

THE PERFECT MAN

by

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BLACK.

The rising SOUND of an unruly, jeering AUDIENCE.

**INT. ROYAL AQUARIUM – LONDON – NIGHT**

TITLE: *'The Music Hall, Royal Aquarium. London, England. 1889.'*

Enter EUGEN SANDOW, 22, center-stage, clothed in fine gentleman's attire: suit, waistcoat, top hat. His skin is soft with a pale hue, his expression gentle with child-like serenity.

He is poised to face his challenger, the bull-necked FRANZ BIENKOWSKI (alias 'CYCLOPS THE STRONGMAN'), 19.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (O.S.)

My Lords, please welcome to the stage the magnificent Sandow, and the formidable Cyclops! Each strongman will pit himself against the other in various feats of strength to determine who is, truly, the strongest man in the world!

The opponents occupy an opulent stage.

Hundreds of SPECTATORS heckle and mock Sandow.

Unnerved, Sandow removes a torn playing card from his pocket, gazes at it for a moment, then returns it.

In one graceful move, he effortlessly tears his shirt and trousers from his body, revealing a perfectly toned, statuesque physique. His muscles flex and bulge under his skin like the gnarled roots of an oak tree.

The audience is hushed.

Silence. Anticipation. Sandow takes a deep breath...

**INT. SANDOW'S 1920'S HOME – DRAWING ROOM – NIGHT**

The room is sparse and dark.

An OLD MAN coughs violently, props up his weak body against a sideboard whilst rummaging through keepsakes that have been laid to rest in a tin box decorated with the words: 'Sandow's spring grip dumbbell'.

The old man retrieves a torn playing card, then a coin. He studies each item momentarily, then turns to a collection of photographs.

He hobbles from the sideboard over to a coffee table.

Tired and pensive, he sinks into an armchair, reaches over to the table to another stack of photographs.

He retrieves one at random, tentatively, as if fearful of the memory it will evoke.

SANDOW (V.O.)

My memories have been distorted over the years. Perception, you see, is the foundation of experience, and no great artist ever sees things as they really are; for if he did, then he would cease to be an artist...

Now, in the frail hand of the old man, a framed photograph of the youthful Sandow in his physical prime.

SANDOW (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was a true artist.

**EXT. NINETEENTH CENTURY KONISBERG - DAY**

TITLE: *'Konigsberg, formerly Prussia. 1882.'*

A sweeping vista of the city.

We meander through crowded streets of the bustling city, eventually settling on a suburban house.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY**

Sadow, 15, sits at a dining table next to his adoptive FATHER whilst his MOTHER serves food. Resentment lingers in the air.

FATHER

Tell me about your day, Friedrich.

Sadow's gaze is fixed on the wooden table. He clutches a knife in his hand, squeezing the handle tightly.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Well? What have you achieved today?  
What have you done to better yourself?

Sadow is numb.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Another day wiled away in fantasy I  
suspect!

Father is now agitated. Mother looks concerned.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
What is so fascinating about that  
table? It is as lifeless as you are!  
But at least it has a practical  
purpose, unlike you!

Sadow lifts his gaze, now full of rage. His eyes lock  
onto his Father's stern expression.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
There is something very wrong with  
you. How are you going to preach to  
your congregation unless you learn to  
speak?

SADOW  
I don't want to preach!

FATHER  
You must, for you have no other use.  
It is not a matter of choice. It is  
your fate. We leave for Rome in two  
days to begin your -

SADOW  
I don't want to preach!

Father stands.

FATHER  
Get up.

Sadow doesn't move.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Up!

Fearfully, Sadow stands. Father strikes him down.

Sadow crumples to the floor into a fetal position,  
covering his head, whining like a beaten animal.

His Father gestures to strike him again.

The cowering Sandow suppresses his tears, now hushed to silence.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
You will starve for this.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Sadow lies on his bed, sobbing.

There is a gentle tap on the door.

Mother enters, bearing a plate of food.

Sadow turns, smiles.

Mother places the plate on the floor. As she turns to leave, Father blocks her exit. Shock. Fear.

Father kicks the plate across the room.

**EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY**

Sadow is sat on a bench next to a GIRL from his school class. He gazes into her soft eyes as she touches the bruises on his cheek. She smiles affectionately at Sandow, much to the amusement of a group of male CLASSMATES jeering from afar.

The girl hears the laughter, stands and walks away, leaving Sandow dejected and humiliated.

The group approaches Sandow, who now stares at the dirt.

The RINGLEADER of the group grabs Sandow by his hair, tugs hard.

RINGLEADER  
Look at his girly hair!

The group hisses with laughter.

Sadow grabs the Ringleader's hand, yanks it away, then stands.

With a blow to the head, the Ringleader knocks Sandow to the dirt.

RINGLEADER (CONT'D)  
Get up, puny girl!

A kick to Sandow's ribs.

The Ringleader spits at Sandow, who remains curled up, silent and helpless.

**INT. VATICAN CITY MUSEUM – ROME – DAY**

In the opulence of the Museo Pio Clementino, Sandow and his Father marvel upon the statue of *The Laocoon* (depicting the eponymous Trojan priest and his two sons being punished by serpents sent by the Gods).

SANDOW

Do men at home look like this?

FATHER

No.

SANDOW

Why not?

FATHER

Because the ancient heroes never lolled at ease in a carriage! They were active. Strong. Not idle, like ordinary men.

Father walks away, leaving Sandow hypnotized by the statue.

SANDOW

I don't want to be ordinary.

The image of the *Laocoon* dissolves into the image of a MAN of high society in a burlesque club, guzzling liquor and dressed in expensive finery. He sits between two FEMALE ENTERTAINERS. They wrap feather boas around his neck – a mocking visual reference of the *Laocoon* and the two sons enwrapped by the serpents.

**EXT. BURLESQUE CLUB – NIGHT**

The man leaves the club, staggering into the street. As he turns a corner, he collides with Sandow's Father, who is out walking with his son.

Sandow's Father is knocked to the ground.

GENTLEMAN

Watch where you are going!

Sandow helps his Father to stand.

FATHER

Forgive me.

GENTLEMAN

How dare you walk into me.

The inebriated gentleman launches his fist at Father, but misses.

FATHER

Sir, I do not wish to fight.

The gentleman lunges forward, stumbles, nearly topples over.

Father grabs Sandow by the scruff of his jacket, makes to flee the scene.

As they are about to turn a corner, Sandow looks back to see the gentleman being beaten and robbed by two YOUTHS, around 16.

Sandow slips out of his jacket, darts towards the gentleman, who is now on the ground.

SANDOW

Stop! Stop!

Before Sandow can get any closer, he is yanked back and restrained by his Father.

SANDOW

I want to help him!

FATHER

You will be beaten to a pulp, Friedrich. We both will. That is not our fight. We are not their kind.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME – BEDROOM – NIGHT**

Sandow pores over comic book strips of wrestlers and books illustrating the Greco-Roman deities.

He is mesmerized by an image of the mighty Hercules.

Next to him lies a NEWSPAPER CUTOUT advertising that the circus is in town.

**EXT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME – NIGHT**

The backdoor creaks open.

Sandow furtively creeps out, wrapped in a blanket from head to toe. He scans the garden, looks behind him, then makes a run for it.

**INT. A CIRCUS — NIGHT**

Sandow is buried amongst a frenzied crowd of spectators. Amidst the noise and the bustle, he seems lost.

He is ensorcelled by the principal STRONGMAN, who is of mighty stature, bald, with a thick moustache.

As part of his act, the strongman tears through a pack of playing cards, as if made of tissue, then fixes his penetrating gaze on the spellbound Sandow.

With a smile, the strongman tosses a torn playing card to him.

Sandow is transfixed by the card, his expression alight with joy.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME — KITCHEN — DAY**

Father lashes Sandow with a leather belt. The young boy howls.

Mother turns away. She has a black eye and a bruised cheek.

FATHER

You will learn respect!

He strikes Sandow again.

FATHER (CONT'D)

You will learn obedience!

And again.

FATHER (CONT'D)

The army will teach you.

Father leaves the room.

Mother rushes to her son, cradles him in her arms, weeping hysterically.

MOTHER

(Russian accent)

I wish I was strong, Friedrich.  
Strong to protect you.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME – BEDROOM – NIGHT**

Already at the point of burnout, Sandow, now 17, performs a series of intense push-ups. His face creases from the pain, but he carries on. Tearful eyes betray anger and resolve.

More reps. His arms begin to tremble, he groans, but does not stop.

More reps. Then –

He stands, collapses onto the bed, exhausted, clutching his arm, straining to breathe.

As he regains his breath, he sits on the edge of the bed. In the moonlight his neck and naked back betray fresh bruises.

Sandow stands, gazes into a dirty mirror, executing various strongman poses. Whilst his physique is slight with some signs of development, the reflected image is muscular and powerful: in his mind he is stronger than in reality.

From his pocket he retrieves the torn playing card gifted to him by the strongman.

He then fixes upon a tattered backpack hanging limply from a wardrobe.

**INT. SANDOW'S CHILDHOOD HOME – BEDROOM – DAY**

A gentle knock on the bedroom door.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Friedrich?

She pushes the door open. A momentary silence followed by an agonizing scream.

Father rushes upstairs, charges into the room.

MOTHER

He's gone! He's gone!

In a fit of rage, his Father tears down a poster of a circus strongman from Sandow's bedroom wall.

**EXT. A FACTORY — DAY**

Sadow sleeps in a sheltered area behind a factory. He is abruptly awoken by a boot plunging into his stomach. He bolts up.

An angry FOREMAN cranes over the winded Sadow, poised to strike him.

Sadow grabs his rucksack, scuttles away.

**INT. AN ART STUDIO — DAY**

Sadow buttons up his shirt. He is clearly uncomfortable.

A young ARTIST makes the finishing touches to his sketch of a half-nude Sadow.

The artist places the pencil to one side, stands, picks up some money, and slinks over to Sadow.

ARTIST

Is that all?

The artist places the money in Sadow's hand, holding it tight. Half-heartedly, Sadow tries to release his hand from the artist's grip.

SADOW

I don't understand.

The artist gently places his free hand on Sadow's chest — his fingers roaming back and forth — then begins to unbutton his shirt.

Sadow grabs the artist by the wrist, holds it for a moment.

Anger. Indecision.

Sadow forces the artist's hand downwards towards his groin.

SADOW

How much?

**EXT. HIGHSTREET — DAY**

Sadow wanders the foggy streets, biting voraciously into a piece of bread.

Along a bustling high street, he passes a wall decorated with posters advertising the circus.

He tears one of the posters from the wall, gazing upon the image with fierce determination.

**INT. CIRCUS - NIGHT**

Sandow wrestles against a bull-like strongman in a pit of sand: a raucous CROWD cheers for the latter, jeers at the former.

The strongman locks Sandow in a bearhug, shakes him violently, then releases him, as Sandow's body crumples to the sandy floor.

He is bloodied and disorientated. But he stands tall.

The strongman lunges forward, as Sandow takes a blow to the midriff, then to the head, knocking him down.

A jubilant crowd. Money exchanges hands.

The RINGMASTER enters the pit, grasps the strongman's hand, raising his arm into the air. Both face the crowd, but away from Sandow.

RINGMASTER

The winner!

Cheering turns to hushed murmurs.

The Ringleader and the strongman look at each other, confused, then turn around to see Sandow standing, arms folded, undefeated.

The strongman fixes his enraged eyes upon Sandow, who now extends his arm and makes a beckoning gesture with his index finger: 'come here'.

The strongman charges furiously towards Sandow who stands tall, unflinching, raising his arms up to shoulder-level like wings.

As the strongman ploughs into Sandow, they tumble to the ground, their arms and legs knotted together. In a deft move, Sandow contorts himself around the strongman, restraining him in a tight grip, pulling back on his arm.

The strongman whelps.

RINGLEADER

Stop! Stop!

Sadow releases the strongman from his grasp. The strongman clutches his shoulder, pants for breath.

RINGLEADER  
(to Sadow)

Take your money and go.

**INT. RAILWAY CARRIAGE — DAY**

Sadow's gaze is fixed upon a penny that he holds between his thumb and index finger.

He studies the coin closely, as if under hypnosis. His trance is broken by —

CONDUCTOR  
(in German)

Tickets, please.

(in French)

Tickets, please.

**EXT. UNIVERSITY BUILDING — BRUSSELS — NIGHT**

Deep in the heart of the city, Sadow watches two STUDENTS playfully arm wrestling on a picnic table outside a University building. They are surrounded by a dozen more students and several bystanders, drinking and gambling.

One student, LOUIS, defeats the other, slamming his opponent's wrist down with ease.

Cheering from those who won the bet, hissing from those who lost.

LOUIS  
(in French)

Too easy! Who's next?

No takers.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Winner takes all. C'mon. Who's next?

Sadow steps forward. The bystanders are hushed to silence.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Who're you?



There's someone you must meet,  
Friedrich.

**INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY**

A spacious, well-equipped gym. Posters of a youthful strongman - 'Professor Atilla' - adorn the walls.

Sandow, now 19, performs a grueling circuit of push-ups, followed by pull-ups and squats. He crumples to the ground, breathless.

A man with a powerful physique looms over him with stern eyes: it is ATILLA himself, now in his 40's.

ATILLA

Rise. Repeat.

SANDOW

What?

ATILLA

Twice. Faster.

Sandow looks at Atilla in disbelief.

SANDOW

But -

ATILLA

Do you want to be in my act?

SANDOW

Yes.

ATILLA

You want to compete all over the world?

SANDOW

Yes!

ATILLA

Then get up!

Sandow remains on the floor.

ATILLA (CONT'D)

Up!

The broken Sandow struggles to his feet.

ATILLA (CONT'D)  
No more circuses. You belong on a stage!

SANDOW  
(in fluent French)  
I belong on a stage! I belong on a stage!

ATILLA  
You will be peerless! But you need a name. Something more powerful than 'Friedrich'...

Sandow listens with intent.

ATILLA (CONT'D)  
A name of moral upstanding. 'Eugen'. It is Greek. It means 'strong'.

SANDOW  
Sandov.

ATILLA  
What did you say?

SANDOW  
'Sandov'. It was my mother's name.

ATILLA  
'Eugen Sandov'.

A momentary silence. Sandow's gaze is fixed on the ground.

SANDOW  
Sandow. I want my own name.

ATILLA  
'Sandow'! Hercules himself! Tomorrow we leave for Amsterdam, my boy. Mark my words, you will be the most famous strongman in the Western world! Now repeat! Twice! Faster!

Sandow resumes a push up position. Presses once, twice...

ATILLA (CONT'D)  
Faster!

Another rep, and another, faster, faster, until...

With a cry of anger mixed with pain, Sandow flops to the floor.

Disappointed, Atilla walks away, then stops, turns.

ATILLA (CONT'D)  
Are you Friedrich Müller, or are you  
Eugen Sandow?

**INT. SHABBY THEATRE - AMSTERDAM - NIGHT**

A half-empty theatre. Yawning and groaning from a listless audience.

Sandow is suspended in the air by rope. Atilla watches from the wings, anxious.

As Sandow misplaces his grip, he plummets to the wooden stage floor.

He lies in a fetal position, clutching his left arm and fitting in pain.

The audience erupts into laughter.

The curtain descends.

**EXT. SHABBY THEATRE - NIGHT**

A heavy rain beats down.

Sandow and Atilla are ejected from the theatre by the rear entrance. An angry THEATRE MANAGER hurls some coins at them.

MANAGER  
Don't come back!

Sandow kneels on the ground, foraging for what money he can salvage.

He stands, counting the pennies in his hand.

ATILLA  
You will starve for this.

Sandow looks up, eyes full of rage as Atilla grasps him by the hand, takes the money.

ATILLA (CONT'D)  
In two days, you face the Italian  
beast, Basilo, on his home terrain.

In wrestling, two men compete for dominance, victory, even pride; but what we see on the outside as mere entertainment reflects the most basic and brutal of our human instincts: the will to survive. You are a fighter, but you are no entertainer. Stick to what you know. Stick to what you are, Friedrich.

SANDOW

My name is Eugen Sandow.

ATILLA

Your name is Friedrich Müller.

He turns, walks away.

**EXT. STREET – NIGHT**

A tearful Sandow wanders the lonely streets, furiously rubbing his arms, attempting to stay warm but aggravating his injury at the same time.

A WOMAN, clad in alluring attire, stands at a window, gesturing for him to make his way to her room. Sandow shakes his head, continues on his way.

He soon chances upon a penny arcade lever-based strength machine.

He stares at the contraption with simmering anger, then in a fit of rage punches the machine with his right hand.

He slips a coin inside the machine, grips the lever, then in one swift movement pulls it downwards, breaking the contraption.

Sandow realizes someone is behind him, watching. He turns, slowly, to see a POLICE OFFICER, baton in hand.

With a heavy sigh, Sandow extends his wrists.

**INT. POLICE STATION – NIGHT**

Cuffed, Sandow sits at a table accompanied by two Police Officers.

POLICE OFFICER #1

You 'unwittingly' broke the machine?

Sandow nods.

POLICE OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)  
Impossible. It must have been tampered with. You are charged with destruction of public property!

SANDOW  
I broke it with my own strength.

POLICE OFFICER #1  
You lie.

SANDOW  
Then I'll show you.

Sandow stands, gestures to his cuffed hands.

Tentatively, Police Officer #1 nods to his colleague. Police Officer #2 removes the cuffs.

With his right arm, Sandow effortlessly raises Police Officer #2 into the air.

Police Officer #1 gasps in astonishment.

**INT. WRESTLING RING - ITALY - NIGHT**

Sandow faces his fearsome opponent, the mighty BASILO.

As they wrestle, there is finger snapping and rib crushing.

Blood spatters. Bones crunch.

Yet the men persist in their match, fierce and undeterred, with animal-like ferocity.

Basilio spits blood from his mouth that, while open, reveals he has lost a tooth.

Sandow smiles, wiping his blood-drenched nose.

**INT. OPULENT THEATRE - NIGHT**

TITLE: *'San Remo, Italy. 1887.'*

An opulent hall brimming with esteemed guests - a stark contrast to the dark and dilapidated theatre halls of Amsterdam, and the blood-stained wrestling rings of urban Italy.

PRINCE FREDERICK, 56, heir to the Prussian Empire, stands

atop a stage opposite a sheepish Sandow. The former is clothed in fine royal dress, the latter in gaudy wrestler's attire, tattooed with bruises and cuts to his face.

A Master of Ceremonies stands between them.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Prince Frederick will now demonstrate his strength by rending a complete deck of cards!

The Prince places his hands tactically on the deck. Apprehensively, he tears the pack into two. He is surprised yet relieved that the trick has worked.

The audience applauds in admiration.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (CONT'D)

To the ladies and gentlemen in the audience who may not be able to see, I can confirm that fifty-two cards have been torn in two! Truly, a most powerful Prince!

In a swift and sudden movement, Sandow grasps two decks of cards and, with minimal effort, tears them in two.

The audience gasps in amazement.

The humbled Prince approaches Sandow, extending his hand.

PRINCE

(hoarse tone)

I would gladly trade my royal position for your supreme health.

The Prince's handshake is limp, as if drained of life.

We see a collection of playing cards, riven and strewn across the theatre stage floor. We close in on the 'King'.

**EXT. OPULENT THEATRE – NIGHT**

Still wearing his wrestling attire, Sandow exits the theatre. It is dark and cold, the streets eerily quiet.

He finds shelter in a nearby alleyway, clutching his threadbare backpack as if it contained all he has in the world.

He opens it up, pulls out several trinkets – a necklace, a ring, a box of matches. No money.

**INT. RAILWAY CARRIAGE – NIGHT**

Sadow sits in a dark, damp, dingy freight carriage amidst numerous livestock.

**EXT. CAFÉ – FRANCE – DAY**

Sadow sleeps inside the doorway of a café: the sign reads 'boulangerie'.

He is awoken by the OWNER, who throws some scraps of bread at him.

As the scraps land on the dirty ground, Sadow scavenges for them, stuffing them into his mouth like a ravenous animal.

**EXT. CRAUCK'S STUDIO – DAY**

Disheveled and jaded, Sadow sheepishly knocks on a studio door in an affluent part of Paris.

It is swiftly answered by GUSTAVE CRAUCK – a wiry, gentle faced man in his early 60's – whose clothes are smeared with fresh clay.

Crauck casts Sadow an impatient yet inquisitive glance.

SADOW

Do you speak English? Anglais?

Curious but guarded, Crauck nods.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Forgive me for disturbing you at work, Sir. I have heard your name spoken of in the highest esteem and I thought to, you see, I am seeking work.

CRAUCK

I have neither money nor time for you.

As Crauck makes to close the door, Sadow places his hand on the door frame.

SADOW

Do not assume from my appearance that

I am a beggar. I request but one moment of your time to -

CRAUCK

I said -

Sandow forces his way inside the doorway.

Half fearful yet half impressed by his brute strength, Crauck stands aside to allow Sandow to peruse the interior of the studio. A half-finished statue stands in the center.

SANDOW

Hercules.

CRAUCK

How did you -

SANDOW

I assume you have not completed the trapezius. The proportion to the shoulder does not seem natural.

CRAUCK

It is difficult to conjure perfect proportion from memory, and more so to replicate from the two-dimensional pages of a book.

SANDOW

Then it is fate that I have called on you this day.

Without hesitation, Sandow removes his tattered shirt.

Upon seeing his naked torso, Crauck launches himself upon Sandow, showering him with kisses on both cheeks.

CRAUCK

Hercules himself! What is your name?

An image of the half-finished statue DISSOLVES to:

**INT. GYMASIUM - LONDON - DAY**

A newspaper image of the finished statue, with Sandow and Crauck stood next to it.

Reveal Atilla reading the newspaper.

**INT. RAILWAY CARRIAGE - DAY**

Sandow, now wearing gentleman's clothes, sits in a railway carriage. A suitcase is placed on the seat next to him.

In his hand he holds a postcard of London. He turns it over, to reveal a message from Atilla: 'you are Eugen Sandow. Your friend, the Professor.'

**INT. ROYAL AQUARIUM - LONDON - NIGHT**

We return to the OPENING SCENE.

Underneath an array of lights, Sandow stands on a stage with Cyclops.

Sandow is stripped to a pair of athletic tights. He flexes his muscles. Under the penetrating spotlight his body is enveloped by an ethereal glow.

Meanwhile, Cyclops paces the periphery of the stage, like a crazed beast poised to attack.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

For the first challenge, each man will raise two, fifty-six-pound weights above his head which is, ladies and gentlemen, the equivalent of two large sacks of potatoes!

Effortlessly, Cyclops performs the challenge. He glares at his opponent whilst returning the weights to the floor, his eyes burning with rage.

Sandow, undaunted, completes the challenge with ease.

Cyclops snarls.

Won over by Sandow, the audience applauds.

A LADY, sat in the front row, claps erratically: it is SARAH WHITE, 20's, whom we will meet again...

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (CONT'D)

Now each man will raise a two-hundred and forty-pound barbell above his head, which is the same as lifting an adult man!

Cyclops raises the bar above his head using both arms. He returns it to the ground then, like a bull, flares his nostrils at his opponent, who stands casually, arms

folded.

Cyclops' gaze is fixed on Sandow, the rage inside him bubbling.

Sandow nonchalantly walks over to the barbell and raises it above his head with one arm.

The audience responds with hysteria.

Before the Master of Ceremonies can announce the next feat, Cyclops grasps two dumbbells and proceeds to press them above his head, reaching six repetitions before dropping them to the floor, exhausted.

As the sound of three hundred pounds falling to the wooden stage reverberates around the hall, the audience is hushed.

Tension mounts.

Sandow strolls over to the dumbbells, grasps one in each hand, then presses them above his head for six repetitions. He pauses for a moment – not to catch his breath, but to tease the crowd – then presses the weights another six times.

As a resounding applause.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (CONT'D)

The winner is indisputable! The mighty Sandow has outdone his opponent by performing twice the number of repetitions! Ladies and gentleman, have you ever witnessed such a feat?

CHARLES SAMPSON, 29, a strongman and mentor to Cyclops, watches from the wings, shaking his head in disbelief.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (CONT'D)

In a few moments I will invite Mister Sampson to furnish our winner with the prize.

The Master of Ceremonies looks at Sampson with a blank expression, gesturing for him to enter the stage.

After a moment's hesitation, Sampson, dressed in gaudy strongman attire, emerges into the spotlight, raising his elbow to his eyes to block its piercing light.

SAMPSON

I cannot award Mister Sandow the prize money.

The audience groans, hisses, and begins to chant 'Sandow' with increasing fervor.

SAMPSON (CONT'D)

Unless! Unless!

A hushed silence.

SAMPSON (CONT'D)

Unless Sandow can prove that he is undoubtedly the strongest man in the world by completing one more challenge.

Sandow reclines against a prop on the stage, his arms and feet crossed in a nonchalant stance. He pauses for a moment, yawns, then nods in agreement.

SANDOW

Accepted.

A resounding cheer.

Later...

Cyclops lays on his back, pressing a bar with two MEN sat on top of it, one at each end. After one repetition, the two men alight and Cyclops stands up, breathless, but beating his chest with his fists.

Sandow repeats the challenge with ease, pressing the bar three times.

Sampson exits the stage, crestfallen, closely followed by Cyclops, who whines like a wounded animal.

The Master of Ceremonies, now center stage, takes Sandow's hand and raises his arm into the air, triumphantly.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

I present to you the magnificent Eugen Sandow, the strongest man in the world!

Sampson returns to the stage. He gestures to hand Sandow the prize money, then snatches it back.

SAMPSON

I challenge the 'magnificent' Sandow to a further competition. In two days, he will face me. We will then see who is 'the strongest man'!

SANDOW

Accepted.

**EXT. ROYAL AQUARIUM - LONDON - DAY**

A restless crowd gathers outside the theatre.

Sandow, dressed in disguise, struggles to wade through throngs of people.

He eventually reaches the rear entrance of the theatre, but is declined entry by a DOORMAN.

**INT. ROYAL AQUARIUM - DAY**

Sampson paces about the stage, anxious, impatient. He wears tights, boots, and a garish cloak. Various medallions are pompously arrayed around his neck to display his former victories.

He turns to the Master of Ceremonies.

SAMPSON

How dare he make we wait!

**EXT. ROYAL AQUARIUM - DAY**

Sandow removes his disguise.

SANDOW

I am performing, today! You must permit me entry -

DOORMAN

You could be anyone tryin' to steal a peek o' the show from behind the stage! Now move on.

SANDOW

I am Sandow.

DOORMAN

Ha! Prove it!

Sandow ponders momentarily, then sighs.

He pushes the burly doorman out of his way and charges against the door. As his shoulder impacts it, it bursts open as if made of paper.

He hands some money to the doorman who, picking himself up from the ground, clutches his chest where he has been severely winded.

SANDOW

For your trouble.

**INT. ROYAL AQUARIUM – DAY**

The audience murmurs impatiently, half in anticipation, half in disappointment.

Sampson is more enraged.

SAMPSON

The show is to be cancelled and I will win by default! The 'mighty' Sandow is clearly too afraid of the challenge.

Then, a voice:

SANDOW (O.S.)

Do not cancel the performance, Mister Sampson. The strongest man in the world has arrived to defend his title.

Hushed into silence, the audience turns to see Sandow standing in the entrance of the grand theatre.

Later...

In the first challenge, Sampson clutches an iron bar with both hands and squeezes it until it bends.

Hesitantly, Sandow takes the bar and performs the challenge with difficulty.

For the next feat, Sampson wraps a small chain around his bicep and snaps it by flexing his muscle.

Sandow shakes his head.

SANDOW

Mister Sampson, I cannot replicate this feat, for my biceps are too large for your small chain!

The audience erupts with laughter whilst lancing mocking comments at Sampson.

Sadow reaches into his trouser pocket and smugly produces a longer chain.

SADOW (CONT'D)

But as fate would have it, I came prepared!

Later...

A panel of JUDGES discuss the results of the competition.

Sampson paces backstage, anxious, enraged.

Also loitering backstage is Sarah White.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Ladies and gentlemen, the panel has tabulated the scores and it is with the greatest pleasure that I announce our champion...

Silence. Anticipation.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (CONT'D)

The mighty Sadow!

A rapturous applause.

To Sarah's horror, Sampson explodes with rage, trashing various props.

Sadow takes center stage.

SADOW

Mister Sampson is dissatisfied with the result. Therefore, I challenge him to one more test: to raise a two-hundred-and-eighty-pound dumbbell above the head, for one repetition. If Mister Sampson can equal me in this feat, then I shall declare the competition a draw.

From the wings, Sampson shakes his head in disagreement.

We freeze on Sadow and the Master of Ceremonies, the latter raising the former's arm into the air in triumph.

## MONTAGE:

A series of images of Sandow performing at different venues, each conveying his tremendous talents and reinforcing his celebrity status:

He makes statuesque poses in the manner of the Grecian arts;

He cartwheels across a stage with weights attached to his arms and legs;

He lifts an adult man with one hand;

He lifts a pony above his head.

In each successive scene, the audience grows in number, in particular females.

**EXT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT**

A torrent of rain.

Outside the hall, gatherings of disparate people, including men of high society, the press, and prostitutes.

At the rear of the hall, Sandow darts through the rain towards the entrance, when -

ATILLA (O.S.)

Eugen.

Sandow turns to see Atilla, drenched.

SANDOW

What are you doing here?

ATILLA

We did it, my boy. You are the strongest man in the world.

SANDOW

I did it. There is no 'we'.

ATILLA

But Eugen -

SANDOW (CONT'D)

You once said that you could not believe in me until I first believed in myself.

ATILLA

I always believed in you.

SANDOW

Then where were you?

ATILLA

I was in London. You were in Paris. I sent you a -

SANDOW

You are here because I have reached the top. Where were you when I fell?

ATILLA

I was there at your lowest. I took you in off the streets. I trained you. Without me you would be Friedrich Müller, not Eugen Sandow!

SANDOW

I am Eugen Sandow, the strongest man in the world. And I did it without you. Goodbye, Professor.

Sandow makes to walk away, but Atilla grabs him by the shoulder, spinning him around.

ATILLA

Do not walk away from me!

In a fit of rage, Sandow plants his fist in Atilla's abdomen. Atilla creases over, winded.

SANDOW

You left me in the rain, penniless and homeless. You left me to starve. I felt I had failed you. I carried that with me for months, until I realized that it was you who failed me. Goodbye.

**INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT**

Sandow is topless with only light linen shorts covering the lower part of his body.

He begins his performance by posing and flexing his muscles.

A WOMAN from front row leaps to her feet then swoons,

gliding to the floor like a delicate feather.

Sadow continues with his act: placed between two large wooden frames, Sadow faces upwards, supported by his arms and knees, as if making a bridge out of his contorted body.

A plank of wood is laid across the two wooden frames and across his torso that provides a fulcrum.

Subsequently, a MAN appears on stage, walks across the plank from one wooden frame to the other.

A subdued applause. A hiss. A jeer.

Then, a rider on horseback is poised to cross the bridge.

The audience is hushed.

As the horse edges closer, stepping onto the plank, the wooden support begins to creak and wobble.

The rider hesitates. The horse snarls.

SADOW  
(to the rider)  
Continue! Continue!

The plank slides out of position, putting the weight of the horse on Sadow's chest. He struggles to breathe, as the rider makes it to the other side.

As the horse and rider dismount from the platform, Sadow stands upright, bows to his audience, concealing the pain.

A throng of SPECTATORS surge to the front of the stage. In the midst of the frenzy, a LADY throws a bouquet of purple violets to Sadow. She has raven hair, a pale yet classically beautiful complexion, and bright, warm eyes.

It is BLANCHE BROOKS. We will meet her again.

He catches the flowers and returns a smile. Their eyes lock, and as he is carried away by a frenzied crowd, he continues to look upon Blanche, entranced by her beauty, captivated by her innocence.

**INT. MUSIC HALL – BACKSTAGE – NIGHT**

Perched on a wooden stool, Sadow is dressed in trunks and a fine silk dressing gown, worn open to reveal his

impressive muscularity.

A gaggle of adoring WOMEN surround him. Excitedly, they each in turn touch his chest and biceps. They titter whilst Sandow remains composed and unmoved, as if made from stone.

A PATRON of the hall approaches with a wooden box brimming with all manner of jewelry – rings, brooches, necklaces, and bracelets.

PATRON

More than yesterday, it would seem.

SANDOW

Place it on the sideboard.

As the patron places the box on the sideboard, his expression turns from one of greed to one of curiosity as he lifts a pair of ladies undergarments from it.

A WOMAN from the gaggle speaks.

WOMAN

Did you pick up my necklace, Mister Sandow? A sign of my affection, I hope you like it!

A second woman interjects, laughing coyly.

WOMAN #2

I'll give you gold, Mister strongman, all the riches you like, in exchange for your 'company'.

SANDOW

I am grateful for your generosity, but it is most unnecessary. I do not perform in order to receive gold, or to offer my 'company' away from the stage.

A well-dressed and well-spoken GENTLEMAN pushes through the women.

GENTLEMAN

May I congratulate you on an unparalleled performance! Never before have I seen the combination of primal masculinity and artful beauty; yet I am still uncertain as to whether what I have witnessed is real

or, how shall I say, 'fantasy'.

The man gestures a touch towards Sandow's chest.

GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

May I?

Sandow nods his head in agreement. The man reaches out, tentatively at first, then with increased confidence and arousal.

GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)

Your skin is like silk. Your muscles like steel. You are indeed real...

The man's hand roves towards Sandow's inner thigh.

SANDOW

(standing up)

Enough! I thank you all for your admiration. But this is an art exhibition. I remind you to observe propriety.

The man, abashed, takes a step back as the other admirers swarm around Sandow.

A REPORTER emerges amidst the admirers.

REPORTER

Mister Sandow, Mister Sandow. You have admiration for the male form, do you not?

SANDOW

The male body is an object of art, and like all art it is to be studied and admired.

REPORTER

And how do you study it, Mister Sandow? Do you look upon living examples?

SANDOW

I look upon the great Grecian statues for inspiration. I look upon contemporary athletes and entertainers for the same reason.

REPORTER

Does that admiration involve an

element of desire?

The reporter slips away amidst a surging gaggle of admirers.

**INT. SANDOW'S APARTMENT - DAY**

A sparse room.

Sandow perches on a wooden stool at a rustic table, sipping on a fresh cup of coffee whilst reading a newspaper.

Suddenly, he strikes his cup upon the table, breaking it into several pieces.

SANDOW

Lies! Lies!

He raises the newspaper to eye level. The headline reads: 'Sandow desires the male form.' He tears the newspaper in half then, spontaneously, performs a series of press-ups on the bare floor: his catharsis.

He stands, performs a series of jump squats, and as the intensity of his exercise increases, his anger does not wane.

**INT. A KITCHEN - DAY**

The LANDLADY, sat in a kitchen below Sandow's apartment, watches in horror as plaster falls from the ceiling in synchronization with Sandow's movements above.

She panics, screams, escapes to another room.

**EXT. A STREET - DAY**

Carrying his rucksack and a suitcase, Sandow idles along a desolate street, pensive.

He stops at a NEWSTAND to read a newspaper headline: 'Sandow evicted by landlady for demolishing his own home'.

He fixes on the paper, until his trance is broken by a runaway truck-horse charging towards a carriage, which is occupied by a LADY.

Observing the imminent danger, Sandow drops his belongings, hurtles towards the carriage.

Fearfully, he stands in front of the horse, now bearing down upon him, distracting it from its course.

The horse bolts into the distance.

Sadow attends to the carriage, opens the door to reveal Blanche Brooks.

SADOW

Madam, are you injured?

Blanche realizes who her savior is.

BLANCHE

How is it, that every time we meet, there is imminent danger involving a horse!

SADOW

It seems we are destined to meet.

BLANCHE

Indeed, it does, Mister Sadow.

SADOW

Friedrich. Miss?

BLANCHE

Brooks.

SADOW

I hope the Fates see it fit for us to meet again, Miss Brooks.

BLANCHE

Come to my Father's studio in Manchester. He will photograph you as an expression of my - our - gratitude.

SADOW

I would be most obliged, and most indebted to you.

BLANCHE

The debt is all mine.

As Blanche offers Sadow a visiting card, he takes her hand, kisses it, then closes the carriage door.

**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

Sandow, now lost in a daydream, continues his saunter along a foggy street lit by gaslight.

As he turns a corner into a nebulous alleyway, a GROUP OF MEN emerges from the shadows.

SANDOW

I am Eugen Sandow, the strongest –

ATTACKER #1 is poised to attack.

ATTACKER #1

Aye, we knows, so-called strongman!  
Ya ready for ya do down?

Sandow raises his fists, ready.

SANDOW

I don't understand.

ATTACKER #2

Who was that Judy you was speakin'  
too, eh?

SANDOW

That's none of your concern.

ATTACKER #1

Another catch for his brothel, where  
he entertains the gents!

Sandow throws a punch, his fist driving into Attacker #1's check. Attacker #2 emerges from behind, grabs Sandow's arms into a lock, as the third attacker lands a series of blows to Sandow's abdomen.

Attacker #1 stands, wipes his bloodied nose.

ATTACKER #1

My turn.

Attacker #2 releases Sandow.

Sandow is winded, disorientated.

SANDOW

Please, I beg you –

Attacker #1 strikes Sandow in the stomach. He creases over, coughing, struggling for breath, then collapses to the ground.

ATTACKER #1 spits on Sandow, then lands a sharp kick into his abdomen.

ATTACKER #1

Filth!

A PASSER BY interjects.

PASSER BY

You there, what are you doing? Stop!  
Stop now!

The attackers grab Sandow's suitcase before dispersing.

The fog begins to clear as the passer by attends to the bloodied Sandow.

PASSER BY (CONT'D)

Let me help you. Can you stand?

The passer by grips Sandow under his armpits, lifting him to his feet.

PASSER BY (CONT'D)

I say, aren't you —

SANDOW

Let me be.

Sandow unlocks himself from the stranger's grip.

PASSER BY

But Mister Sandow —

SANDOW

Let me be!

Sandow grabs his rucksack, disappears into the fog.

**INT. OPIUM DEN — NIGHT**

Inside the smoke-filled room, FEMALE ESCORTS flaunt their wares to GENTLEMEN of the aristocracy.

Sandow slumps into a seat in the corner, nursing his wounds. As a WOMAN approaches, he raises his hand, gesturing refusal.

He contorts his body into a tight space between a table and seat in an attempt to conceal his presence.

**INT. BROOKS' STUDIO — MANCHESTER — DAY**

Sandow poses for a photograph, stood on a platform, wearing a wrestler's leotard to disguise his bruises.

He flexes various muscles following WARWICK BROOKS' instruction.

Blanche gazes admiringly from a distance. She intermittently locks eyes with Sandow and chances a smile. Distracted, he returns the gesture.

WARWICK

Do not smile! We want the public to admire you - nay, revere you, even fear you! To create a persona you must look stern, for sternness implies authority, and authority implies power!

SANDOW

(still smiling)

Indeed. Forgive me.

Warwick turns to see his daughter attempting to suppress her laughter.

WARWICK

Mister Sandow needs his full concentration on our work. Now if you please, young lady.

He nods towards the door.

With reluctance, Blanche makes to leave the studio, casting her eye upon her admirer once more.

WARWICK

(to Sandow)

Powerful people don't blush, either!

SANDOW

Mister Brooks. If I may.

Warwick rises from behind the camera.

WARWICK

What now?

Sandow alights from the platform, glides over to Blanche, takes her hand, and leads her back to the platform.

SANDOW

If you would, Mister Brooks. A memento.

Sadow turns to Blanche.

SADOW  
We may smile, for this one.

**EXT. HAYMARKET - LONDON - DAY**

Sadow and GOLIATH - a baby-faced giant - lumber up the street towards Piccadilly, weighed down by a number of suitcases.

A mob of ADMIRERS clusters behind them, gathering pace.

GOLIATH  
They're gaining on us! Faster!

SADOW  
Then may I suggest losing some weight! I can perfectly understand that your size is your selling point. But at over six feet tall and twenty-three stone to boot, you run like a tortoise.

The mighty Goliath, panting for breath, falls behind, closer to the maw of the mob.

GOLIATH  
If you want me to lose weight, then perhaps I should lose the cases!

SADOW  
As cumbersome as you are, I need all of my props, including you!

Sadow slows his pace to match Goliath's.

SADOW (CONT'D)  
If you could fit into a cab, then we wouldn't be forced to walk with this blasted baggage!

GOLIATH  
(playfully)  
Is your slender, thirteen-stone frame unable to carry your own luggage? So much for your magnificent strength!

SADOW

For your information I am fourteen stone, or thereabouts.

GOLIATH

Stop whining! We are nearly there. We will lose the crowd.

SANDOW

Good. We need to prepare ourselves for the Press.

GOLIATH

Is it as we discussed?

SANDOW

Yes. Let's hope they are amicable. I can never tell whether they wish to destroy me or deify me.

GOLIATH

It depends on their politics at the time! Speaking of which, don't forget to keep the stage props separate from the rest of the equipment. We must create as much of an illusion backstage as onstage.

The mob gains on them.

SANDOW

Run!

Sandow sprints ahead, leaving a breathless Goliath behind.

**INT. ROYAL MUSIC HALL — NIGHT**

TITLE: *'Royal Music Hall, London. 1890.'*

Backstage is littered with props for the evening's performance — dumbbells, steel bars, metal chains.

In awe and disbelief, a small number of VIP GUESTS inspect the various items for their genuineness.

A REPORTER, flushed with wine, approaches Sandow with a swagger. He is rotund with flaming red hair and a spiky moustache. A cigarette dangles limply from his bottom lip. His manner is abrasive and his appearance somewhat unkempt; yet he presumes to be a person of importance.

Sandow is dressed in fine evening attire, hiding his

musculature. He sits atop the case of props, as if concealing something inside.

REPORTER

I hear you are quite the specimen of physical perfection. Not that I can tell. Are there muscles underneath there?

Sandow is calm, composed, slightly amused.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

You do not appear to be a man of extraordinary strength, but rather a boy presuming to be a man! Perhaps you are a person of clean conscience and probity, which makes up for it, assuming that what the papers say isn't true, of course!

SANDOW

I believe in the edification of the body and of the soul.

REPORTER

There you are! You see? I knew it! You do believe in something! Then you can't be one of those God-awful cynics that seem to be taking over.

SANDOW

Perhaps I am cynical in a manner that is healthy. I believe that the human spirit is capable of wondrous things; but we sometimes lack the guidance of our fellow man to achieve them.

The reporter, now curious, raises an eyebrow. A trickle of wine issues from his mouth, now agape.

REPORTER

Intriguing. You are quite articulate for a foreigner. You almost sound like a philosopher, except one that makes plain sense! That's unusual for you Germans!

His laugh is nasal, resembling a pig. With his sleeve, the Reporter wipes excess wine from the side of his mouth, snarling as he does so.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

May I assume you're not the egotistical sort – you know, all for one and none for all? Eh?

SANDOW

Human beings are by their very nature sociable creatures. We are not made to survive in solitude. Any advancement of society cannot be realized through the individual alone but through the collective spirit.

REPORTER

(change in tone)

You are clearly as strong in your principles as you are in your body.

SANDOW

My principles are stronger. Much stronger. The body is corruptible and perishes; but a belief in the betterment of humanity is everlasting. I assume you have heard of the Beyond Man, an ideal state of human existence created intrinsically by humanity, and not by an external deity. What need is there for a Supreme Being if Man can transcend earthly things and become more than himself?

REPORTER

I have underestimated you, Sir.

SANDOW

You are not the first person to mistake me for a mere brute. Enjoy the show.

**INT. ROYAL MUSIC HALL – NIGHT**

The finale of the performance.

Sandow and Goliath bow to a cheering audience. Then, in one swift move, Sandow raises Goliath into the air with one arm, then transports him off stage.

The reporter watches furtively from the wings, furiously scribbling notes.

SANDOW

(sotto)

You are heavier than you were  
yesterday!

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY**

Unpacked suitcases are placed on a bed.

Sandow and Goliath sit at a table, the former perusing  
the newspaper.

SANDOW

'From head to toe there is no bad  
point in him. His features are of  
bold and classical type; his head is  
well-shaped and balanced upon a white  
and muscular neck.' It goes on!

Goliath remains silent, winding a chain around his hand,  
then unwinding it, then repeating.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

This part amuses me. 'Sandow is the  
first man in history to lift a two  
hundred and fifty-pound weight.'  
Nonsense. You are at least three  
hundred pounds!

Goliath winds the chain around his fist, pulls tight.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

That intrusive swine mistook me for a  
brute. I will show them I am a true  
artist. I will make my movements more  
graceful.

GOLIATH

How so?

SANDOW

My former mentor once mentioned a  
man. Markus Sieveking. A pianist.

Goliath looks at Sandow, blankly.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

(condescendingly)

I will train to music.

GOLIATH

Is that necessary? The Press already  
sees you as the antithesis of  
degeneration.

SANDOW

What are you talking about?

GOLIATH

Degeneration is when a man eats too much, drinks too much, and is idle. He has no instinct for survival, in the Darwinian sense. As a species we are going backwards, degenerating and enfeebling civilization, passing inferior genetics from one generation to the next. According to this theory, a person's physical state reflects their moral state.

SANDOW

So those who exercise and attend to a proper diet are thought to be morally righteous?

GOLIATH

Something like that.

Sandow's gaze fixes on the newspaper page, on an image of himself in physical splendor.

SANDOW

Do you think me a moral man, Karl?

GOLIATH

If you need assurance of that, then I suggest you ask that question of yourself.

SANDOW

What are you implying?

Silence.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Speak.

GOLIATH

I disagree that a healthy body is indicative of moral virtue.

SANDOW

Why? Because you are overweight? Because the Press perceives you to be an immoral man?

Goliath remains silent.

SANDOW (CONT'D)  
Or are you jealous?

Goliath, angry, stands up, flings the chain across the room.

SANDOW (CONT'D)  
That's it!

GOLIATH  
The Press calls you the perfect man.  
But you are not incorruptible.

SANDOW  
Then perhaps you seek to corrupt me.  
Undermine me. Slander me. Jealousy  
can drive a man to anything.

GOLIATH  
So can ambition.

SANDOW  
How dare you allow your jealousy to  
question my integrity.

GOLIATH  
I am not jealous!

SANDOW  
Then what?

GOLIATH  
I feel —

He hesitates.

SANDOW  
What?!

GOLIATH  
Pity.

Sandow is stunned to silence.

Goliath grabs his suitcase, leaves.

**INT. ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY — DAY**

Stripped to his waist, Sandow stands in front of a blackboard filled with various sketches of musculature.

His audience is a mixture of scientists and soldiers.

An anatomical model sits at the side of a lectern.

Sandow turns to a delicate, effeminate looking man, MARTINUS SIEVEKING, 26, who is sat next to a portable Berliner gramophone. As Sandow nods, Sieveking cranks the handle.

As the MUSIC plays, Sandow gracefully flexes his biceps in time to it.

Amidst murmurs of enthusiasm the audience hastily writes notes.

A train of a dozen SOLDIERS are lined up, each taking it in turn to touch Sandow's pectoral muscles.

A PROFESSOR inspects the musculature of his back.

PROFESSOR

Your talents should not be wasted in showmanship, Mister Sandow. You have much to offer science. My colleagues and I -

SANDOW

I am an artist. And my art will have the respectability of any science. If the body can be mastered and developed, then so can our knowledge and understanding of its functions, and of its natural potential. But we should not lose sight of its elegance and beauty as a living work of art.

The MUSIC dissolves into the same piece being played on a piano by...

**INT. SIEVEKING'S HOME - DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Sieveking sits at a grand piano, stripped to his waist, playing carefree as Sandow, also topless, performs various exercises in time to the music.

There is grace and precision, until -

Sandow begins to exercise at an increased pace and out of sync with the music.

SANDOW

Faster!

SIEVEKING

You have lost the grace of your movements, Eugen!

Sadow stops exercising.

SADOW

Dissonance is a form of art!

Sieveking stops playing, turns and smiles, as he locks eyes with Sadow.

Silence. Then —

SADOW (CONT'D)

My turn.

Sadow playfully pushes Sieveking from the piano stool, sits down.

He begins to play, poorly. Sieveking leans in.

SIEVEKING

Like this.

Gently, Sieveking takes Sadow's hand, moves his fingers it into a chord position, softly presses his hand down upon Sadow's.

A perfect chord.

Sadow is frozen and does not make eye contact with Sieveking.

SADOW

We must rehearse for tomorrow's performance.

SIEVEKING

You mean the one where a statue of Adonis is brought to life: the most beautiful work of art is made flesh. Adored and pursued by women across the world, Adonis tires of human life and reverts back to being made of marble.

Tense silence. Sadow breathes heavier and faster.

SIEVEKING (CONT'D)

He would rather be lifeless than live  
a life of love, of admiration, of  
desire from the wrong kind of people.

In a sudden outburst, Sandow smashes his fist on the piano, creating a harsh, dissonant sound. He stands, squaring up to Sieveking.

Sandow's breathing is intense and enraged. He glares at Sieveking, who recoils in fear, then turns, picks up the piano stool and launches it across the room.

He turns back to Sieveking, locking eyes, his breathing fast and shallow, then grips Sieveking by his hair, pulls it tight, leans in, and kisses him.

**INT. CASINO THEATRE – NIGHT**

TITLE: *'Casino Theatre, New York. 1893.'*

Sandow paces in the wings whilst watching the performance of *Adonis*: a mock version of the Pygmalion myth, whereby a female sculptress creates a male statue that is so beautiful that she cannot bear to part with it.

The curtain descends on ADONIS, who sustains a static pose: he is the statue remade.

A rapturous applause wanes to a tense silence. Moments later, the curtain rises with Sandow in place of Adonis.

Applause.

The statue of Adonis comes to life as Sandow, who performs a series of poses displaying perfect control over his muscles.

**EXT. A STREET – NIGHT**

An impenetrable fog envelops a lonely street.

Sandow makes his way along a side road.

SARAH (O.S.)

Oi, you! Sandow! I wanna speak with  
you!

A figure emerges from the shadows: it is Sarah White dressed in an elaborate stage costume, as if she has just left the theatre.

SANDOW

Miss White. This is most peculiar.  
What brings you to New York?

SARAH

I want back what ya robbed from me.

SANDOW

Forgive me, I do not understand.

SARAH

Don't ya play ignorant with me, ya  
charlatan! Ya thief!

SANDOW

I am sorry, I do not —

SARAH

In ya farce of a show with that  
Sampson. You cheated an' I knows it!

SANDOW

Clearly there has been a  
misunderstanding. Goodnight, Miss  
White.

Suddenly, Sarah brandishes a small whip from inside her  
coat. She pants heavily, ready to attack.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

If you intend to strike me then let  
me dissuade you. For if I should  
catch hold of your wrist you may  
never be able to use it again.

As Sarah lashes Sandow across the face, he lunges towards  
her and grips her wrist, squeezing tightly until she  
drops the weapon.

SARAH

Help me!

Passers-by hear the commotion and gather around the  
scuffling pair.

Three MEN intervene — two restrain Sandow, the other  
attends to Sarah.

MAN #1

(to Sarah)

Madame, are you hurt?

Sadow is pinned to the ground by the other men, panting heavily, yet maintaining control of his anger. His eyes, full of rage, are locked on Sarah.

**INT. COURT ROOM – DAY**

Sadow stands in the dock, head held high. A pale and scrawny JUDGE with a British accent presides over the proceedings.

JUDGE

The Prosecution has informed the Court of various allegations against Mister Sadow pertaining to his early life in England, namely that Mister Sadow claimed to be a man of the aristocracy, thereby beguiling Miss White into lending him money, which he failed to reimburse, having subsequently fled to Italy. Please confirm how much the sum of money was that was allegedly borrowed.

PROSECUTOR

Eleven British pounds, your Honor.

Sadow laughs to himself, almost choking.

SADOW

Your Honor, if I may speak.

JUDGE

Permission granted.

SADOW

I refute the allegations leveled against me, for I paid the sum of money back to Miss White before leaving for Italy. And as for my status, I will prove to the court that I am an aristocrat.

PROSECUTOR

Can you prove that the money was repaid? And as for your self-professed status, Miss White has informed the Court that you visited her home in London without money, food, and barely any clothing. She also invested a great deal of money in both you and your Manager in the contest with Mister Sampson. Surely,

a man of the aristocracy would not be so lacking in the basic means of life, or indeed capital to finance his career.

Sadow is silent, head bowed.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

And what of Miss White's claim that you are, in fact, a fraudster? She has informed the Prosecution that she paid a metalsmith - a Mister Schlag - a considerable amount of money to fashion chains and coins out of brittle material. These props were then substituted on the night of the contest with Mister Sampson for the real materials, thereby ensuring your victory over him.

Murmurs erupt within the courtroom.

Between his fingers, Sadow turns the torn playing card gifted to him by the strongman.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

I conclude that not only do you owe Miss White the monies borrowed; but you are also morally obliged to reimburse every single member of the audience who purchased a ticket for the event in question, only to be beguiled by a charlatan.

A heavy silence lingers, Sadow's gaze remains fixed upon the card. His breathing is labored. He begins to perspire.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

Silence is the loudest confession of guilt, your Honor.

JUDGE

In the absence of sufficient evidence, the case remains inconclusive. The Prosecution will arrange for Mister Durlacher - alias Professor Atilla - to travel to New York to testify the truth of these claims.

**INT. SIEVEKING'S HOME - DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Sadow is sat at a table, impatiently rustling through the morning paper whilst Sieveking plays gentle music at the piano.

SADOW

According to this, Atilla wants to tear me in half like a deck of cards! He then goes on to denounce me as a fraud. If he wins the case I am finished.

Sieveking alights from the piano. Sadow is fixed on the newspaper and doesn't see Sieveking slink up behind him.

SIEVEKING

If my music won't calm your nerves, perhaps this will.

Sieveking gently places his hands on Sadow's shoulders, begins massaging them.

Sadow bolts up from the table, furious.

SADOW

What are you doing?

SIEVEKING

I thought -

SADOW

Thought what?!

SIEVEKING

The other day.

SADOW

A mistake. Nothing more.

SIEVEKING

Don't you feel it, Eugen?

SADOW

No.

SIEVEKING

But what we have is -

SADOW

Whatever we had is finished.

Sadow grabs the paper, storms out of the room.

**INT. COURT ROOM – DAY**

Atila is in the witness stand.

ATILLA

The chains supposedly broken by Sandow were a fabrication, for one link hung by but a thread. Any man – even a child – could have broken it. The 'mighty' Sandow's reputation is founded on a lie.

JUDGE

Mister Sandow, do you refute this claim?

SANDOW

They are more or less knacks, your Honor. Nevertheless, they are clever. Some elements of the overall act are akin to conjuring tricks, therefore you must view the show as a whole piece. The conjuring act is merely part of the entertainment scene...

FLASHBACK to a previous performance.

Sandow invites a member of the audience to lift a barbell. Their strength fails.

We then see that, slowly, the sand from the weight trickles out through a hole in the stage floor, so that by the time Sandow comes to lift the weight, it is light.

SANDOW (V.O.)

As the Great Houdini said, 'it is a phenomenon of stupidity and goes to show how willingly people will be fooled, and with what cheerful asininity they will help on their deceivers'.

We return to the COURT ROOM.

JUDGE

Such a remark betrays contempt for your audience.

SANDOW

You mistake me, your Honor. I am merely quoting a highly respected and renowned entertainer, one who is

practiced in the arts of deception.  
If I am guilty of chicanery, then you  
must sentence all music hall artists  
for the same offence.

**EXT. COURT – DAY**

Sadow descends a flight of steps and wades through  
members of the Press.

ATILLA (O.S.)

You may have gotten away with it.

Sadow turns.

ATILLA

But I will have justice, in my own  
way.

SADOW

Go back to London, along with your  
slander. There is but one worthy  
strongman in America.

Sadow removes his top hat, bows his head.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Good day.

**INT. CASINO THEATRE – NIGHT**

Backstage, Sadow divests of his performance attire in  
the company of FLORENZ ZIEGFELD: an affluent, stylish and  
eccentric businessman in his mid 20's.

ZIEGFELD

A superb performance! I have attended  
most this season and you get better  
each time!

As Sadow removes more of his stage attire, he becomes  
slower in movement, more hunched in posture.

He then removes a chain – a stage prop – from around his  
neck. He sighs. Relief.

SADOW

What can I do for you, Mister  
Ziegfeld?

ZIEGFELD

To be blunt, I am here on business

matters and I wish to venture a proposition.

Sandow stops removing the remainder of his costume.

SANDOW

What is your proposition?

ZIEGFELD

You have immense potential, Mister 'S'. But you're wasted in New York. Not to mention the Press' treatment of you over that silly court case.

Sandow continues to remove his clothing.

SANDOW

I won.

ZIEGFELD

Perhaps. But you need to win back the public.

SANDOW

And how do I do that?

ZIEGFELD

Reinvent yourself.

Sandow stops.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

Reinvention is survival in this crazy business. And I can help you.

SANDOW

How?

ZIEGFELD

Your journey to newfound fame lies in Chicago. At the Trocadero Theatre, to be exact!

SANDOW

Fame and renown are not the same.

ZIEGFELD

I can see that you're passionate about your art. That's good. You live it, you breathe it, so share it with the world!

Sadow is silent, pensive.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

Come with me to the World's Columbian  
Exposition.

Sadow turns away from Ziegfeld, glances down at his threadbare backpack which rests in the corner of the room.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

What do you say?

We focus in on the tattered backpack.

**EXT. WORLD'S FAIR – CHICAGO – DAY**

TITLE: *'World's Fair: Columbian Exposition, Chicago. 1893.'*

The fair is a magnificent feat: the newly built ferris wheel; an appearance from Houdini himself; Tesla's 'egg of Columbus' and more.

Ziegfeld stands atop a small transitory stage amidst the bustling crowds, touting for passers by to witness Sadow's act.

A small crowd has gathered.

Surrounding him are other STAGE PERFORMERS and their MANAGERS, each showcasing feats of strength.

ZIEGFELD

Ladies! Gentlemen! Witness the Magnificent Sadow, the strongest man in the world, defying all limitation of human strength! You will be amazed as he lifts a piano in each hand; you will be left in disbelief as he juggles with cannon balls!

The voice of a COMPETITOR emanates from across a walkway.

COMPETITOR (O.S.)

No man can juggle cannon balls!

ZIEGFELD

Cynic!

COMPETITOR (O.S.)

Fraudster!

ZIEGFELD

If sheer strength doesn't amaze you,  
then perhaps this will! Eugen!

Sheepishly, Sandow emerges from behind a curtain wearing only a loincloth and sandals. His body is covered in white powder, giving the impression of a living statue.

The female members of the audience are stunned into silence; the competitor's mouth agape in amazement.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

Being strong is not for brutes but  
for the beautiful! Come and see. Come  
and feel for yourself!

**INT. A MAKESHIFT TENT — DAY**

A group of four WOMEN touch Sandow's muscles from behind a curtain, gingerly at first and with gloves.

One woman removes her glove and swoons as she touches his bare chest.

A fifth hand extends from behind the curtain, now stroking Sandow's neck.

Sandow, alarmed, bolts up, pulls back the curtain to see Sieveking.

SANDOW

What are you doing?

SIEVEKING

You haven't written in weeks. How  
else was I to reach you?

SANDOW

You cannot be seen.

Ziegfeld enters.

ZIEGFELD

What's going on? Why have you  
stopped?

Ziegfeld glances at Sieveking, disapprovingly.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

You are?

SANDOW

A friend.

Ziegfeld ignores Sieveking, turns to Sandow.

ZIEGFELD

Women want to touch you. Men want to look like you. Your weekly earnings have risen from two thousand to twenty thousand dollars! But something's wrong. What is it?

SANDOW

The body is a work of art, not a commodity. It should not be exploited.

Sieveking nods enthusiastically, poised to interject when

—

ZIEGFELD

Artistic integrity. I understand. I do. But you must understand that in America there is an appetite for the body unlike anywhere else! People are drawn to it. They desire the fantasy, the titillation. And they're prepared to pay for it! If they want it, then let's give it to them! The women flock to see you. You could have any one of them.

SANDOW

Their desire is of no consequence. I do not want just anyone. I will wait for the right one.

Sieveking smiles, poised to speak when —

ZIEGFELD

Even better! We can create a romantic interest. Who can we pair you with? Lillian Russell?

SANDOW

That virile woman?

ZIEGFELD

The columnists will lap it up.

SIEVEKING

If I may, Mister...

Ziegfeld casts a glare.

ZIEGFELD

Ziegfeld.

SIEVEKING

If I may, Mister Ziegfeld. If you successfully find a match for Eugen, will that not alienate his admirers? People are drawn to the slightest prospect, the slightest hope, of having that which they desire, even if they know in their heart it is out of reach. If you take that from them, then their interest – even their love – may wane.

A heavy silence, broken by:

SANDOW

Mister Ziegfeld. I may have found the right one. Blanche Brooks. From England.

Sorrow, anger, confusion as Sieveking's heart breaks.

SIEVEKING

Eugen, how can you –

SANDOW

My romantic life is no-one's business. Not the Press...

He turns to Sieveking who strains to hold back a flood of tears.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

And not you.

Sieveking flounces out of the tent.

Emotionless, Sandow turns to Ziegfeld.

SANDOW

I want to inspire people. As many as is humanly possible. What must I do?

ZIEGFELD

You can start by being one of the first people to be publicized by the new technology: the motion picture

camera. It is the future!

SANDOW

With respect, I fear you are exploiting my integrity for your own gain.

ZIEGFELD

Oh, I am. Indeed, I am. And you'll thank me for it.

SANDOW

I have trusted you this far.

ZIEGFELD

Then trust me now. We live in changing times. Do you want to be remembered as a music hall celebrity, or as something far, far greater? From a marketing perspective, now is the time, Mister 'S'. Embrace change. Adapt to it. Use it to your advantage. Make yourself a legend.

**INT. FILM STUDIO – DAY**

TITLE: *'Edison Studios. 1894.'*

Sandow stands against a black backdrop. He flexes his muscles whilst a motion picture camera films him.

EDISON

Let us see the arms, Mister Sandow.

Sandow strikes a front biceps pose.

EDISON

Hold.

We next see Sandow through the lens of the CAMERA.

The reflected light gives his skin a marble-like tone reminiscent of the Grecian statues.

EDISON (CONT'D)

Hold...And relax. Mister Sandow, thank you for your contribution.

SANDOW

Truly, this invention will make men immortal.

**EXT. THEATRE HALL — NIGHT**

Sandow is poised inside a spacious cage — also inhabited by a docile lion — on a stage. The lion does not move, despite being goaded.

The attendant audience is restless. Murmurs. Goadings.

As Ziegfeld watches from the wings, he gestures to Sandow to rescue himself from humiliation.

SANDOW

Ladies and gentlemen! I can assure you that during our practice of this act, no sooner had I stepped inside the cage than the lion crouched, preparing to spring on me! His eyes ablaze with fury, he hurled himself in the air but missed! For I stepped aside, and before he had time to recover, I caught him around the throat with my left arm, and round the middle with my right. Though his weight was five hundred and thirty pounds, I lifted him high above my shoulder and —

HECKLER #1

Why is it asleep? It's more like a lamb than a lion!

HECKLER #2

It's a lamb, not a lion!

SANDOW

The lion met his match during practice, and now he cowers in fear.

HECKLER #1

Easy for you to say. Where's the proof?

The audience begins to jeer.

Sandow looks to the wings. Ziegfeld has gone.

**INT. THEATRE OFFICE — DAY**

Ziegfeld reads from a newspaper.

ZIEGFELD

They're onto us. They're claiming the lion was sedated prior to the match. I didn't realize we gave the beast so much!

SANDOW

It was a farce! What now of my integrity?

ZIEGFELD

Oh, stop whining! If you want integrity, then write a blasted book!

**EXT. BOOKSELLER'S - DAY**

Sandow's book - 'Sandow on Physical Training' - displayed in a popular bookseller's window.

A group of GENTLEMEN is gathered outside the shop, each one expressing interest in the book.

One MAN removes a cigarette from his mouth, tosses it to the ground, stamps on it in disgust, then marches into the shop.

**EXT. MANCHESTER CATHEDRAL - DAY**

TITLE: *'Manchester, England.'*

The wedding party leaves the cathedral: Sandow, Blanche, Warwick, and Blanche's two brothers.

Ziegfeld trails behind.

No crowds and no press: a private affair.

**INT. BROOKS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY**

Warwick stands at the head of the table, slightly inebriated. A dozen or so guests listen with enthusiasm.

WARWICK

Please raise your glass and join me in a toast, to the bride and the groom.

GUESTS

(in sync)

To the bride and groom.

A toast follows.

WARWICK

Now, a few words from the best man.

Reluctantly, Ziegfeld rises.

ZIEGFELD

I wish Eugen and Blanche every  
happiness.

He raises his glass to silence.

WARWICK

Mister Ziegfeld. Short of a few  
words. Now there's a rare thing.

Sandow rises.

SANDOW

Mister Brooks.

WARWICK

Warwick! It's Warwick!

SANDOW

Whilst not customary, I want to begin  
by presenting my wife with a gift.

He reaches down, retrieves a small rectangular object  
wrapped in paper.

Curious and excited, Blanche unwraps it, to reveal a  
framed photograph of her and Sandow – taken when Sandow  
first visited Warwick's studio.

Her tearful smile lights up the room.

Warwick stands, puts his arm around his new son in law.

WARWICK

Welcome to the family.

**INT. BROOKS' HOME – DRAWING ROOM – NIGHT**

Blanche is sat at a piano, playing gently. Her eyes are  
closed, she smiles, lost in the melody.

The wedding guests are sat around, sprawled on chairs and  
chaise lounges, smoking and enjoying a whiskey...except  
for Sandow who watches his wife, as if hypnotized.

Ziegfeld sidles up to him.

ZIEGFELD

Are you sure you want to travel back tomorrow?

A long silence, then —

With a tear swelling, Sandow nods.

**INT. THEATRE — NEW YORK — NIGHT**

Backstage, Sandow demonstrates the torn deck of cards trick to Ziegfeld.

SANDOW

The non-dominant hand grips the deck, covering about half of it. Grip too high or too low, and one hand will work harder than the other, as it is grabbing less surface space. You see?

Ziegfeld grips the deck.

ZIEGFELD

Like so?

SANDOW

Yes. Now the hand grips over the top of the deck with the fingers and thumb wrapping around the deck. Like this.

Ziegfeld makes an attempt, gets it wrong.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

No. Like this.

Sandow takes Ziegfeld by the hand, places it in the correct position on the deck.

His hand lingers. Sandow catches Ziegfeld's gaze, when —

ZIEGFELD

Is that why your 'friend' left in such a hurry?

SANDOW

What are you talking about?

ZIEGFELD

I'm no fool. Why did you marry her? Why have a child with her?

SANDOW

I love her.

ZIEGFELD

I'll tell you why. Because it's what you're supposed to do, not what you want to do.

Sadow throws the deck of cards at the wall.

SANDOW

How dare you presume to -

ZIEGFELD

You're lost, Eugen. Lost. How can I promote you when you don't know who you are?

A heavy silence.

ZIEGFELD (CONT'D)

When the season is done, I'll take my leave. I wish you the best.

SANDOW

I don't need you! Get out!

ZIEGFELD

Eugen. Please. I want this to be -

SANDOW

Get out! Out!

**INT. BROOKS' HOME - BEDROOM - DAY**

Blanche nurses her newborn daughter, HELEN, surrounded by her family - her mother, brother, father...

**INT. OPULENT THEATRE - NIGHT**

Sadow performs a series of tableaux, each illustrating the mythical episodes in the life of Hercules.

In the first of these 'living pictures', a beautiful maiden and her betrothed are reaping in a vineyard, when Hercules snatches her and escapes on horseback.

The lover pursues Hercules and cuts the suspension ropes on a bridge crossing a ravine, thereby preventing his escape.

Hercules responds by throwing the lover into the ravine -

but how are they to cross the bridge?

Sadow kneels down beneath the broken bridge, sustaining it on his chest, whilst the horse – a real horse – and the maiden cross safely.

As he stands, he is breathless and wan.

The curtain descends.

In the wings, Sadow wades through various stagehands, clutching his chest.

STAGEHAND

Mister Sadow. Are you alright?

He pushes the stagehand aside.

SADOW

Leave me be!

**INT. THEATRE – DRESSING ROOM – NIGHT**

Still breathless, Sadow enters his dressing room, clutching his chest, collapses into a chair.

He buries his head into his arms and, slowly, lifts his gaze to see himself in the mirror.

The reflected image is now aged.

He begins to cough violently, spitting blood onto the ground.

He wipes the blood and phlegm from his mouth, gazing more deeply into his reflection.

He takes a deep breath. Then another.

He calms down, retrieves a newspaper that sits on the dressing table, opens it up.

We see an advertisement for Professor Atilla's new gymnasium, 'Atilla's Athletic Studio and School of Physical Culture' with the accompanying words: 'trainer of Eugen Sadow'.

Panic sets in. Heavy breathing and profuse sweating.

In a fit of rage, he launches his fist into the dressing room mirror.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM — NIGHT**

With noticeable loss of muscle mass, Sandow sits in an armchair, solemn and composed, whilst a REPORTER sits adjacent to him.

A PHOTOGRAPHER takes pictures throughout.

SANDOW

The bridge alone weighed one thousand two-hundred pounds, and the maiden was no featherweight.

REPORTER

If your strength is waning, is this the beginning of the end for Eugen Sandow?

SANDOW

I have nothing left to prove, except for my longevity.

REPORTER

And how do you propose to prove that? And where?

A contemplative silence.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Your contract is due to expire. The halls will not book you if you are falling ill.

In a resolute gesture, Sandow stands.

SANDOW

To answer your first question: whilst British and European society fear the onset of 'degeneration', I will implement a system of self-improvement that will transform idle weaklings into paragons of health.

The Reporter frantically takes notes. The photographer moves in closer to Sandow.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

To answer your second question: by returning to England. And to address your final point: I no longer need, or belong in, the entertainment halls. A new chapter has begun.

**INT. BROOKS' HOME — DRAWING ROOM — DAY**

Blanche is stood at a window cradling her daughter. She gazes upon a verdant field and is mesmerized by the sunlight dappling a row trees, perfectly arranged in series. The symmetry of the natural world is beautiful and captivating.

Sadow is sat facing away from her, his mind buried in a stack of papers and letters.

BLANCHE

It's so peaceful. So private. We could be a real family, Friedrich.

SADOW

It is quaint, yes. But I do not desire the provincial life. We must return to London.

BLANCHE

Is this not the life of peace you yearn for?

SADOW

I must work harder to create my system, or else be enslaved by another man's.

BLANCHE

I don't understand.

SADOW

The system of Physical Culture. It is my legacy to the world.

Blanche remains silent.

Amongst the mass of papers, Sadow retrieves a copy of the newly established *Daily Mail* newspaper.

SADOW (CONT'D)

The Press is now appealing to a wider and more popular readership. From a marketing perspective, now is the time.

A brief but tense silence. Blanche places the sleeping Helen into a basket.

BLANCHE

I was sorry to hear of the news.

SANDOW

What have the papers said now?

BLANCHE

I mean the news of your Father's passing. Did you not receive the letter? It was left for you.

Sandow is speechless. Numb.

SANDOW

It must be lost amongst my correspondences.

BLANCHE

One of your clerks opened it. It was amongst the letters from your admirers.

A lingering silence. Heavy breathing.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Are you not —

SANDOW

Do not speak of this again.

BLANCHE

But Friedrich —

SANDOW

I said never!

He rummages impatiently through newspaper scraps.

BLANCHE

You never used to pay so much attention to the newspapers.

SANDOW

I was a naïve fool. The Press has the power to make or break a man.

BLANCHE

But you know they will break you as soon as they would make you.

SANDOW

My muscles may be failing, but my reputation is stronger than ever. I

must capitalize on it. The time is -

BLANCHE

'Now'. Yes, I have heard you say it many times. But you never seem to live for 'now'. Your mind is always wandering, fixated on future ventures.

Blanche approaches her husband from behind and lovingly embraces him. He fidgets, as if being suffocated.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

How much have you already capitalized on? What is your fortune, at present?

Sandow breaks away from Blanche's embrace, as if unchaining himself in one of his stage performances.

SANDOW

That is no business of yours.

Helen wakes, cries.

**INT. ST JAMES' STREET GYMNASIUM - DAY**

TITLE: *'St James' Street, Piccadilly, London. 1897.'*

A large wood paneled room is filled with paintings and statues of Sandow. Amidst the self-promoting iconography there is a pair of dumbbells rested on a wooden bench.

Sandow consults with an upper-class CLIENT - 40's, rotund - on a fitness regime.

SANDOW

My pledge to you is that, assuming your illness is not an incurable one, I guarantee to bring you to such a state of health that you will pass the severest of physical tests.

Sandow demonstrates a series of calisthenic exercises to the client.

The client performs the movements and is out of breath almost immediately.

Next, Sandow lifts a dumbbell above his head, but quickly retracts his arm in pain. His expression of discomfort disappears almost immediately as he continues instructing his client.

CLIENT

Mister Sandow?

SANDOW

It is nothing. An occupational hazard, nothing more!

Sandow's smile quickly shifts to a look of concern.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME — DINING ROOM — NIGHT**

Sandow and Blanche sit at the dining table. The former buries his head in the newspaper.

A heavy silence lingers. Eventually:

SANDOW

I think *The Times* captures it rather accurately. Listen. 'The object of the instruction is to develop the physical system as a whole by exercises founded on scientific principles and adapted to both sexes and all ages.' For once they got it right!

He lowers the newspaper, slowly, deep in thought. As he leans forward, he clutches his shoulder that is causing him discomfort.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

That is what I must do next.

Blanche is silent. Her head is bowed.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

I said, that is what I must -

Blanche wakes, as if from a trance.

BLANCHE

What must you do next?

SANDOW

A magazine. But here's the ruse. I will claim to respond personally to each and every letter that is sent to me through the magazine; but in reality, I will devise an elaborate system for categorizing questions, and employ more clerks to sift

through the post, dispatching pre-written answers!

BLANCHE

You will lie?

SANDOW

It is not lies.

BLANCHE

It is dishonest.

SANDOW

What is your point?

Silence.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Do you dare to question my probity?

Blanche remains silent but not stoic. The pressure is building inside.

Sandow bolts up.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

I asked you a question, damn you!

BLANCHE

Ruses?

Blanche's voice trembles, her heart palpitates.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

You seek to deceive your public through lies, Friedrich, lies!

SANDOW

It is a means to reach more —

Now Blanche stands, her eyes ablaze.

BLANCHE

Numbers! All you care about it numbers! You used to care only about your integrity! What has happened to you, Friedrich?

Sandow grabs the newspaper, screws it up into a ball, tosses it to one side.

SANDOW

Get out!

BLANCHE

I was already leaving.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME — BEDROOM — NIGHT**

Helen, 2, is asleep in the master bed.

Blanche retrieves a framed photograph from her dressing table: the photograph gifted to her by Sandow at their wedding.

With her index finger, she traces the lines around Sandow's face and smile.

She breaks down. Weeps.

Helen wakes, cries.

Blanche dries her tears, then swiftly attends to her daughter. She picks her up from the bed, cradles her tightly in her arms.

BLANCHE

Hush. Don't cry. Don't cry.

**INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE — DAY**

JAMES CARPENTER, 20's, nonchalantly sits at a desk that is littered with unread mail.

A MAN frantically approaches him from behind. It is the MANAGER of the Press — a portly gentleman, finely dressed, with a stern expression.

MANAGER

Carpenter! I've had it with you. This is the third complaint from a reader highlighting your poor spelling and unflattering tone! We have Mister Sandow's reputation to uphold. I very much doubt that he would refer to his client's 'overly large pudding house'!

CARPENTER

Perhaps you could write to Mister Sandow, Sir, to ask for some advice on how to shift that gut of yours. Perhaps I'll be the one to respond!

MANAGER

You've crossed the line, Carpenter.  
Gather your things and get out!

The Manager, enraged, walks away whilst Carpenter glances over his shoulder. The Manager is out of sight...

Carpenter furtively retrieves from a drawer a number of 'code books' in which all questions relating to fitness - and their possible answers - are contained.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY**

Sandow sits at the table staring angrily at a newspaper headline: 'Sandow the Fraudster!' With a degree of struggle, he tears the newspaper in half.

BLANCHE

Now what is it?

SANDOW

It is nothing but a blip. But I need something to win back the public's favor. I will strengthen my brand. I must be a name known in each and every home!

Blanche remains silent, detached, breathing shallowly.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

If George blasted Shaw wants an *Ubermensch*, I'll give it to him. I hope he chokes on his salad!

**INT. AN OPULENT RESTAURANT - DAY**

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, 40's, is pale with a wiry frame. He does not touch his salad. Sandow devours a large steak.

A REPORTER is in attendance at the lunch.

SHAW

I never wanted to stand a piano on my chest. Nor did I consider it the proper place for three elephants! Your physical system will not change society, Mister Sandow.

SANDOW

Then what will? Literature?

SHAW

Selective evolution. The mating of partners with only the finest genetics to create a race of people that are intellectual, moral, and -

SANDOW

Overweight. Physical culture is the education of the body, just as philosophy is the education of the spirit. The two are required to create a balanced human race, are they not?

Sandow gestures towards Shaw's salad.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

May I?

SHAW

I have finished.

SANDOW

You have barely touched it.

Sandow eats the salad, exaggerating every mouthful.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Healthier men and women will beget children with better constitutions free from hereditary taint. Does this not align with your vision of social evolution?

SHAW

No. Simply because the mind has dominion over the body in all matters. If you wish to see a race of unintelligent but physically strong people, then I thoroughly recommend your system. It is, however, not aligned with my own.

SANDOW

I concur, for my system does not permit intellectual elitism.

Sandow wipes his mouth on a napkin, pushes the plate of salad towards Shaw, stands up, and leaves.

SHAW

(to the Reporter)

Do not quote the comment on elitism!

Angrily, Shaw digs his fork into what remains of his salad, eats.

Chokes.

**INT. THEATRE — NIGHT**

Sadow waits in the wings with a PIANIST.

PIANIST

Forgive me if it is not my place to say, but in the previous act, I observed you struggling. Do you wish to take a longer rest?

SADOW

And ruin the show? Never!

Sadow gently pushes the pianist onto the stage.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Let's make this a night to remember!

Now onstage, the pianist sits at a piano, playing a tune. Sadow approaches, full of confidence, and grips the side of the piano, lifting it a few feet into the air.

An expression of triumph. But then -

He loses his grip on a handle situated round the back of the piano (designed to shift the weight to allow him to carry it with greater ease).

Panic.

The piano — together with the pianist — tumbles over the edge of the stage. An almighty clatter followed by screaming.

Sadow watches in horror.

The audience is hushed, until a cackle — followed by a jeering comment — breaks the heavy silence.

The audience erupts into laughter.

Crestfallen, Sadow marches off stage.

**INT. COURTROOM — DAY**

The pianist, HARRY LEIGH, 30's, is sat with the Prosecution.

SANDOW

Your Honor, in truth I tripped over a piece of carpet. It was indeed Mr Leigh's responsibility to ensure the stage was safe prior to the performance, and therefore any accusation of neglect must be directed at him.

JUDGE

In the absence of sufficient evidence to support your defense, Mister Sandow, I rule that Mister Leigh is awarded one hundred and twenty-five pounds to compensate for damages incurred.

Sandow reclines in the chair, satisfied, smug.

He glances over to his LAWYER with a beaming smile.

Leigh is disgusted. He stands assertively, clutching on to a walking stick and raising his head, despite wearing a restrictive neck brace.

LEIGH

Your Honor, that man nearly killed me!

JUDGE

Order!

LEIGH

He's not fit to be on stage!

JUDGE

Order, Mister Leigh!

LEIGH

He's a charlatan, your Honor. A has been!

Now longer smirking, Sandow's head is bowed.

JUDGE

Order! The ruling has been made.

**EXT. COURT HOUSE — DAY**

Sandow and his lawyer descend a flight of steps.

SANDOW

Victory!

LAWYER

'Victory' indeed. But tell me. Did you struggle to perform that night?

Silence.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

If you are putting yourself and others at risk, then I fear we will be seeing each other much more often. And I do not mean in a social capacity.

SANDOW

My good friend, I must preserve my title as the strongest man in the world. And as I have just received a new challenge, the incentive to do so seems timely.

LAWYER

What challenge?

SANDOW

From an Arthur Saxon. He has come to England with his brother in the hope of emulating my success. He claims that he is stronger than I; but I will prove him otherwise.

**INT. THEATRE STAGE – NIGHT**

TITLE: *'The Grand Theatre, Sheffield. 1898.'*

ARNO SAXON

Esteemed audience! My brother will now lift a barbell above his head – a barbell that is so heavy that even the mighty Sandow could not lift it!

Effortlessly, ARTHUR SAXON raises a 260lb barbell into the air.

At that moment, a VOICE emanates from the rear of the theatre.

SANDOW (O.S.)

Stop! I dare you, Sir, to repeat that remark!

Saxon is perplexed.

Sandow leaps to the stage and attempts to perform the challenge, but he can only lift the barbell as far as his shoulders.

Defeated, he releases the barbell that impacts the stage with a mighty thud.

The audience is silenced.

ARNO SAXON

As everyone here is witness, the world's strongest man has been defeated! Behold Saxon, the Magnificent! The world's new strongest man!

Sandow's eyes lock on Saxon, the victor.

**INT. THE PARK HOTEL – CARDIFF – DAY**

Sandow, dressed in business attire, sits casually on a chaise lounge whilst a REPORTER perches at the edge of a wooden seat.

Next to the reporter there is a table that is littered with formal papers: the room is Sandow's temporary workspace.

REPORTER

You are at the pinnacle of your popularity and earning in excess of ten thousand pounds a year. And yet you wish to retire from the stage?

Distracted, Sandow sifts through an innumerable pile of letters. A couple of SECRETARIES hover around him.

SANDOW

Yes, it is true. I thought I would have been finished before now, but I had so many contracts to fulfill. In a few weeks I will have retired from the stage. For good.

REPORTER

But Mister Sandow. Why?

SANDOW

Now I have over five thousand pupils in my Physical Culture schools and I receive hundreds of letters from all parts of the country requesting that I should open more! This I intend on doing. In addition, I have to edit my monthly magazine, as well as consider the next edition of my book on the subject of which, incidentally, over three hundred thousand copies have been sold to date. All of this takes up a great deal of time, for I superintend everything myself.

REPORTER

Is it your ambition to build a nation of 'Eugen Sandows'?

SANDOW

I will improve the physical condition of all those who seek my guidance.

REPORTER

You have not answered my question. Do you intend to create a nation of supermen?

SANDOW

The betterment of humanity is my goal. But there is only one Eugen Sandow. I cannot be matched. I will not be defeated.

**EXT. NEW EMPIRE THEATRE – NIGHT**

TITLE: *'Launch of the New Empire Theatre, London. 1899.'*

The theatre is teeming with high society, including the MAYOR.

Sandow begins the introductory performance with a tableau: a formalized display of his body performed from inside a velour-lined 'posing box' (a large cabinet lined with black velvet and illuminated with spotlights).

After his display, the curtain is lifted to reveal a gladiatorial arena.

The IMAGE of the theatrical arena DISSOLVES into a real theatre of the Boer War.

**EXT. ARMY BASE — ENGLAND — DAY**

A line of BRITISH SOLDIERS undergoes physical inspection. They are either undernourished and wan, or overweight and cumbersome.

**EXT. ARMY BASE — INDIA — DAY**

AFRICAN SOLDIERS — mostly conscripted farmers — undergo physical exercise in a training camp. They are strong, fast, and focused.

Then, a series of IMAGES of the Boer attacks on Cape Colony. Swift. Calculated. Humiliating for the British.

Further IMAGES of:

Farm boys and outdoor dwellers being loaded onto an army transport, headed for training camp. They are filled with patriotic fervor;

The British aristocracy idling away in unhealthy and insalubrious pursuits — over-consuming food and wine, gambling, and smoking.

**EXT. ARMY BASE — DAY**

The camp is full of familiar equipment from Sandow's St. James' Street gymnasium: benches, bars, dumbbells.

Sandow is surrounded by six SOLDIERS who watch him demonstrate various exercises using the equipment.

SANDOW

Instruct your troops to follow this program and prove to our enemy that Britain is fit to rule.

One Soldier speaks with a Canadian accent.

SOLDIER #1

Shame Britain can't prove it with her own soldiers.

SOLDIER #2

(with an Australian accent)

Too lazy. Too scrawny. Can't fight for their own bloody Empire.

SANDOW

Poor hygiene and poor diet. Yes. But lazy? No. The working classes are our lifeblood.

SOLDIER #2

'Our' lifeblood? You're not even English! What do you care?

Sandow doesn't reply. He picks up a dumbbell.

SANDOW

Now extend this over your -

As he lifts the weight above shoulder level, he brings his arm crashing down, the dumbbell falling to the ground.

The Soldiers laugh and mock.

**EXT. PORTOBELLO GARDENS - LONDON - NIGHT**

On stage, a TROOP of South Africans - played by actors - shown tracking and killing a lion, then performing a mysterious dance in front of an audience of dozens of impassioned hecklers.

**INT. EXHIBITION CENTRE, EARL'S COURT - LONDON - NIGHT**

A shooting gallery where VISITORS take potshots at Africans: the 'enemy'.

**EXT. A BATTLEFIELD - SOUTH AFRICA - DAY**

The horrors of war. Smoke. Gunfire. Bloodshed on both sides.

**INT. EXHIBITION CENTRE - NIGHT**

We see a replica goldmine, designed to remind the public of the economic incentives for prevailing in South Africa.

Crowds of women with their children bustle to get close to the attraction.

Their expressions betray excitement and curiosity mixed with amusement.

**EXT. A CAMP - SOUTH AFRICA - DAY**

South African women and children - malnourished and exhausted - are driven like cattle into a British

concentration camp: a barren clearing filled with dozens of tents.

As a CHILD falls to the muddy ground. A SOLDIER hoists the child back up.

The child's MOTHER wails, lunges towards the soldier, who cracks her ribs with the butt of his rifle.

**INT. THEATRE — NIGHT**

Documentary footage of the war, set to light-hearted music, flashes upon a screen to a captivated audience:

British Soldiers providing water, food and medical attention to South African refugees;

A British soldier smiles with a South African child playfully sat on his shoulders;

Soldiers laughing, waving, with various expressions of camaraderie.

Sandow waits in the wings dressed in army attire.

Later, he enters the stage with a group of British soldiers, chased by a battalion of 'Boers' played by actors.

The stage is made of two raised platforms, covered in green material to resemble hills, with a gap in the middle, to resemble a river.

To the tune of 'Royal Britannia', Sandow turns his body into the customary 'bridge', over which the British soldiers escape to safety.

A rapturous applause.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME — OFFICE — NIGHT**

Sandow sits at his desk, lost in the hundreds of correspondences that surround him. He reads a newspaper headline: 'One fifth of our boys come home.'

Helen skips around him joyfully, but he is oblivious to her.

Blanche lingers outside the room, eavesdropping.

HELEN

Father! Watch me dance!

Sadow is now engrossed in a letter.

SADOW  
That's impressive my dear.

HELEN  
Father! You're not watching!

SADOW  
Perhaps I will later. I must finish my work.

HELEN  
You are always at work!

SADOW  
To keep clothes on your back! When I was your age, I did not have the privileges you do. Now let me be!

Helen flounces from the room, weeping. Blanche enters, angry.

BLANCHE  
Neither did you have a supportive Father, so surely you don't want the same for her.

SADOW  
I must work. First, the great competition. Then the cocoa factory. Then the expansion of Physical Culture, our legacy.

BLANCHE  
It is your legacy. Our legacy just ran from this room in tears.

Sadow continues to sift through his papers.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)  
Where do your dreams of success end?  
When will you be satisfied?

SADOW  
When my work is done.

BLANCHE  
Why can't you be satisfied with what you have?

SANDOW

Tell me, what have you achieved? What have you done to better yourself, or to help others? Mere 'satisfaction' is not enough. I need more.

BLANCHE

At what cost?

SANDOW

At any cost!

BLANCHE

Our daughter is upset. I will go to her.

**EXT. ALBERT HALL — LONDON — NIGHT**

TITLE: *'Albert Hall, London. September 1901.'*

Black.

The darkness of the hall is penetrated by twenty spotlights that illumine row after row of young ATHLETES, eighty in total, marching in time to Sandow's tune, 'March of the Athletes'.

Behind them, fifty young boys, one holding a banner saying: 'Watford Orphan Asylum'.

As the athletes make their way to the stage, they perform displays of wrestling and gymnastics, flexing their hard muscles to the elated applause of the audience.

The stage is ascended by THREE JUDGES: Sandow, ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, and CHARLES LAWES (a sculptor).

Ten athletes wearing black tights and leopard skin stand on a pedestal, one at a time.

**INT. ALBERT HALL — NIGHT**

Backstage, Sandow, the judges, and the HALL MANAGER converse at a long rectangular table. Sandow sits at the head dressed in fine evening attire.

MANAGER

The great competition was a great success! We stand to make a fortune! Are you certain you want to donate all of the takings?

SANDOW

Every penny must go to the widows and orphans of those men lost in the war.

HALL MANAGER

That is a considerable amount of money!

SANDOW

Not as considerable as our debt to the British soldiers. Their families will benefit from it. The British people will benefit. I owe my success to them.

CONAN DOYLE

An adoring public is indeed the best motivation to work.

SANDOW

On that note, will you be resurrecting the Sherlock stories?

CONAN DOYLE

Incidentally, I am working on a new tale involving a mysterious creature found in the woods.

SANDOW

I have no doubt you will be immortalized through your work.

CONAN DOYLE

What remains of our selves are but fragments. Our true legacy lies in our creations. Sherlock Holmes will be immortalized, not I.

**INT. SCULPTOR'S STUDIO - DAY**

Awkwardly, Sandow perches on a stool. He is attended to by a cast-maker who applies lashings of plaster to his naked shoulders.

Sandow is restless, wriggling in discomfort.

The sculptor, RAY LANKESTER, mid-50's, is panicked.

LANKESTER

Stop moving!

Sadow stops wriggling. The cast-maker applies more plaster.

LANKESTER (CONT'D)

Tense! Tense!

A pained expression on Sadow's face.

He wriggles again.

**INT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM – DAY**

Sadow observes the statue of himself with the MUSEUM PATRON: an effervescent man in his 40's.

Sadow is dressed in gentleman's attire in stark contrast to the muscular statue before him: it is as if he is looking into the past, upon a former incarnation of himself.

MUSEUM PATRON

Wonderful! Beautiful! Wonderfully beautiful!

SADOW

What is beauty?

MUSEUM PATRON

The imitation of life in art, of course.

SADOW

You think beauty lies in art imitating reality? But beauty is not a property of art. It is an emotional response to it.

MUSEUM PATRON

True, classical art! There's not much left of it these days.

SADOW

The arts must evolve by breaking the boundaries of classical form. It is merely self-reinvention in an ever-changing world with ever-changing tastes. It is survival.

**INT. SADOW'S HOME – BEDROOM – DAY**

Sadow and Blanche pack clothes into a suitcase.

Sadow folds and packs his clothes with order and precision.

Blanche packs clothes at random, as if in protest.

BLANCHE

When are we going to settle here, for good? We returned from America less than a month ago and now we are travelling to France. Our child does not need a Nanny. She needs her parents.

SADOW

The tours can be unpredictable. You know that. Helen will be fine with your parents. And my business will be fine in the hands of your brother.

BLANCHE

And who is accompanying us this time?

SADOW

Sketch artistes. Comedians. A troupe of dancers.

BLANCHE

I do not understand why my presence is necessary.

SADOW

It is necessary to show that the Great Sadow is a wholesome man in matrimony.

BLANCHE

Then I am merely a Public Relations vehicle.

She stuffs items forcefully into the suitcase.

SADOW

You are a part of the Sadow brand.

BLANCHE

I am a part of the Sadow family!

Blanche runs her hand across her stomach, gently and protectively.

**INT. MUSIC HALL — NIGHT**

Backstage. Sandow is divesting of his stage attire accompanied by three female DANCERS, also removing their costumes.

There is a knock at the door.

SANDOW

I do not wish to be disturbed.

BLANCHE (O.S.)

It is me.

Angry, Sandow pulls open the door.

SANDOW

I have told you not to disturb me  
backstage!

Timorously, Blanche enters the room, looks around, afraid of what she might find.

BLANCHE

I need to speak with you.

SANDOW

Then speak. Quickly.

BLANCHE

In private.

The dancers button up their costumes and leave.

Blanche is silent. Fearful.

SANDOW

Speak!

BLANCHE

I am returning to England.

Sandow begins to re-dress himself.

SANDOW

You cannot.

BLANCHE

I must.

SANDOW

You cannot. I have a reputation to —

Blanche bursts into tears. Sandow remains frozen, silent.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

What is the matter?

Blanche cannot summon the words.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Speak!

Then, through the tears...

BLANCHE

We are having another child,  
Friedrich.

Sadow is dumbfounded.

Blanche bursts into rage.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Perhaps you will be a father to this  
one.

As Blanche collapses into a chair, sobbing, Sadow picks up a stage prop, hurls it at a mirror.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY**

Blanche cradles her newborn baby, FANNY LORRAINE, with an underlying sadness. Warwick and Helen are by her side.

She glances towards the bedroom door.

Nothing.

**EXT. RAILWAY STATION - DAY**

TITLE: *'Calcutta, India. 1904.'*

As Sadow arrives at the station, a MOB gathers to display their admiration for him. He has a messianic presence: some reach out to touch him as he passes by.

**INT. MEDICAL CLINIC - DAY**

Sadow stands in the center of a large yet sparse clinic surrounded by denizens of the local town who watch in awe.

SANDOW

I have the ability to cure any  
ailment, physical or mental...

He retrieves two photographs from his jacket, presents them to the audience.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

This is a man who suffered from tuberculosis before he undertook my regimen. And here he is now, a picture of health and vitality.

A subdued applause.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

I shall now demonstrate the effectiveness of my system by treating elephantiasis. Mister Bomanji, may I have your assistance?

DHUNJIBHOY BOMANJI stands. Sandow places his hands on his shoulders.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, you will be amazed, for this man will be cured!

The audience applauds in a manner reminiscent of the music hall.

Bomanji turns to Sandow, whispers.

BOMANJI

Come to my residence. You are my guest of honor.

**INT. BOMANJI'S MANSION — PARLOUR — NIGHT**

A party brimming with wealthy people including many beautiful women.

A beaded screen separates Sandow from a group of PARSEE LADIES. In turn, their hands reach through the screen to touch his torso.

Sandow's eyes are closed. He remains still.

**EXT. BOMANJI'S MANSION — BALCONY — NIGHT**

Sandow and Bomanji enjoy a glass of wine and a spectacular view of the city.

BOMANJI

I implore you to stay. You can do wondrous things here for the people of India.

SANDOW

Alas, I cannot. For I have other places to travel. My journey does not end here.

BOMANJI

If greater wealth and fame cannot tempt you, then I wish you well. I understand you have a family at home.

SANDOW

My family is a global one: each and every person who I instruct.

**EXT. RAILWAY STATION – DAY**

As Sandow alights onto the platform he is met with an unruly MOB.

He can barely move against a tide of bodies and requires the assistance of his ATTENDANTS to form a pathway to a carriage.

A WOMAN yells from the surging crowd.

WOMAN

He's not so big! I 'eard he was seven feet tall, with shoulders just as wide!

Sandow casts a disapproving glance. As he approaches the carriage, the DRIVER opens the rear door for him.

DRIVER

Welcome to New Zealand, Professor Sandow.

Sandow clambers into the carriage with two attendants. The mob envelops the vehicle as it slowly begins to crawl away from the chaotic scene.

ATTENDANT

Is it 'Professor Sandow' now?

SANDOW

Self-proclaimed, of course! It lends more weight to my brand.

**EXT. A FARM — DAY**

Sandow demonstrates a series of exercises to an intimate audience of New Zealand SETTLERS. They are farmers: strong and proud.

SANDOW

You look to Britain in awe; but you can develop your own identity. You are by nature strong. You must feel confident and powerful.

He turns to a FARMER.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Remove your shirt. Be proud of your body! Be proud of your heritage! Declare your strength to the world!

As the FARMER removes his shirt, the surrounding settlers follow suit.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

You can fashion a national identity through sport, or any such demonstration of strength and skill, for you all have the potential to be masters of your destiny!

The settlers cheer.

**EXT. FERRY PORT — DOVER — DAY**

TITLE: *'Dover, England. 1905.'*

As Sandow alights from the ferry, he is greeted by an adoring crowd, like a celebrity, or war hero.

He is dressed impeccably in a black frockcoat with buttonholes of embossed leather, a dark silk waistcoat, and grey trousers. On his head he wears a black felt trilby hat.

A BRASS BAND plays 'The Conquering Hero Comes'.

A host of FEMALE ADMIRERS is present to greet him.

Blanche is stood aloof at the very rear of the throng, Fanny Lorraine in her arms, Helen by her side.

**INT. HOTEL — DAY**

Sadow sits at a table. A swarm of REPORTERS from various newspapers and magazines bustle to get closest to him.

On a table, a newspaper, with the headline: 'The New Zealand All Blacks victory over Australia'.

Blanche and Helen are sat on the periphery.

SADOW

(to the Reporter)

After one more tour of the provinces,  
I intend to retire from showmanship.  
I no longer consider it necessary to  
defend the title of the world's  
strongest man. My life will now be  
devoted to...

Blanche looks hopeful. She longs for him to declare that he wants a peaceful, family life.

SADOW (CONT'D)

My physical education system, in  
particular building a new temple of  
Physical Culture from which the war  
against degeneration will be fought  
and won!

The attendant PRESS is frenetic. Blanche disheartened.

**INT. SADOW'S HOME - DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Helen plays innocently with her newborn sister, curling a ribbon around her fingers.

Helen gives the ribbon to Fanny Lorraine, who lights up with joy.

Blanche watches attentively, smiling.

Sadow reclines on a chaise lounge. He is engrossed in the morning newspaper.

SADOW

'Sadow's latest venture is to seek  
commercial potential in the new  
markets of the British colonies, and  
in replicating the success of his  
magazine and training schools in  
America, of which there are now over  
one hundred. His crusade to spread  
the gospel of physical strength  
extends to the whole world. We now

question whether Sandow's messianic eugenicist imperialism can better the eugenicist intent of his statue, which was publicly displayed for only three months before being deemed too obscene by the trustees of the museum.'

Helen takes the ribbon from her sister. Fanny Lorraine is close to tears, then Blanche intervenes, gives the ribbon back to Fanny Lorraine.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

The statue vexes me. I wanted to become everlasting. Immortalized in stone. But perhaps infinity is relative to those who perceive it.

In one swift move, Helen snatches the ribbon from her sister. An outburst of tears follows.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Remove the children. I cannot concentrate.

BLANCHE

Perhaps you would care to comfort your daughter?

Sandow lowers the newspaper and stares blankly at his daughters.

Blanche cradles Fanny Lorraine.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

What is more important: worldly affairs or your affairs at home?

SANDOW

I cannot spread myself everywhere and at all times.

BLANCHE

You spread yourself thinly here, Friedrich. For yet again you are due to go on your travels. Where to now?

SANDOW

We are due to go to South Africa. Then to India.

BLANCHE

I shall not be going. My place is here.

Sandow raises the newspaper back to his line of sight and continues to read.

SANDOW

Very well.

Blanche cradles her daughter.

**INT. COUNCIL OFFICES – DAY**

Sandow is seated in consultation with the MAYOR of London, 50's.

The office is lifeless and hollow.

MAYOR

The war has taught us a great deal about the physical condition of our nation. We must ensure that future generations are strong and do not succumb to the idleness that has heretofore been to our detriment.

SANDOW

Every school ought to devote a set amount of time each day to physical activity. Then we shall see a marked improvement in the physical standard of the nation! But to enforce this scale of change will require intervention from the government, which is out of my sphere of influence.

MAYOR

It will be difficult to convince Parliament of –

SANDOW

Our country is weak. We cannot afford for the world to see us as such.

The Major shrinks into his chair with a mixed expression of concern and contemplation.

MAYOR

Now let us move on to other matters, expressly the matter of your citizenship. I understand that you

will require character references as part of a routine investigation. Have you given any thought to which persons you might ask?

SANDOW

The venerable Mister William Sinclair, the former chaplain to Queen Victoria; the Colonel George Malcolm Fox, the Army's inspector of gymnasia and a longstanding proponent of mine; Mister Warwick Brooks, my father in law; and Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, the son of -

MAYOR

Are you certain you want Gower? The Press says he's one of those 'unnatural' types. I assumed you might have been more prudent in your choice.

SANDOW

My marriage is proof enough that I am not 'unnatural', even if Lord Gower's infatuation with me extends beyond aesthetic admiration.

**EXT. SANDOW'S HOME - HOLLAND PARK AVENUE - DAY**

Sadow and a series of attendants lug furniture into a vast, opulent house.

Blanche watches from afar.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Separately, Sadow and Blanche tidy away some small items.

Blanche breathes shallowly: tense, and about to explode.

SANDOW

Now that my network of gymnasiums has closed, aside from St James' of course, I think it wise to -

BLANCHE

I knew what I was getting into when I married you. I knew there would be times apart. But I always hoped there would be trust.

SANDOW

Trust? What possesses you to -

BLANCHE

The last tour to India and then to Australia, I -

SANDOW

I have built a business - a reputation - on the notion of wholesomeness. Do you presume I would jeopardise my reputation by being unfaithful?

BLANCHE

Your reputation? What of jeopardizing our marriage? Is that even a consideration? I knew your work was important to you. But I had hoped your children and I could be just as important. What else would account for the distance between us? There is no love, Friedrich. Not towards me.

We now see that the couple stands at opposite ends of a vast and dreary room.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

I thought I had the strength for this.

She flees the room.

Sandow remains frozen.

**INT. SHELDONIAN THEATRE - OXFORD - DAY**

TITLE: *'Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford.'*

Sandow is amongst a series of men - including Conan Doyle - receiving a degree from the UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR.

As Sandow receives a scroll, he glances at the grand surroundings with a tinge of sadness in his eyes.

**EXT. SHELDONIAN THEATRE - OXFORD - DAY**

Outside the theatre, crowds of SCHOLARS clad in graduate gowns, celebrating with their families.

A long line of scholars and their families queue to have their photograph taken.

Sandow stands alone.

He looks with envy upon Conan Doyle embracing his five children. His wife stands to one side, violently coughing into a handkerchief.

The PHOTOGRAPHER calls out:

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Mister Sandow, do you want to go next?

Dejectedly, Sandow shakes his head.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - DRAWING ROOM - DAY**

Blanche amuses Fanny Lorraine, now 8, whilst her sister performs a series of exercises mimicking her father's system.

Sandow is sat with perfect posture in an armchair reading aloud from *The Times*:

SANDOW  
'This is the first appointment of the kind that has been made. The King has long shown interest in Sandow's system of Physical Culture and has derived considerable benefit from the prescribed treatments. But apart from the purely personal aspects of the appointment, it is a recognition of the value of systematic training in the nation as a whole.'

HELEN  
Father, am I doing this right?

Helen mimics the movement of a bicep curl. Sandow glances up from the newspaper.

SANDOW  
Yes, my dear! I can see you have been practicing. Soon you will be strong and bold enough to forge your own path.

Blanche tries to hide an expression of great concern.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Blanche creeps into Helen's bedroom. Looks behind her. No-one.

We hear Helen and Sandow, their voices emanating from downstairs.

As Blanche edges further into the room, she looks down, picks up an object from the floor: a Sandow-branded exercise doll.

She carries the doll to a sideboard, squeezing it tightly in her arms, then sees another object: a Sandow-branded exercise band.

She sits on the edge of the bed, cradling the doll. Then, in a sudden burst of anger, she hurls the doll at the sideboard.

**INT. ST JAMES' STREET GYMNASIUM – DAY**

WILLIAM STEAD, a journalist in his late 20's, saunters around the gymnasium whilst scribbling notes.

There are numerous 'patients' occupying cubicles – some undertaking exercises, others bathing, others in consultation with various physicians.

As he walks behind one cubicle, Stead stops to eavesdrop on a conversation between Sandow and a PATIENT.

SANDOW

I am sorry Sir, but we do not treat conditions affecting the heart.

PATIENT

But I am in need of medical intervention. I will pay handsomely for your services.

SANDOW

Money will not persuade me. We operate under strict regulations and I cannot provide medical assistance for you. I am sorry; but my good name – and the name of the Institute – must come first and foremost.

PATIENT

So, you will leave me to die?

SANDOW

Sir, we are not equipped to manage your condition here.

PATIENT

I was of the understanding that you are a Professor of health. Yet you say you cannot help me. You would rather leave me to die.

SANDOW

You must understand I can treat a certain number of ailments, such as insomnia, indigestion, fatigue and the like. I cannot cure your heart condition.

PATIENT

Then you may as well have signed my death certificate.

The patient, irate, spits on the floor and flees from the building in haste.

After a moment of contemplation, Sandow returns to his treatments, unaware that Stead has been witness to his conversation.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME – DRAWING ROOM – NIGHT**

Sadow and Blanche are sat at a distance from each other, each reading from the daily newspaper.

SANDOW

'The General Medical Council has investigated a number of physicians working at Sandow's St James' Institute of Physical Culture, two of which were struck off for their association with the former strongman'. Now they deem me a quack!

An ominous silence lingers until it is broken by:

BLANCHE

'Sandow offers you health, happiness, a new body, with as much physical beauty as can be carved out of the rude mask that conceals or reveals your soul'. You see, body and soul working in harmony; but your soul is hidden from me these days. I am

losing you. For the sake of your children, come back to me.

Sandow remains silent, absorbed by the accolade in the newspaper.

Blanche holds back her tears. Her husband's silence is more heartbreaking than a thousand hateful words.

**INT. ROYAL ALBERT HALL — NIGHT**

TITLE: *'Royal Albert Hall, London. 1914.'*

Helen stands on the stage in front of a vast audience. She is unnerved and composes herself with confidence.

Her PARENTS are sat on the front row but not together: WARWICK JUNIOR, Blanche's brother, is sat in between them.

HELEN

Esteemed ladies and gentleman,  
welcome to this evening's pageant of  
dress, featuring new additions of  
ladies wear to the Sandow Corset  
Company!

Applause.

Sandow turns to Blanche, smiling, and bursting with pride for his daughter.

Blanche's gaze remains fixed on Helen. Her face is hidden behind a VEIL.

**INT. ST JAMES' STREET GYMNASIUM — DAY**

Half a dozen YOUTHFUL MEN are lined up in a row, topless. Sandow parades the line, as if a Drill Sergeant.

SANDOW

It is equally patriotic to fight your own ailments, as it is to fight the Germans! At this Institute there is every facility for the rebuilding of manhood.

Sandow turns to an exercise bench, picks up a dumbbell.

SANDOW (CONT'D)

Follow my system, for it will make you strong and steadfast in the face of your enemy.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - PARLOUR - DAY**

Blanche is sat a piano. She plays softly, harmoniously then, gradually, anger takes over. She presses on the keys with force, without melody.

Not a tune. But dissonance.

**EXT. ST JAMES' STREET GYMNASIUM - NIGHT**

Sadow locks the premises, then ambles down an isolated street where he is confronted by a GROUP OF MEN, watched over by an ARISTOCRATIC MAN: the ringleader of the group.

SADOW

Sirs. I know why you accost me. I am not your enemy.

RINGLEADER

Tosh! With a name such as yours you are the enemy of the entire nation! Go back to Germany, to the filth from which you came!

The men set upon Sadow, delivering a series of blows to his abdomen until he collapses to the ground, retching in pain.

One of the ASSAILANTS spits on him.

ASSAILANT

Filthy Hun!

PASSERS BY stop momentarily, only realize who has been assaulted, then carry on their business, leaving Sadow in pain, helpless, curled into a fetal position under a fading streetlight.

**EXT. SANDOW'S HOME - DAY**

Blanche, veiled, wades through a thick mob of REPORTERS and members of the public who have congregated outside her home.

She clutches Fanny Lorraine in her arms and struggles to protect her, as the frenzied mob hurl words of abuse, or direct probing questions to her.

**INT. GROCERY STORE – DAY**

A CUSTOMER browses the shelves as the SHOPKEEPER busies himself at the checkout.

CUSTOMER

Where might I find the cocoa?

The shopkeeper does not look up but continues with his task.

SHOPKEEPER

You're lookin' at it.

The customer approaches the checkout.

CUSTOMER

I could not see the Sandow brand.

Suddenly, the shopkeeper stops, glares at the customer, disdain in his eyes.

SHOPKEEPER

There're no Kraut goods sold in my store! Scum o' the earth, the lot of 'em!

**EXT. SANDOW'S COCOA FACTORY – DAY**

The gates are padlocked. Windows have been smashed.

On a sign advertising the entrance to the factory, the words 'enemy' have been painted.

Sadow, pensive and jaded, stands outside the closed factory.

He notices a vagrant sleeping in a sheltered area and, without empathy, shoos him away.

An English penny rests between Sadow's finger and thumb.

He breaks it with one swift flick of his finger; but then the penny returns to its original form: a fake.

**INT. THEATRE – MANAGER'S OFFICE – DAY**

The THEATRE MANAGER sits at a desk. Helen stands in front.

THEATRE

I am sorry, my dear, but we have to release you due to your father's — how can I put this — 'associations'. We cannot risk the reputation of our theatre.

HELEN

But my mother is English. And my father is now a British citizen, surely —

THEATRE MANAGER

Forgive me. There is nothing to be done. You have great talent, Helen. Use it well when the turmoil is over.

HELEN

We are victims to the accidents of our time. I fear my time may have come and gone.

**INT. ST JAMES' STREET GYMNASIUM — DAY**

The gymnasium is empty: no people, no equipment.

Sandow gazes at a poster of him in his prime, now hanging limply from the wall.

In a swift movement, he tears the poster down, collapses to the dusty floor, weeping.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME — OFFICE — DAY**

TITLE: *'Four Years Later.'*

Sandow sits alone. He stares blankly into space, ignoring a stack of newspapers and correspondences on his desk.

His mind is preoccupied with a painting of Hercules: the painting has been hanged slightly off-center.

Physically, Sandow's neck is thicker, his arms fleshier, and his eyes heavy and wan.

He now wears a pair of spectacles.

The housemaid, CELIA, enters the room.

CELIA

I beg your pardon, Mister Sandow. There's a gentleman here to see you.

SANDOW

Does that painting look off-center to you??

Celia casts her eye over to the wall where the painting is hanged. She is confused, her reply tentative.

CELIA

Seems straight to me.

SANDOW

No. I distrust my eyes – and yours for that matter! See that it is rehanged.

CELIA

Very well.

Celia loiters. A tense silence.

SANDOW

Why do you linger?

CELIA

What about your guest, Sir?

SANDOW

What guest?

CELIA

Mister Liederman. Claims to be an admirer of yours.

Sandow's trance is broken.

SANDOW

An admirer?

CELIA

Should I let him in?

Later...

Sandow and LIEDERMAN are sat on the couch drinking tea. The latter is well built with a warm, healthy glow in his eyes. He is reminiscent of the youthful Sandow, who is now – with age – the physical opposite to his guest: pale and emaciated.

Liederman's voice is tinged with reverence and excitement.

SANDOW

I would offer you some of my cocoa,  
but the shops no longer sell it. Ha!

LIEDERMAN

Tea is just fine. Mister Sandow, let  
me get straight to the point. I come  
to you with a proposition: that we  
export your brand to the United  
States where it can be reborn.

Sandow gazes into his cup, fixated by the tealeaves  
swirling inside.

SANDOW

I am not a young man anymore. I fear  
it is too late for another  
reinvention.

LIEDERMAN

It is not too late. We could adapt  
the 'Sandow' franchise, starting with  
an Institute in New York. Have faith,  
Mister Sandow, for there are people  
like myself who would honor the  
chance to continue your legacy.

Sandow tips his cup from side to side as if trying to  
make patterns from the tealeaves.

LIEDERMAN (CONT'D)

We can have contracts drawn up  
swiftly. All we would need is your  
consent, and a small investment.  
Perhaps you would like to think on  
the idea?

SANDOW

Time to think, yes. But time is not  
what I have.

LIEDERMAN

Excuse me?

SANDOW

I will not linger on this. Let us  
meet soon and discuss the matter  
further!

LIEDERMAN

(rising)

Excellent. Your fortune is about to change! I am confident of that. But it will involve travelling to the States for some months. Will that be an issue?

Sadow glances over to a photograph of his family that rests on his desk.

SADOW

There is no issue.

Later...

Sadow stands at the window. The view is bleak.

Blanche sits on the couch where Liederman was sat.

BLANCHE

You said your travels had ended. You said you wanted to settle here. Was that another lie?

SADOW

It was no lie. But this may be my opportunity to regain what I once had. An opportunity to reinvent myself.

BLANCHE

I do not understand your obsession with continual reinvention. Why can you not be happy with who you are?

SADOW

To define is to limit! But to continually re-define is to survive.

BLANCHE

Survive? Survive what? We must all succumb to the accidents of our fate, and yet you resist. You crave immortality.

SADOW

I have been made immortal, fashioned into a statue, just like the heroes of old! What concerns me now is reclaiming my legacy so that I am remembered! Revered!

BLANCHE

A statue does not make you immortal.  
A statue is frozen in time. It is  
lifeless. Dead.

SANDOW

A statue is permanent! It is  
incorruptible. When I looked upon the  
sculptures in Rome as a child, I saw  
everlasting beauty -

BLANCHE

Real beauty is not everlasting. Real  
beauty exists in the transience and  
fragility of this life, and therefore  
in cherishing every moment. But for  
you, beauty exists only in strength  
and power. You strive for permanence  
and perfection, but the human  
condition does not allow for either.  
Why can't you seek beauty in what is  
here and now, instead of searching  
for it in the past, or in some future  
ideal? Why, Friedrich?

SANDOW

My name is Eugen Sandow!

Blanche is dumbfounded. An ominous silence looms in the  
air.

Sandow, flustered, busies himself in his diurnal tasks.

With a calm but hesitant tone, Blanche breaks the  
silence.

BLANCHE

When I looked upon you on the stage  
for the very first time, I found  
myself falling in love, not because  
of your strength, but because of your  
vulnerability. I saw a man from a  
distant land searching for himself  
through a stage persona. I saw a man  
whose physical presence astounded the  
world, but who was so alone in his  
search for perfection, that it  
alienated himself from others. Yet  
you stood there, proud, in front of  
the world, exposed to both its  
cruelty and admiration. You made a  
statement about selfhood, and to me  
that was beautiful.

SANDOW

I know who I am. And that man you speak of is gone. I must be reborn.

BLANCHE

He is truly gone. The more you came to be adored by strangers, the more alienated you became towards the ones who truly love you.

In the moonlight Sandow is pale, as if made of white marble. He reclines on a chaise lounge in a pose that resembles that of the statue that was fashioned of him for the British Museum.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Where has your love for me gone? When did I become merely an accessory to your business pursuits?

SANDOW

There is something I must confess, for until I do it may plague my conscience.

BLANCHE

You are going to break my heart.

SANDOW

Yes. I am.

BLANCHE

Then do it. Quickly. Do not torture me.

SANDOW

Despite devoting my life to perfecting my body, I neglected, perhaps, my soul. I have learned too late that the spirit is as corruptible as the body.

BLANCHE

Say it!

SANDOW

Very well. In a moment of weakness, I succumbed to temptation.

BLANCHE

One moment?

SANDOW

Many.

BLANCHE

Is this a lie, because it is easier  
to reject my love than to return it?

Sandow remains silent.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Is it a lie? Whether your love for me  
has gone, at least allow me my  
dignity!

Silence.

Blanche, hysterical, flees from the room. Her wailing  
echoes around the empty, soulless house.

The cries of a distressed child, Fanny Lorraine, are  
heard in the background.

Sandow sinks into a chair. After a moment of  
contemplation, he becomes enraged and flings the stack of  
newspapers and letters across the floor.

He collapses, burying his face into his arms, sobbing.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Blanche collapses onto the bed, weeping.

Helen enters the room, holding hands with Fanny Lorraine.  
Together, they climb onto the bed and lie next to their  
mother.

**EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY**

With a fierce look of intent, Sandow drives at speed in  
his motorcar along a narrow and sinewy road.

As he maneuvers the vehicle around a sharp corner, he  
unwittingly loses control.

The car jolts, then speeds off the road, hurtling down an  
embankment, puncturing its side on series of verges as it  
descends.

Sandow is flung from the car, trapped under the wreckage  
as the vehicle comes to a rest.

As he attempts to raise the mangled chassis from his lower body, he ruptures himself, collapses in pain.

**INT. SANDOW'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY**

Sadow is resting in bed. His leg is fixed in plaster and his body is tattooed with bruises.

Helen sits at his bedside, solemn, dressed in black.

SADOW

I am sorry that you must see me in this way. As your Father I should be strong, always. I tried to be strong. I failed.

HELEN

Father, you were the strongest man alive.

SADOW

No. Strong for you, strong for your sister, and strong for your mother. Does she speak of me?

Helen bows her head. Silence.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Helen. Does your mother -

HELEN

No.

With a heavy heart, Sadow turns his head away. Tears swell, but he does not cry.

SADOW

I know now how much I have missed, watching you and your sister grow. Forgive me.

Helen rises, makes to leave the room.

Sadow is close to tears.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Forgive me! Please!

Helen stops, but does not turn around. Her father is now weeping.

SADOW (CONT'D)

Please. Please.

Helen leaves.

**INT. BROOKS' HOME — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT**

In her hand, Blanche holds the photograph of her and Sandow, gifted to her by her husband on their wedding day.

Without a shedding a tear, she takes a candle to the photograph and watches it burn.

**INT. SANDOWS'S 1920'S HOME — DRAWING ROOM — NIGHT**

Sandow lays a photograph to rest in the tin box. A candle flickers, struggling to remain alight.

The room is dark and silent, but not tranquil.

Sandow retrieves from the box the worn playing card once given to him by the circus strongman. He holds it between his thumb and forefinger, pensively gazing into it, analyzing every blemish, every crease: a symbol of his fate.

SANDOW (V.O.)

Once I was adored by thousands of people all over the world; but they were all strangers to me. Once I had an adoring family, and now they are strangers to me also. Truly, the palaces we build through our human endeavors are but made of glass: beautiful yet fragile. Our passions make us capable of wonders; but our hearts are easily corruptible.

As he lays the card to rest inside the box, he picks up the photograph of himself with Blanche.

His eyes fixate on it. Tears swell.

SANDOW

Es tut mir lied.

He holds the photograph to his breast, creasing it as he clenches his hand into a fist.

Closing his eyes, a heavy sigh follows — not of regret, but of release.

His last breath.

The faint sound of a resounding applause together with an announcement from a Master of Ceremonies:

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (V.O.)  
Behold, the strongest man in the world, defying all limits of human strength! He is Eugen Sandow! Sandow the strong! Sandow the magnificent! Sandow the perfect man!

FADE OUT with the sound of applause from an adoring audience.

SUPER: *'Eugen Sandow died on 14 October 1925. His system of physical improvement inspired an international revolution in health and fitness. His legacy continues to this day.'*