

RAGTOWN SCRIPT SAMPLE

SYNOPSIS-

“May 2, 1931. The Tierney family, recent Irish immigrants from Kilkenny, find themselves in the harsh Nevada desert waiting for work on the famed Boulder (later re-named Hoover) Dam. To increase their chances, they decide to take the dangerous journey from Las Vegas to “Ragtown,” a famed shantytown on the bank of the Colorado River erected to house over a thousand workers and their families. Ennis Tierney, a physician by trade, meets Harry “Tex” Merrill, the “go to guy” for the International Workers of the World. In order to insure his spot on the dam, Ennis joins the wobblies, much to the distain of his eighteen year old son, Brodan. Fear of devastating pay-cuts for the workers is soon a reality and the union decides to organize a strike. Brodan is approached by Bud Dawson, a United State’s Marshall, and is made an offer to insure the strike does not happen. Tex is the only one who knows the name of the union organizer. If Brodan finds this man’s name and turns it over, his family will be given a real home in Boulder City and his father will be given his own clinic. Brodan becomes taken with Helen, Tex’s young and haunted wife, and is able to procure the name of the Wobbly organizer with her help. As the strike approaches, the desperation increases, and Brodan finds himself torn between his father’s wishes, his own desires, and the future of the thousands of workers on Boulder Dam.”

CHARACTERS

BRODAN TIERNEY- 18. Stubborn, prideful, pragmatic, and outspoken. Son of Ennis and Cliona. Speaks in a strong Irish dialect (Kilkenny).

ENNIS TIERNEY- 45. An Irish immigrant. Physician by trade. Strong willed. An idealistic dreamer. Irish dialect (Kilkenny).

CLIONA TIERNEY- 41. Wife of Ennis. Soft spoken but firm. Does not mince words. A Christian Scientist. Irish dialect (Kilkenny)

KEEGAN TIERNEY- 16. Impulsive, untamed, and beautiful. Irish dialect (Kilkenny) .

HARRY "TEX" MERRIL- 44. A very large and jolly man with a rarely seen, though quite intense, temper. A West Texas drawl.

HELEN MERRIL- 25. Second wife of Tex. She is a desert cactus; beautiful to look at, painful to touch. Southern drawl. Her speech is slow and purposeful.

NORMAN "SHOE" HAGGLAND- 24. Wild and unpredictable. Always looking for a way to prove himself.

BUD DAWSON- 45. United States Marshall. Jovial.

TIME- May 2, 1931-May 2, 1935.

PLACE- In and around Ragtown, a small shantytown of just over 1,000 residents, housing the workers and hopeful workers of the Boulder Dam project.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(May 2, 1935. Late Night. A brush covered cliff overlooking Lake Mead in Southern Nevada. Beneath the water of this reservoir created by the Boulder Dam, (Later re-named Hoover Dam) sits the remains of Williamsville, or “Ragtown”, a shantytown that once housed over a thousand workers and prospective workers. There is a howling wind as the lights slowly come up on BRODAN who is playing a harmonica. He wears a beaten hat, a pair of wrinkled trousers, a corduroy jacket, a necktie that has seen better days, and a pair of work boots. He carries a small suitcase. The wind dies down. BRODAN pockets the harmonica. He speaks)

BRODAN

The moon hangs itself high this night. High over the desert filth and mucky red water that rests heavy on the place and souls I come to love. Tis a place that has since been all but forgotten. But those of us who lived there...the whole lot of us fools and dreamers...we'll ne'er be having the blessing of forgetting.

(He sets down a suitcase and sits on it. He pulls out a tobacco pouch and rolling paper. He begins to roll a cigarette.)

Tis late night, May 2, 1935. Four years to the day when me family arrived in this canyon. Looking over this very cliff, right down there a bit, a man could see the shadow of a craggy old road that wined its way to the base of Hemenway Wash. On the Northern part of the slope, just a skip up the Colorado River from the site of Boulder Dam, sat a ragged shantytown. If'n ye were hard up enough fer work—which was damn near all of America—and if ye were dull enough in the brain, and if ye had a push cart in front of ye to carry yer bollocks, ye packed up what little ye had the gumption to carry and got here any way ye could. Nevada, the desert, the dam...home. Of course we ne'er called it home. We be calling it hell, the devils dubby, the hottest goddamn place on earth...but ne'er home.

(he lights the cigarette. He takes off his jacket and places it in his suitcase, revealing a collared shirt. He takes off the hat and holds it in his hands. The wind picks up again. He listens.)

They say that if ye be listening closely, if ye let the wind pass by yer ear for long enough, ye can hear them...the voices of ghosts...ghosts of the workers, ghosts of their families and friends, ghosts of their loved ones, ghosts of dreams ne'er come to be. These be the ghosts...of Ragtown.

(The lights slowly change)

END ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

(Late Night. May 2, 1931. The same cliff, though distant lights; campfires and lanterns, can now be seen down the slope. Enter KEEGAN. She sneaks up on BRODAN)

KEEGAN

Don't fall Brodie!

BRODAN

Tis right near a hundred meters down Keegan! Don't scare a man like that!

KEEGAN

Pap says to come back up and help him change the wheel.

BRODAN

Tell him I says the wheel can wait a spell. I'm having a quick peep.

KEEGAN

Tell him yer self ye lousy dewdropper. Yer off yer nut smoking a fag down here. Mam'll burst a vein if she be catching ye.

BRODAN

Good for her.

KEEGAN

Roll us a ciggie, will ye?

BRODAN

Alls I got left is shake.

KEEGAN

Fine, I'll smoke a shaky fag. Come on then, butt me.

(He begins to roll her a cigarette. She looks over the edge)

Is that where we're going to be living Brodie?

BRODAN

I imagine so, aye.

KEEGAN

Ye think tis a big shite hole in the light?

BRODAN

Watch yer mouth. Those be no words for a lady.

KEEGAN

Well this be no place for a lady either. Dandy thing I'm not a lady, eh?

BRODAN

If ye want to fit in with the rest of em', you better start acting like a lady, like one of them dolled up Hollywood quiffs.

KEEGAN

(jumping from boulder to boulder)

Certainly. But, why be like them says I? I figure tis better to be a shark in a tank full o' yellow gills, eh? The lasses o'er here, they be refined and civilized. Coy as foxes they be. "I beg your pardon," this, and "Oh, you are such a lovely person" that. Makes me want to heave me eats.

BRODAN

Yer a truly refined American girl.

KEEGAN

(looking over the edge again)

It don't look so bad, do it?

BRODAN

It don't look so bad? Ye can't be seeing a ting save for them lights. It sure don't look like no bustling city, like no New York or Dublin do it now?

ENNIS

(from offstage)

Brodan! Get up here son!

KEEGAN

Ye better go and have a word with pap Brodie, or he'll off and whallop your arse.

BRODAN

What'n the hell are we doing in the mid of the desert Keegan?

KEEGAN

Waitin' for work.

BRODAN

That be all we ever do. Wait, wait, wait.

(pause)

A dam...in the mid of the desert? What wet sock thought up an idea like that?

KEEGAN

Tis a loony venture, ye think?

BRODAN

Tis.

KEEGAN

(smoking and kicking at the dirt)

Mam says there be rattlers in them rocks and bushes. Ye think so Brodie?

BRODAN

Wouldn't know?

KEEGAN

Mam says there be rattlers and spidies and even scorpions. We read about those back in Kilkenny. They got wee stingers on their rears, and if ye be stepping on them, they be sticking ye in yer dogs and ankles, turn yer gams green as a shamrock. I wouldn't mind seeing me a scorpion or two. Or even a rattler.

BRODAN

Well, if ye do be seeing one, don't be touching it, aye?

KEEGAN

Don't tell me what me business is. Yer not me pappy Brodie.
(Brodan puts Keegan in an arm hold)

BRODAN

Aye?!

KEEGAN

Aye! Aye!

(He lets her loose)

Ye got a hold like rabid mutt ye do!

BRODAN

I aren't pap, true. But I am yer brother, and I am older than ye, and I sure as shite don't want to be burying me only sissy under a bloody cactus.

CLIONA

(from offstage)

Brodan! Yer father told ye to come! Do as yer told!

BRODAN

Don't bite me head off! I'll be up in a moment!

KEEGAN

Tis windy up here. The sand be getting in me eyes.

BRODAN

Here, take pap's hat.

KEEGAN

Ye must feel like the King of England, wearing pap's hat like that. His favorite hat at that.

BRODAN

That I do miss, that I do. And as my first act of kingship, I appoint you as honorary Queen.

KEEGAN

What's the Queen do?

BRODAN

Shuts her hole.

KEEGAN

Shut this ye bloody wanker!

(She jumps on his back. They wrestle and laugh. A rustling comes from behind a patch of brush)

KEEGAN

What was that?

BRODAN

Probably one of yer rattlers ye been going on about.

KEEGAN

Ye think?

BRODAN

No.

(More rustling. Much louder this time)

Sounds far too big to be some rattlin serpent.

KEEGAN

Maybe we should be getting on?

BRODAN

I think yer right. Come on then.

(They turn to leave. From behind a large boulder jumps TEX MERRIL and NORMAN "SHOE" HAGGLAND, both holding pistols.)

TEX

GOT YA!

(They turn around and run the other way. From behind the brush jumps BUD DAWSON, carrying a shotgun)

BUD

Don't move you sons of bitches! Put your hands in the air!
(KEEGAN makes a run for it but is tackled by SHOE)

KEEGAN

Bloody hell! Get off!
(BRODAN tackles SHOE. BUD hits BRODAN in the head with the butt of his rifle)

BUD

Don't make me shoot ya! Where's the loot?

KEEGAN

Pap! Pap!

SHOE

It's a gal! Imagine that! We got us a lady booter!

BUD

I aint got all night to be futzing around with a couple thieving varnish runners. We know all about your late night trips to the juice joints in Las Vegas. Come on now, hand it over.

BRODAN

(holding his head)

Hand what over? We got nothin'!

BUD

Bud Dawson, United States Marshall. Give me the booze!

BRODAN

We don't got no booze!

TEX

That's a ruse if I ever heard one. Shoot 'em both Bud.

BRODAN

Leave me sissy be! Don't ye dare hurt her!
(enter ENNIS quickly)

ENNIS

What'n the bloody hell's goin' on down here?

SHOE

There's another one! Get him!

(SHOE attempts to tackle ENNIS, who side steps him and puts him in to the dirt face first)

ENNIS

We're not lookin' for no fight! Jest come searchin' for work is all. Please, don't hurt me wee ones.

BUD

You aint no bootleggers?

BRODAN

Don't even know what a bloody bootlegger is!

BUD

Huh.

(pause)

Shit on a stick. No juice boys. Sorry to drag you all the way up here for nothing.
(enter CLIONA who is limping)

CLIONA

Lord Jesus! Are ye okay son!?

BUD

Ahh hell. My apologies folks. We got bootleggers running illegal gin mills all around these parts. Neighboring canyons and caves are full of 'em.

ENNIS

(offering a hand to SHOE)

Sorry 'bout that. Acting in defense is all.

SHOE

I don't need your help.

CLIONA

Why do ye smell like a ciggy Brodan?

BRODAN

Ciggy? Uh...tis a good story really. Tell her Keegan.

KEEGAN

Brodie made me smoke it mam.

BRODAN

Ye lying shite!

CLIONA

Bite yer tongue Brodan!

BUD

Ya look like ya got a mighty tender ankle there ma'am. Anything I can do for ya?

CLIONA

No, thank ye sir. I had me a bit of a fall on the way down. Jest twisted a little.

TEX

Where you folks coming from?

ENNIS

Las Vegas. Been waiting there for work for some months now. Decided not yesterday to take our chances nearer the dam site. Not but half a stones throw from Williamsville and the bloody flivver breaks down. Busted three wheels trying to get here.

TEX

Yes sir, an automobile in Nevada's bout near as useful as tits on a bull.

ENNIS

Ennis Tierney.

BUD

Bud Dawson, United States Marshall.

SHOE

Norman Haggland. Everyone around here calls me Shoe.

TEX

Harry Merril, go by Tex. Hell of a pleasure. Sorry for the fright.

ENNIS

This be me wife, Cliona. Them two kippers there, that be me son Brodan and me daughter Keegan. Good kids. Don't look it, but they're good kids.

(BUD pulls out a flask and drinks)

BUD

You boys need a pull?

(TEX takes the flask and swigs)

KEEGAN

So ye bust the bootleggers for making and selling the stuff, but ye be drinking the hooch anyway do ye? Rather a hypocrites work aint it?

CLIONA

Keegan, hush.

BUD

Looky here! If'n I can provide a little comfort for the citizens of Ragtown miss, I'll be sure to do so. There's nothing eases the pain of sunburn quite like a drop of coffin varnish or squirrel whiskey.

BRODAN

That be the noblest thing I e'er heard in me life!

KEEGAN

The Robin Hood of Nevada this man!

ENNIS

Don't mind these two Marshall. They got mouths like a pair of dock jockeys they do. Ye say the folks of Ragtown? I think we be lost. Looking for Williamsville we were.

TEX

Right down there. Williamsville in all its glory.

SHOE

Folks round here don't call it Williamsville. They go by Ragtown.

CLIONA

Why Ragtown?

TEX

Wait until daybreak. You'll see.

BUD

How long you folks been in the states?

ENNIS

Moved me family from Kilkenny not but two years ago in July. Come to New York to work as a physician. That be me trade. Not here but two months, the market falls and all hell breaks loose. But all that be behind us now. Here we are, in Nevada, ready to work. Right boy?

BRODAN

Aye.

ENNIS

All the talk in Las Vegas says a man and his family do better near the dam. That so?

TEX

You a union man?

ENNIS

Never had much use for a union before, no sir.

TEX

Ya want work on the dam, I suggest ya join up. Certain folk help certain other folk when they know they're brothers, blood, ya understand?

SHOE

Work's hard enough as is without having to worry about keeping it.

TEX

Ya can't let the higher ups know, of course. The second they find out a man's organized, they get to shaking in their boots. Frank Sparrow, the big boss, he'd sooner fire ya than look at ya if he knew ya joined the wobblies.

SHOE

That snoop is always sending spies down to the camps, trying to get the lead.

TEX

Only thing worse than a scab is a Pinkerton, that's for damn sure. Whatever happened to that last feller he sent our way Shoe? What was his name? Bo, was it?

SHOE

Yeah, whatever happened to poor old Bo?
(TEX smiles widely)

BUD

Dangerous line these boys walk. You don't need to be in no union to get work.

SHOE

You do if you don't want those snakes cutting you and hiring someone else for a dollar less. Do it all the time. All the talk says they'll be cutting again soon.

TEX

It just so happens I know a man, *the* man, good fella, real steady sort. Man's got ties out west in San Jose, back East in New York and Boston, knows all the big players in the unions. Ya lend us your support, I'd be more than happy to put in a pleasant word or two for ya.

ENNIS

Whatever gets me work, aye, I'll be doing it. What be this man's name? Where do I find him?

TEX

Ya don't. No one knows his name but me. He gives me the word, I spread it.

SHOE

If the suits found him out...well...most of us would be done for.

ENNIS

I thank ye kindly for the offer.

BRODAN

Not even on the job yet and yer already talkin' revolution.

(ENNIS gives BRODAN a hard look)

SHOE

You don't want to be no mud pig mucker like Tex. Come flying with the big boys, that's the ticket.

TEX

Shit. Shoe here's a rock crawler, a high scaler. Hangs off the cliffs, pries loose rock off the walls with a jimmy bar. Man's got a death wish worse'n a stud with no pecker.

SHOE

Better to fly than to haul, that's what I always say.

ENNIS

I'll be taking whatever work comes me way. And what about the boy?

BUD

My regrets. Six companies and the great state of Nevada only allow one worker per family on the dam site. Too many folks are waiting for work to give out more than one card to a family. Wouldn't be fair.

BRODAN

"Let's go to the states!" ye say, "There's opportunity" ye tell us. What kind of opportunity do ye see around here?

ENNIS

That's enough son.

(Brodan turns his back on the others, looking out over the night)

TEX

Well hell, no use staying up here all night long. Let's get ya folks settled in. There's a nice patch of earth next to my home you're welcome to. I reckon my wife Helen could rustle up a pot of stew to fill them gullets. You'll take a quick liking to her Ma'am, she's a healthy girl.

ENNIS

We'll pay for the meal. I insist. Don't have much, but—

TEX

It's on me tonight. We'll get ya a living situation erected by the end of the week. Scrap together some powder boxes and old gas cans, you'll have yourself a beauty of a palace. Earl Walters— that's the proprietor of the general store—Earl makes his rounds early in the morning. I reckon he'll open an account for ya.

SHOE

Can you make it down the wash ma'am? I'd be happy to help you.

CLIONA

No, thank ye. I'll be fine on me own.

BUD

Well, how bout we have a look at that ankle when we get down there?

CLIONA

Whatever healing I be needing, the good lord does provide it. And if he sees fit that I should limp for the rest of me years, so be it.

(Cliona exits)

ENNIS

Cliona don't be taking any traditional healing. She's a praying woman, always been. Thinks the lord heals through the hands.

SHOE

Well don't that just beat all. A doctor married to a faith healer. That's like a...a cat married to a dog or something.

KEEGAN

Near quick-witted as a retarded snail, aint ye?

TEX

That's Shoe alright!

KEEGAN

Why do they call ye Shoe? Ye got a tongue made of leather?

SHOE

I was swinging on the rocks one day, prying this, blasting that...all a sudden, my damn shoe fell right off my foot. Fell clear down to the bottom of the canyon, hit the shift boss smack on the head. Knocked him clean out. Ever since, well...the name stuck. Shoe. Would you like to come watch me high scale some day miss?

KEEGAN

I'd rather remove me organs with a dull knife, but thanks for the offer...Shoe.
(she winks at SHOE)

ENNIS

Keegan. Go up the path and help yer mam.

KEEGAN

A wee tip for ye Shoe...get yerself some laces.
(she exits)

TEX

Well, no use sitting around here. Let's put some spine in it boys. Those things aint gonna move themselves.
(TEX, BUD and SHOE exit up the path)

ENNIS

Brodie...Nevada's a...well, it's a new land. It's going to take a wee bit of getting used to, no doubt about that. But we will. Tings'll right themselves.

BRODAN

And if they don't?

ENNIS

Then...well, then...we won't think about that, will we now? No use thinking bout that sort of thing.

BRODAN

That's the problem pap! Ye never think about anything before ye do it! Kilkenny was our home! Life was fine in Kilkenny! But ye would not budge, ye would not let her take the due penalty, and now we're in the middle of a big fekking canyon, in the middle of a big fekking sand patch, in the middle of a big fekking backward country that don't know it's mouth from it's arsehole!

(silence. Brodan throws the hat at his father, picks up his suitcases and exits up the path. Ennis looks out over the night sky, as the lights fade)