking towards the cart. Lukey Chase comes trotting back from that direction. He, too, has a mug in his hand, and

THE ROAD

a piece of bread in the other.

LUKEY: Ay, 'tis only Big Jeff foolin' about.

SIR TIMOTHY (calling): Quiet down there! (He turns) Now, Lukey, back to your place.

LUKEY: Squire, what's the use?

SIR TIMOTHY: Back, I said.

LUKEY: But already? I'm still stiff -

SIR TIMOTHY: And you, lad. (Lukey and the lad finish their ale and start for their places in the trees. Sir Timothy catches Lukey as he climbs) Lukey, can you see through the branches up there?

LUKEY: Only a little.

SIR TIMOTHY: Keep an eye on Big Jeff - I don't trust him.

Lukey nods and climbs. Sir Timothy turns, pulling an elegant little notebook from his pocket.

The meal has been eaten. Sam closes the lid on the hamper and straps it. Tetsy is drawing the last ale from a small cask. Men are wiping their mouths, putting knives back in their pockets, stretching. The air of vague expectation has thinned to boredom.

At Sir Timothy's signal, two of them pick up their staffs and make for another part of the rope barrier. Two more go to another section.

In the tree, Lukey settles and adjusts his toasting forks. He glances across at the other tree, catches the lad's eye and grimaces as he points down.

Below, Tetsy brings a refilled tankard to Cobb. He is sitting on the ground by the ruined tree. Lavinia is a yard away, balanced on a trailing branch, pouring herself another small glass from a brandy flask.

COBB: Thank you, my dear.

LAVINIA (as Tetsy goes): Would you share her?

COBB: She's got a man. She's satisfied. (He takes a gulp of ale) For the present.

She looks from him to her husband. Sir Timothy is going from plank to plank inspecting his apparatus. Thermometers and barometers have been set up alongside the jars. He is noting readings with a crayon in his book.

She looks at Cobb again. There is a compact between them now, as if he has filled his part in humiliating her husband, and has earned her promise.

LAVINIA: You were saying just now -

COBB: Mm?

LAVINIA (puzzling it out): That immorality - is what gives us pain. (Cobb nods) Then - the London wives and their lovers must suffer a great deal?

COBB (grinning): Not a bit.

LAVINIA: But surely -

COBB: They're not immoral. They're enjoying a natural virtue. What morality is there in being tied to - a dotard, for instance?

LAVINIA (softly): Or a dullard. (She laughs prettily) I begin to understand.

COBB: You've much to learn. You must learn it.

LAVINIA: Yes. I must.

THE ROAD

For a sudden, split second there is a disturbance in the air, a mere blink of sound, shrill and gone in a moment. Tetsy, who is filling a mug at the cask, drops it. She gives a wail of terror.

Sam runs to her. Her cry dies into sharp sobbing. She seems unaware even of his arms around her.

Men are scrambling to their feet. Sir Timothy comes running. Lavinia springs from her seat and starts towards the spot.

SIR TIMOTHY: That noise frightened her. She shakes her head, unable to speak.

LAVINIA: What was it?

SIR TIMOTHY: Sounded like - a shot somewhere across the valley.

SAM: No, it was here. (Pulling the girl round) All right, love. 'Tis gone now.

TETSY (looking into his face and whispering): I seen the road!

SAM: Eh!

SIR TIMOTHY: What does she say?

Tetsy turns to him, her voice gaining strength as she speaks.

TETSY: Like a lightnin' flash, I seen it! There wasn' no trees, but a huge, wide road - an' things movin' - (Clutching at Sam) Didn' you see it? (Sam shakes his head. She looks again at Sir Timothy and from him to the other men. Heads shake) Nobody?

She looks even to Lavinia, whose white face shows only distaste. But beyond her is a surprising sight. Cobb sits with his face buried in his hands. His spilled tankard lies on the grass beside him.

SIR TIMOTHY: Cobb -

He kneels by him. After a moment the heavy face is uncovered, chalk-white. The eyes look warily, slowly about.

COBB: A touch of dyspepsia. I must have eaten too quickly. Rather distressful.

TETSY: Did you see it, sir?

COBB: I - heard a curious sound.

SIR TIMOTHY: That might have been the echo of a fowling piece. A poacher somewhere.

TETSY: It was real - it was real to me! Oh, Sam -

She clings to him, shivering.

SIR TIMOTHY (to Cobb): Nothing else?

Cobb shakes his head. Sir Timothy goes briskly back to his observations.

Cobb meets Lavinia's curious eyes and manages a smile.

COBB (putting a hand to his stomach): Greed. Clear example of vice, it's so painful.

His hand stops rubbing his belly and his smile fades as he looks past her to Jethro.

The negro is regarding him with total disbelief.

A yard away, Tetsy senses the silence and turns from sheltering in Sam's arms.

TETSY (whispering): He was lyin'.

Cobb looks up at the ring of doubting faces.

JETHRO: Were you?

THE ROAD

COBB: Jethro - !

JETHRO: Were you?

COBB (pulling himself up-on one knee): I will not have you speak so -

JETHRO: Here in this place, I can! I am not real to you, am I? I'm something you made, not a man. But the man is speaking to you now! Mr Cobb, you have a great mind, but there are too many things it won't admit - troubling, odd, hid-away, mean things - even in yourself. Yes, listen to me! They'll rise up and spoil your grand design - you can't talk them away and make a new world just with words - not even all your words, Mr Cobb -

There is a wild jangling and clashing from the rope barrier.

The Roped Trees

Near the cart, bells and coils of rusty iron are jumping and clanking on the rope. Sam and one or two other men come running. They can see no cause.

The Clearing

Sir Timothy pauses only to grab the loaded blunderbuss before running after Sam and the others. Jethro glances at Cobb, picks up a lantern and goes too.

Lavinia looks at Cobb. He is breathing fast, all complacency gone.

The Roped Trees

A long shot across a different section of the rope barrier. Sir Timothy and Jethro join the other searchers. The rope in the foreground is undisturbed. But now something creeps towards it from outside. A pitchfork.

It tweaks the rope deftly and sharply, then whips out of sight. The cowbell and scraps of harness on the rope are set jangling.

JETHRO (pointing): There!

The men come running, Sir Timothy in the lead with his blunderbuss. The others have their staffs and rakes at the ready. As they peer about, there is growing alarm in their faces.

From the silhouetted shape of a tree in the foreground outside the rope - something projects. The end of a pitchfork. A man's head follows it, watching them go.

Jethro suddenly turns, flashing the lantern round. Before the head can withdraw, he has seen it.

JETHRO (shouting): It's Jeff! Behind that tree.

They turn quickly back. The big man springs out into the lamplight, roaring with laughter.

BIG JEFF: How's that for a spook? You should'a seen your faces!

His wild laughter is cut off by a thunderous boom from the blunderbuss.

Sir Timothy has fired over his head. Jeff cringes, white and silent before the suddenly fierce figure glaring at him across the rope. Smoke drifts from the gun's wide muzzle. Leaves and twigs scatter down.

SIR TIMOTHY: Throw your fork down. (Jeff does so) Now get back to the village and stay there. If I see you again, you'll get this through your middle. Big Jeff stands a moment more, then twists round and bolts, crashing and blundering through the bushes. As they turn back, Lavinia comes running.

LAVINIA: What was it?

SIR TIMOTHY: Big Jeff. I frightened him off home.

LAVINIA: Oh. I thought you'd - killed -

She breaks off. He watches her.

THE ROAD

JETHRO: Why should he do it, sir?

SIR TIMOTHY: He's a simpleton.

LAVINIA: Did he cause - the other?

SIR TIMOTHY (after a moment): No.

JETHRO: D'you still think it was a shot?

He gets no reply.

The Clearing

Cobb is standing with a staff in his hand, close to Tetsy as if ready to defend the girl. He feels obliged to explain the weapon as the others return. He tosses it down.

COBB: She was frightened.

Sir Timothy passes the gun to Sam.

SIR TIMOTHY: Reload this.

And while Sam finds the powder horn, he returns to his observations. Tetsy has not moved. Her eyes go to Cobb again.

TETSY (quietly): You seen it like I did.

Cobb gives her an odd look, as if she is mad. He takes out his snuffbox with deliberation, turning to Lavinia.

COBB: How much longer - are we to share this midnight party for the yokels?

Lavinia's eyes are on his hands. They are trembling. He forces himself to open the silver box without spilling the contents. He clicks it shut and takes a great sniff.

Sir Timothy frowns at one of his thermometers. He checks the previous reading in his notebook, then notes the new one with his crayon. He hurries to the next lighted plank with its jars and instruments. What he sees there leaves him in no doubt.

He turns to find Jethro at his elbow.

SIR TIMOTHY: The thermometers - they've gone down by seven Fahrenheit degrees! In these last few minutes. (He makes for his wife and Cobb) - Have you noticed the air temperature? It's dropped.

LAVINIA: Yes.

She shivers and pulls her cloak round her.

COBB: Normal at this time of night, surely? Out here in the open -

SIR TIMOTHY: It's not normal.

He darts across the clearing to where another thermometer is set up. The results are the same. He scribbles in his notebook. Cobb stays close behind him.

COBB: Sir - are you bent on spreading alarm? Not only to the women -

SIR TIMOTHY: The barometer's down too. All in the past five minutes.

COBB: You'll have these simple men in terror. I appeal to you, squire, not to submit to superstition -

SIR TIMOTHY: Quiet!

He makes for the planks where the electrical apparatus is set out.

THE ROAD

COBB (staying with him): I don't think you've the smallest idea what you're doing - !

SIR TIMOTHY: I'm setting down facts! Even if I don't know what I'm doing - if I make these readings for all the wrong reasons - there's no doubt about them! If I don't find out their meaning, someone else will. They'll take this notebook as I've taken other men's - and they'll read it and use it! It will be there to use!

He crouches over the Leyden Jars. Cobb stares at him, momentarily baffled.

COBB: That - humility again. (As the implications begin to reach him, he draws back, suddenly and strangely appalled) - Selfless. Aimless. Mindless. Why do I suddenly find danger in it? (He starts back towards the middle of the clearing) Yes, danger - danger - !

The camera pans from him to a couple of men on watch by the rope. They turn back to look out into the darkness.

COBB (joining Lavinia): Make sure you despise him for the right reasons. (She frowns) He is ruthless in his way.

LAVINIA: Timothy!

COBB (seized with insight): One of a blind, mad pack! They will do things!

LAVINIA: What do you mean?

COBB (coming to himself): Let us leave this place. (She shakes her head, watching him) Why not? (She says nothing) I'm afraid now. You know that.

LAVINIA: Yes.

COBB: And you want to watch it.

She says nothing. The camera pans from them to where Sam is wiping down the reloaded blunderbuss with a greasy rag. Tetsy is at his side. Jethro sits without expression. In the tree above, Lukey is cramped and watchful. He stretches.

At the rope barrier, a man joins two of the others and they crouch, listening.

The camera pans to Sir Timothy. He is just rising from his observations when he freezes at a small, sharp sound. It lasts perhaps two seconds, distant and uncanny, a fragment of a shrill wail.

Sam is instantly on his feet, the gun raised. Above in the tree, Lukey stares about in alarm, grabbing at the trunk.

Lavinia is looking to Cobb when her husband hurries across and grabs Sam by the arm.

SIR TIMOTHY: Was that like the sounds you heard?

SAM: Yes, I - think so -

Cobb steps forward, fighting to maintain his composure. His voice has a shake in it.

COBB: This is where we must take a grip on our senses. Whatever this be, it is of the world we inhabit. We can understand it if we seek a profoundly natural -

This time the distant wail lasts a fraction longer, three or four seconds. And there are other, more staccato, sounds superimposed on it.

SAM (pointing): Far away yonder! That's where it started before -

COBB: Quiet, lad.

There is a blast of sound in the very clearing. Again it cuts in sharply, but this is a terrible medley of noises, of deafening loudness. It lasts only a second or so. Then it cuts again.

Lavinia clings to Cobb in terror. All round the clearing the men are shouting out their alarm. The lad comes tumbling down from his tree almost at Sir Timothy's feet.

The squire brushes aside the shuddering lad and crouches by his precious apparatus on the nearest plank. Sweat is streaming

THE ROAD

down his face.

Cobb looks jerkily about, his heavy face loose. Sam has dropped the gun. One arm is round Tetsy, his other hand creeps to the hidden talisman within his jerkin.

In the tree, Lukey has stuck to his post.

LUKEY (shouting down): Squire! Squire!

Below, Sir Timothy is at the electrical apparatus. He yells back.

SIR TIMOTHY: Stay where you are!

The tiny gold leaves of the electroscope are moving, opening and closing as a charge reaches them through the wire. Sparks flicker between two brass knobs.

The distant sounds come again - and again - in short, irregular bursts. From now on they do not cease. Sir Timothy sits back on his haunches, watched by fearful men nearby. He wipes his sleeve across his streaming face and turns again to his notes.

Lavinia looks to Cobb with a desperate trustfulness.

LAVINIA: Say what this is! I know you can! You must.

But he has no comfort for her. He shakes his head, looking vaguely about - and encounters Tetsy's eyes fixed on him across Sam's shoulder. He frees himself from Lavinia and calls to her.

COBB: Do you see anything?

TETSY: No - not now.

COBB: Nor I.

Sam turns.

SAM: Now you believe me!

Cobb looks round the clearing in a wave of demoralisation. The distant sounds go on - and for the first time it is possible to read some meaning into them.

Nothing that Cobb can understand, as his expression shows - but to listeners of two centuries later, the sounds would be hideously significant.

As they blend more and more it is just possible to discern the rising and falling of numerous air-attack sirens at a considerable distance. Unsynchronised, they tend to merge into a single wavering throb, but even that is unmistakably evocative. Superimposed on it are small, sharper sounds - distant car horns in frantic chorus.

Two men on watch suddenly throw down their staffs and run across the clearing past Cobb. One ducks under the ropes and is away. The other gets tangled. Bells ring and clatter.

SIR TIMOTHY: Stop them! You there - come back! I need you -

But the men are gone, and the others are on the brink of doing the same.

The second, far louder, type of sound breaks out again - at first in half a dozen rapid, fragmentary blips, then slowing to irregular bursts that last three or four seconds each. The sheer volume of sound is terrifying. It shatters those in the clearing. More men run off.

Glass jars are kicked aside, smashed by running feet. The rope itself is trampled down. A man stumbles through Sir Timothy's electrical apparatus, dragging wires, scattering Leyden Jars.

Lukey Chase lets go his toasting forks and slithers down through the branches.

Below, Sir Timothy runs from hopelessly trampled apparatus to the next position. There is dread in his face, but he manages to concentrate enough to get the lids on to the jars.

THE ROAD

Lukey tumbles to the ground behind him and is about to run after the other men when he sees the squire. He rushes across and grabs him by the shoulder.

LUKEY: Quick, sir - get out of this!

But Sir Timothy shakes him off wildly. Lukey shrinks as another clap of sound strikes, and runs for his life.

He bolts past Sam, on his knees now and still holding on to the terrified Tetsy.

SAM: Hear the road now! Hear them running there!

The intermittent bursts of the louder sound are blending into a single roar. And picked out in it, as if close at hand, is the particular sound of running feet on concrete, of many feet, moving fast.

Sam suddenly makes a plunge for the gun and stands up facing the unseen runners.

SAM: Stop, you - devils or whatever you be! Hold or I'll shoot! Hold, will ye!

But the noises crash on, and in another moment Sam's gesture is over. He drops to the ground in abandonment to mortal terror. Tetsy crawls over to him, looking to the others in desperate appeal.

Lavinia is crouching by the fallen tree. Her cloak has slipped off and she is shaking with cold and terror, her arms crossed across her breasts. Cobb is on his feet but seems to be supporting himself against the shattered trunk as if he has lost the power to move.

Suddenly Lavinia starts forward, hands over her ears to keep the battering noises out until she reaches safety. She runs only a few paces before tumbling, tripped by a root. As if the fall frees some paralysed mechanism in her, she starts to scream.

She finds herself lifted, turned about, and looks into the face of the negro.

LAVINIA: Save me! Oh, save me!

But he glances round at the others who are equally helpless. He tugs off his livery coat and throws it over the shuddering woman - Cobb stands rigid, hypnotised by the experience.

The running footsteps seem to have passed. And the huge formless roaring that lay behind them has sharpened in its turn - to the engines of innumerable cars. It is as if they are roaring through this very clearing in hundreds. A burst of angry hooting in the distance is echoed by horns close at hand as they scream by.

Jethro is tugging at Cobb's arm.

COBB (resisting): No -

JETHRO: Come quick, sir -

COBB: Listen! It's machines!

JETHRO: Please -

COBB: Machines, Jethro, great machines! This can be nothing of the past!

JETHRO: Master -

COBB: I must hear! Leave me!

He shakes off the servant's grip, clings again to the trunk for support as Jethro goes.

The noises are almost continuous now, and changing their nature. Brakes scream, horns blare close at hand. A rending crash is followed by a rapid series of metallic crunches, as if cars have piled together. Women scream, men shout. There is a brutal revving of engines as if in the worst, most frantic traffic jam of all time. More and more voices are shouting, at first unintelligibly. Car doors are slammed. There are more footsteps ringing out on the concrete.

Sir Timothy totters to the middle of the clearing with his notebook still in his hand. Cobb has not moved.

THE ROAD

Sam, flat on the ground with Tetsy at his side, draws the twig cross out of his jerkin and holds it before the shaking girl.

Lavinia is lying where she fell, hiding under the negro's discarded livery with her hands clamped on her ears. Jethro is nearby. He is bare to the waist, on his knees facing the direction from which the noises first came. He has drawn two spindly saplings together across the track and is fumbling to tie them with a strip of livery braid. He mumbles to himself, half-remembered words from the past. His eyes are squeezed shut as if he is trying to close his mind against the noise.

The camera pans to the ground, to the raw, trodden leaf mould. The strangely blurred voices of the unseen people are clearer, sharp with fear.

VOICES: Get out of it! Get back there! Where's the police? Get out of the way! Get back! Back up there! Drive into them! Go on, that'll shift 'em! It's a pile-up, can't you see! It's hopeless! They're all shunted up! Dozens of 'em...

WOMAN ONE: Oh God, oh God, oh God - !

MAN ONE (almost sobbing): Clear it, make them clear it!

MAN TWO: All lanes blocked - it's hopeless!

WOMAN TWO: More to the side there, quick! On to the hard shoulder -

MAN TWO: It's no use!

WOMAN TWO: They're all doing it!

MAN TWO: No bloody use -

WOMAN TWO: Quick, before he does!

MAN TWO: It's all blocked solid.

MAN ONE: That crash did it. If it hadn't been for that -

WOMAN ONE: Oh God, oh God, oh God -

MAN ONE (bellowing): Let us through! For Christ's sake let us through!

MAN THREE: Out of the car - quick!

WOMAN THREE: What's the use? It must be time -

MAN THREE: Come on, kids! All out, quick!

WOMAN THREE: They said four minutes! It must be about that -

MAN THREE: Quick, I said!

WOMAN THREE: Oh, Charlie -

MAN THREE: Now we're going for a run - first to reach the signboard gets a shilling -

WOMAN ONE: Oh God, oh God, oh God -

MAN ONE: We can crawl across the bonnets!

MAN THREE: Run like hell! Run, damn you, run!

WOMAN ONE: Oh God, oh God - !

She slurs into helpless sobbing.

MAN TWO: Four minutes, it's far more than that now -

THE ROAD

MAN ONE: What's the time, then?

MAN TWO: Far more than four minutes -

WOMAN TWO: P'raps it's not going to - p'raps it won't - p'raps it's all a mistake -

She goes off into hysterical laughter.

The voices blur again, yelling, arguing and simply gibbering with helpless fright.
Close shot of Cobb. He gives a sudden moan, a curious formless cry at the impact of a sensation too great to bear.

COBB: Oh, there -

Tetsy, on the ground, covers her eyes even from the rough cross. As Sir Timothy drags himself towards the fallen tree:

COBB: I can see them! I can see the road!

Appalled, he stares along the leafy space of the clearing.

SIR TIMOTHY: What are they?

COBB (vaguely): People -

The voices sharpen again.

WOMAN TWO: Why don't they come! I want them to come! I want the rockets!

CHILD: What rockets! Daddy, what rockets?

MAN FOUR: Shut up!

WOMAN TWO: Send them quick! Send the rockets quick! Get it over - get it over!

Cobb rubs a hand hard across his eyes.

COBB: I can't see - it's gone again -

SIR TIMOTHY: They said - "rockets" -

A wide shot of the clearing with its few crouching figures, as the sounds and voices go on. The traffic roar has died away. Instead, there is a huge, murmurous lull. A few voices, far off, are singing a hymn.

Car doors slam in increasing numbers and the walking feet move rapidly, between the unseen halted vehicles.

Close shot of the ground, all grass and earth, with Sam's shaking hand in frame clutching his twig cross. The footsteps clatter only a few feet away, and voices are clear and close.

MAN FOUR: Quicker! Quicker, darling - gimme the baby!

WOMAN FOUR: Can you manage?

MAN FOUR: I can manage another! Now then - (Roars) Ronnie!

WOMAN FOUR: Ronnie, hold on to Sue's hand! Keep together among the cars!

CHILD: We're walking on the motorway!

WOMAN FOUR (with dreadful, anguished firmness): That's right. Walking on the motorway. Isn't that a funny thing? Because you're not supposed ever -

Wide shot of clearing.

The individual voices are lost in an extraordinary human sound. A vast anguish that seems to start far off along the motorway and sweep it along, growing. A multitude in total desolation.

THE ROAD

The camera cranes slowly towards Cobb.

COBB (crying out): I see them! All - !

The wail dies slowly. Only a few tiny, sporadic sounds - a dog barking, babies crying, a bell - break the relative quiet. The camera reaches close shot of Cobb and halts as a thunderous nuclear roar crashes out from an explosion perhaps twenty miles away.

Cobb convulses at what he sees. The camera cranes in closer and closer as -

Demoralised, random cries break out again, close at hand. A woman screams in short, sharp barks. A man's voice is shouting in hysterical relief:

MAN: They missed us! We're all right, we're all right -

The camera is tight on Cobb's staring eyes.

All sound cuts dead.

Cobb's eyes squeeze shut. He claps his fingers upon them, as if to crush the eyeballs and destroy the sight in them. And the colossal sound of a thermonuclear blast wave, sweeping outwards from the point of impact, thunders out and spreads and fades.

A low, wide shot of the clearing. For some seconds there is hardly a movement. Jethro, his bare torso glistening with sweat, looks fearfully round from the crossed Obeah branches. Lavinia lies there with one fragile hand extended to clutch the charm like a drowning creature. Her eyes flutter open.

Cobb is on his feet, shuffling forward in tiny steps. He takes his hands from his eyes at first fearfully. His face has curiously collapsed. He stares straight before him.

SIR TIMOTHY (at his side): What did you see? Who were they? You did see - tell me! Tell me!

Cobb nods almost imperceptibly.

SIR TIMOTHY: I must know!

Cobb nods on. There is a sound at their feet like an animal worrying. It is Sam, his face distorted as he rocks the limp shape of the girl.

SAM: She's dead! I felt her heart burst!

LAVINIA: Dead -

JETHRO (whispering): She saw too -

They move towards Sam and the body he holds. Sir Timothy is crouching there, opening the girl's eyelids for a sign of life.

Cobb hardly notices one more after so many. His face is vacant, gentle, vulnerable. He drops to his knees and remains there without moving. Jethro looks round and comes to him in concern. He puts a hand on Cobb's shoulder.

JETHRO: Master.

Cobb hardly turns. But it is as if the familiar voice restores some habit of thinking. And consciousness returns to his eyes. He puts a hand to the ground and brings it up full of leaf mould. He shows this to Jethro, scattering it through his fingers.

COBB: Yet some day men will come here and make a great road through these very woods - a road -

His face shakes into a grotesque mask. His body is racked with great tearing sobs that tail slowly into a low howl of utter despair.

The camera cranes away to a wide, high shot of the clearing.