

Secret Library

by

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EXT. GRASSY FIELD - NIGHT

SUPER: "New York colony, 1696"

A YOUNG MAN dressed in dirty, torn clothing runs for his life, breathing hard. He cries out when he stumbles, drops the

BOOK

He has been carrying, scrambles to pick it up, continues running past dark houses. Sounds of GROWLING, CRASHING not too far behind him. He runs into a

WOODED AREA

Dodging trees and bramble, finally arriving at a lone house lit from within by a fireplace. He bursts through the door in a panic, where an

OLDER MAN

Sits by the fire, reading. At the young man's entrance, he jumps to his feet.

YOUNG MAN

We found it!

OLDER MAN

What happened? Where are the others?

YOUNG MAN

I escaped.

OLDER MAN

None of them made it?

YOUNG MAN

No.

NOISES OUTSIDE

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

They found me.

OLDER MAN

Who?

YOUNG MAN

Take this, it's the only proof.

BOOK

2.

Dirty, small, nondescript.

OLDER MAN

What do I do with it?

YOUNG MAN

Hide it.

He dashes out the back door. Sounds of CRASHING, SNAPPING, GROWLING outside.

OLDER MAN

Opens the book

WORDS ON PAGE BEGIN TO DISAPPEAR

Visibly shaken, he is paralyzed for a moment. A DISTANT SCREAM and GROWLING, CRUNCHING sounds snap him out of it. Frantically, he searches for a hiding place.

He goes to the fireplace, moves a couch and pulls up a loose floorboard underneath. Taking a folded paper out of his breast pocket, he slips it inside the front cover of the book, stuffs the book in the hole. Just as he replaces the board and couch, BRANCHES SNAP outside. He guts the fire, plunging the room into moonlit darkness.

Total silence, except for his panicked BREATHING. Then slow SCRAPING just outside as the

FRONT DOOR

Opens inward, on CREAKING hinges.

OLDER MAN

(whispers)

God help me.

SCREAMS, SNARLS, CRUNCHING.

CUT TO:

SUPER: "200 years later"

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE AREA - LATE AFTERNOON

SUPER: "Law Offices of Rivers & Jefferson, Christmas Eve, 1896"

Open office area with two large wooden desks, several books and papers throughout.

3.

There is a large window with a view of the snow-covered city, people bustling about, doing last minute Christmas shopping.

EDWARD RIVERS stares out the window, checking his pocket watch. ISAAC JEFFERSON is bent over his desk, examining documents.

RIVERS
Oh, how I wish the time would pass.

JEFFERSON
Stop being sentimental and finish your work.

RIVERS
Sentimental? It's Christmas, Jefferson. This is the time of year to be sentimental.

JEFFERSON
Hmph.

RIVERS
Oh, Jefferson. If you only knew how much you remind me of Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, sitting there at your desk on Christmas Eve, wiling away the hours with meaningless paperwork until you can go home.

JEFFERSON
Scrooge? How dare you! Of all the despicable things you could say to me.

RIVERS
Calm down, Jefferson. Don't get fussy on me.

JEFFERSON
Oh, and now I'm a fussy little woman? Why not hit me, and skip the pleasantries?

RIVERS
(chuckles)
Jefferson, you old windbag.

Rivers goes around to Jefferson's desk, claps him on the shoulder.

RIVERS (CONT'D)
My grouchy, wonderful friend. A Merry Christmas to you.

4.

JEFFERSON

Hmph.

(shrugs Rivers' hand off) I don't see what's so merry, anyway. Just a reason to drink and shirk responsibility if you ask me.

RIVERS

This is your final reminder..."Dickens".

JEFFERSON

Oh, stop it. Don't you have something else to occupy your time with? Away from here?

RIVERS

Yes, Jefferson, and so do you.

JEFFERSON

No, I don't. This is what I'm doing until that ridiculous party is over, and then I'm going home.

RIVERS

Well, we paid for that ridiculous party, and you will be attending.

JEFFERSON

Must we go through this every year, Rivers?

RIVERS

Evidently, we must.

JEFFERSON

Why not just leave me in peace?
Just this once?

RIVERS

Ah, well, if I did that you would call me daft and have me committed at Bellevue.

JEFFERSON

Don't tempt me, you fool.

RIVERS

Wouldn't dream of it. Let's go to the party. It's almost time for the guests to arrive.

JEFFERSON

Oh, very well.

5.

Rivers walks to the door, notices Jefferson is still at his desk.

RIVERS
Shall we?

JEFFERSON

Yes, yes, I just have one more thing to do before I head downstairs.

RIVERS
Would you like me to wait for you?

JEFFERSON
No, I'll be down when I'm done.

RIVERS
Suit yourself, Jefferson. But if you aren't down there in a quarter hour, I'm coming back up here to drag you down.

JEFFERSON
Fine, fine. Go.

Rivers leaves.

Jefferson wheels over to Rivers' desk, glancing at the doorway frequently. He goes to a painting on the wall, moves it aside to expose a

WALL SAFE

He spins the lock quickly, and pulls it open to reveal

INTERIOR OF SAFE

There are innumerable stacks of banded paper money, coins, and several rolled parchments tied with ribbon.

He reaches into the safe, extracts a few bills from several bands of money, stuffs them into his waistcoat pocket. Still glancing at the doorway, he carefully shuts the safe, spins the lock and replaces the painting.

RIVERS (O.S.)
Jefferson! Are you coming, old man?

JEFFERSON
Yes! Blast it all, I said I'd be right down!

Jefferson wheels toward the door just as Rivers re-enters.

6.

RIVERS

It occurred to me that I happen to have your key to the freight lift.

JEFFERSON

Ah, so you do. Always holding the keys and keeping the castle, aren't you, Rivers?

RIVERS

That's me - King of the Land! Come, let's enjoy ourselves this evening and forget all our worries.

JEFFERSON

Not likely.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE BALLROOM - LATER

There is a Christmas party in full swing, with lawyers and clients, spouses and children bustling about. In the corner is a string quartet, playing elegant music for a few dancing couples. The room is very large, the polished wood floor filled with numerous tables of food. Servants fill glasses, retrieve plates and shoo children out from under tablecloths. Rivers is talking to a group of people, including his brother, JONATHAN RIVERS. Jefferson is off to the side, alone.

RIVERS

...so I said to the young man,
"well, that's what I would do!"

LAUGHTER rises from the small crowd surrounding him. Rivers' nephew, WILLIAM FAREL, walks up to the group with his date.

WILLIAM

Hello, Uncle Edward, Uncle Jonathan. I must say this is quite the spread. I haven't seen this much food since last year's party!

JONATHAN

I have to agree with him, Edward.
You've outdone yourself again.

WILLIAM

Yes, there's enough food for an army, which is fitting, as there must be twice as many children here this year.

7.

JONATHAN

William, you rascal bachelor, you. It's about time you have a couple of your own. If you could ever settle down, that is.

(to William's date)

Watch yourself, miss, he's a slippery one!

Suddenly, a young boy runs into Rivers, who nearly drops his drink. Passing his glass to William, he snatches the boy by the back of his jacket and bends down to face him.

RIVERS

(happily)

I've caught you, young Rivers!

MERRILL RIVERS, Jonathan's son, tries to get away from his uncle. He's ten years old, a stocky, spitfire bundle of energy.

MERRILL

I'll get you for that, you scoundrel!

(takes a swing at Rivers)

Put me down!

JONATHAN

Merrill! Stop it, this moment! Didn't we talk about how you should behave at the party?

MERRILL

Aw, who cares about this dumb old party? I'm tired of it. I want to go home.

RIVERS

Now, now, Merrill. You must listen to your father.

Merrill's anger deflates at the stern words of his favorite uncle.

RIVERS (CONT'D)

Good. Now, I shall put you down if you will apologize and promise to behave.

MERRILL

Oh, all right.

Rivers sets Merrill down, straightens his jacket, then stands with his arms crossed, waiting.

8.

RIVERS
Well?

MERRILL
(head down)
I apologize.

RIVERS
And?

MERRILL
And I promise to behave now.

JONATHAN
Good. Now off with you, son.

MERRILL
Yes, father.

He looks to his uncle for confirmation. Rivers nods and motions for him to scoot off. The child gladly obliges, weaving through the crowd, climbing under one of the tablecloths, where two other children are waiting.

PHOEBE RIVERS, his sister, is eating a dessert very daintily. She is eleven, slender and tall, very intelligent and wise for her age. GEOFFREY NELSON is chomping away at his dessert with gusto, making quite a mess. He is eight, chubby, unkempt and timid.

PHOEBE
I told you they would catch you,
Merrill.

MERRILL
Yeah, but I didn't get in trouble.

PHOEBE
"Yes".

MERRILL
What?

PHOEBE
The proper word is "yes" not
"yeah".

MERRILL
Oh, go soak yourself. Who cares
about all that proper stuff?

GEOFFREY
Yeah!

9.

PHOEBE

Hush, Geoffrey. Don't mimic
Merrill, unless you want to be in
hot water all the time.

GEOFFREY

I don't want a bath!

MERRILL

That's not what she meant.

PHOEBE

Boys are so simple.

MERRILL

Girls are so snobbish.

GEOFFREY

Yeah!

PHOEBE

Oh, I just can't take this any
longer.

MERRILL

Me either, this party is such a bore. Let's go
look around the building and see what we can
find. What do you say?

GEOFFREY

We're not going anywhere dark, are we?

PHOEBE

Yes, Geoffrey, we're going straight to the dungeon.
Prepare yourself.

GEOFFREY

No! I won't go! No! You can't make me!

MERRILL

Geoffrey, you idiot, she's just
teasing you.

GEOFFREY

Oh. So no place dark?

PHOEBE

No, you baby. Stop whining, it's
truly irritating.

10.

MERRILL

Come on, let's get out of this stuffy place and go somewhere fun.

GEOFFREY

Okay. Can I bring my treat?

MERRILL

Oh, for the love of - go ahead, you big butterball. Come on.

Merrill lifts the tablecloth, where

LEGS AND FEET

Are moving back and forth, as he waits for a spot to clear.

MERRILL (CONT'D)

Now!

He climbs out, holding the tablecloth, so the others can get out. They weave quickly through dancers and servants, passing Rivers and his group on the way out.

JONATHAN

Merrill, Phoebe, mind your manners! Walk!...Oh, why do I waste my breath? Those two will be the death of me, I swear.

RIVERS

Oh, Jonathan, don't be so stern with them. They're children, let them play.

WILLIAM

Yes, let them play. Don't you remember that age? If I'm not mistaken, you punched the schoolmaster when you were just about Merrill's age.

RIVERS

I'd almost forgotten about that! What a story that was. Father would tell it to anyone who'd listen, just to prove you weren't always so prim and proper!

JONATHAN

Must we bring up that old tale? I've heard it so many times it makes me ill.

11.

Jefferson bumps into Jonathan, having wheeled over to the group without anyone noticing him.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
Oh, pardon me.

JEFFERSON
Has it been quite long enough?

RIVERS
What's that?

JEFFERSON
The time, Rivers. Has it been long enough? Have I satisfied my tiresome social obligation?

RIVERS
(to the others)
Excuse me, would you? Refill your drinks and visit those groaning tables so I won't have to figure out what to do with the remnants.

Rivers and Jefferson move away from the group.

RIVERS (CONT'D)
Jefferson, have you eaten anything yet?

JEFFERSON
Don't change the subject. I'm bored beyond words. You can't expect me to stay all night.

RIVERS
At least stay until we exchange gifts. Come, let's refill your glass.

JEFFERSON
I don't want to refill my glass! It's after eight, don't you think we should let these people go home?

RIVERS
These people are all very happy, can't you see?

He gestures to the others in the room, as his beautiful wife, ATHENA RIVERS, moves through the crowd. She is a charming woman, elegant and refined, her smile warm and inviting.

12.

ATHENA

Isaac, how are you this fine evening?

JEFFERSON'S FACE

Changes completely, softening as a tiny smile turns up the corners of his usually-pursed lips.

JEFFERSON

I'm very well, thank you, Athena.

ATHENA

Have you eaten? There's so much food! The goose is simply wonderful, and the desserts - oh, tell him about the desserts, Edward.

RIVERS

The desserts are heaven, Jefferson.

ATHENA

There, you see? What more can a man ask for than good food, a full glass, and the company of friends?

JEFFERSON

You're right, Athena. It's nice to have such a splendid table, and to be among friends.

ATHENA

It's settled, then. I'll have a servant bring you a plate.

She grabs his hand, gives it a squeeze, then pecks him on the cheek.

JEFFERSON

I, uh, well -

She points up to the ceiling, at

MISTLETOE

Hanging above his head.

ATHENA

A Merry Christmas to you, Isaac.

13.

JEFFERSON

Oh, yes, well, thank you. And a very Merry Christmas to you, Athena.

She goes to the nearest servant, gestures toward Jefferson.

RIVERS

Jefferson, I daresay you're blushing.

JEFFERSON

What? Oh, rubbish. I don't blush, you're losing your mind. And that's not saying much, trust me.

RIVERS

No, no, I swear it. Look at you, like a schoolboy!

JEFFERSON

Must you embarrass me at every turn, you ridiculous fool?

RIVERS

I've always known you were sweet on my wife.

JEFFERSON

Yes, well, you might want to have your head examined, then.

RIVERS

You certainly aren't the first man to be giddy around Athena. Remember how I was those first few weeks?

JEFFERSON

How could I not? It was so disgustingly cliché. Nauseating, in fact.

RIVERS

She was so beautiful, so refined. I was a clod next to her, but she didn't seem to mind. Just between us, I think she liked the idea of molding me into the man she wanted.

JEFFERSON

Yes, women tend to lean toward the hopeless. They're very sentimental that way.

14.

RIVERS

She was so patient with me, so kind. She would've made such a magnificent mother. You should see her with our niece and nephew. So much joy when they're around.

JEFFERSON

I must admit, it's quite a shame that she - that you - well, some people are just not blessed with children. It's a sad state of affairs, but more common than you might think.

RIVERS

Yes. Such a good woman, if only...

A servant appears with a very full plate, hands it to Jefferson.

JEFFERSON

Good lord, what do I do with that?

RIVERS

I think she expects you to eat it.

JEFFERSON

It would take hours to eat this!

RIVERS

That's probably the idea.

JEFFERSON

Oh, fine. Help me take this plate to the table, and fill my glass along the way.

RIVERS

Excellent, I knew you'd come around. The night is still young!

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The children have made their way to the basement, where dim lights are on. Phoebe is trying to drag Geoffrey through the entryway, but he resists. Merrill moves in and out of the entryway, impatient.

GEOFFREY

No, I won't go in there!

15.

PHOEBE

There's no reason to be afraid,
we'll be with you.

GEOFFREY

I - I'm not afraid, my mother told
me I shouldn't get dirty.

MERRILL

Is that what you're worried about?

Merrill takes his jacket off, tosses it on the floor.

MERRILL (CONT'D)

There! Now it won't get dirty. Take yours off.

GEOFFREY

But - oh, all right.

He struggles out of his jacket, tosses it on the floor next to
Merrill's jacket.

MERRILL

Good. Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The basement is dim and crowded, stacks of papers and books
leaning precariously on tables. Boxes are sagging and the
ceiling is leaking, water shining on the stone floor in
places. There are a few pieces of discarded furniture and some
old paintings.

Merrill moves through this maze, oblivious to anything but
adventure, the others following.

MERRILL

There sure are a lot of boring old books and
papers down here.

PHOEBE

Why must everything be fun to you, Merrill? Can't
you just curl up with a good book once in awhile,
and forget about adventure?

MERRILL

Books are for old people. And
girls.

(MORE)

16.

MERRILL (CONT'D)
(looks in some boxes)
This stuff stinks.

PHOEBE
Filthy. The room is lousy with dirt and dust.
Stop touching everything, you'll catch a fever.

MERRILL
Hey, look at this!

He holds up an

OLD SWORD

Swings it around a few times, for practice.

GEOFFREY
I want it, Merrill! Please, I need it more than
you do!

MERRILL
No, you're not strong enough to hold it. I'll
keep it with me, and you stay close. Men have to
stick together. Like pirates!

PHOEBE
Oh, please. Don't you ever read anything?
Pirates don't stick together, they kill each
other for treasure and women.

MERRILL
Don't listen to her, Geoffrey. Pirates stick
together and protect their treasure to the death.

GEOFFREY
Really?

MERRILL
Of course. And they don't even have girls on
their ships. They think girls are too boring.

PHOEBE
What a ridiculous notion. A boat full of nothing
but men? Who would cook?

GEOFFREY
I wish I was a pirate.

17.

MERRILL

Me, too. Let's see what else we can find.

He moves to an old fireplace that hasn't been used in decades, boxes piled in and around it.

MERRILL (CONT'D)

Just a bunch of -

He trips and falls to the floor with a loud CRASH, the sword skitters across the floor and hits the fireplace.

MERRILL (CONT'D)

Ow.

PHOEBE

Merrill! Are you all right?

MERRILL

Yeah, I'm all right.

Brushes himself off, looks down at the loose floorboard he tripped over. Pulling the rest of it loose, he exposes a hole underneath.

MERRILL (CONT'D)

Look!

The children gather round the hole, looking inside.

GEOFFREY

Is there treasure in there?

MERRILL

I don't know.

PHOEBE

It's too small for treasure.

Merrill reaches inside, blindly searching, pulls out the book placed there two hundred years earlier.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Ooh, a book!

MERRILL

A book? Just a dumb old book?

Disgusted, he tosses the book aside, reaches into the hole again. Phoebe retrieves the book, opens it, a piece of paper falls to the floor. She picks it up, unfolds it.

18.

PHOEBE

Oh, Merrill? The dumb old book had a map in it.

MERRILL

What?

PHOEBE

See?

She holds up the map. Merrill jumps and snatches it from her. They all examine it.

THE MAP

Is written in Dutch, dated 1696, but is obviously New York City. It shows few buildings, with nearly every building connected by winding lines all leading to one central location in the middle of the city.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

It looks like New York.

MERRILL

But there's nothing that big here.

PHOEBE

And the roads don't look like that, either.

MERRILL

I can't tell what any of these words mean. Everything looks different.

PHOEBE

Here, see how it pokes into the water? That's where the Hudson and East River meet. Follow it up, and that's where we are.

GEOFFREY

Does that mean we can find the treasure?

MERRILL

Let's go.

PHOEBE

Go where?

MERRILL

To find a way in.

19.

PHOEBE

But where do we look?

MERRILL

We found the map here, it's got to be down here somewhere.

They move deeper in the basement, to the far corner. Rivulets of water run on the ground. They look for several minutes, finding nothing.

GEOFFREY

Merrill, can we go now? My shoes are getting wet and my mother will be so upset with me -

MERRILL

Stop whining about your mother.

PHOEBE

He's right. It's wet and smelly and I'm bored. Let's go back to the party and see if we can get some wine out of the glasses they leave sitting around. Wouldn't that be fun?

Merrill ignores her, as he follows the water with his eyes, to where it slips underneath a bookshelf against the wall.

MERRILL

Where is the water going?

PHOEBE

Probably in your brain by now.

GEOFFREY

It's in my socks. My feet are wet.

MERRILL

It's going under that shelf, over there.

(points)

There's something behind it.

PHOEBE

Yes, some bricks, and behind that, dirt. Fascinating.

MERRILL

No, if it's just bricks and dirt, the water should have flooded this place already.

20.

PHOEBE

Well, it...I don't know.

MERRILL

Let's pry it loose with the sword
and see what's back there.

PHOEBE

What if it comes crashing down on
us or we get stuck down here and
smother? How will I get to the
pageant tomorrow?

MERRILL

Come on, Geoffrey, help me.

Merrill pushes the sword into the crack between the shelf and
the wall, prying at it. A loud CREAKING and SPLINTERING ensues.

PHOEBE

This is a brilliant plan. Soon the shelf will
break and we'll all be in trouble for Christmas.

There is a huge CRACKING sound, and the shelf swings away
from the wall, as on hinges.

MERRILL

Whoa....

GEOFFREY

It's a door.