

"THE HOLSTEIN EPIPHANY"

by
Doug Johnson & Dennis Smithers, Jr.

(Sample Excerpt)

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Doug Johnson
dojo@dojowrite.com

FADE IN:

EXT. RAYVILLE, ARKANSAS - MAIN STREET - DAY - 2013

A traffic light at a lifeless intersection blinks red in both directions. Not enough cars to bother with a green.

Realtor signs pock-mark dim shop windows. A mountain town on the downswing.

What's left here only remains by inertia. Police station, post office, funeral home, laundromat, consignment store.

Two dogs whizz on the vacant Noah's Ark Preschool. Dust films little desks and chairs inside.

A gold Toyota rolls past with a flash of blonde braids in the back window.

A couple of GEEZERS play dominoes. Church bells ring.

INT. BLACKSTONE TENEMENT - APARTMENT - DAY - 2013

Cramped and yellowed. Dirt cheap but well-maintained by --

BAYLOR BRANNON (31), shadow of a once proud man. He enters from the hallway with a stack of mail.

He slumps at a flimsy table to thumb through it. Bills. Collections. Final notices.

His face brightens when the pattern breaks. It's a letter from the Lord's Divine Temple, right here in Rayville.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
Halle-fuckin-lujah.

A shrill chirp snaps his attention to the floor. A cockroach scuttles between his feet.

Baylor shrieks. He springs from his chair, jackhammers his boot after the vermin.

BAYLOR
Greasy fucker!

The thin floor bounces, everything rattles, but the roach escapes. It squeezes under a baseboard into the wall.

Baylor plops down on a sagging couch and tears open the church envelope.

A piece of string falls out. He picks it up, reads silently --

PREACHER (V.O.)
*Praying for a miracle, brother?
 Just tie a knot in this holy
 string. Your miracle will be
 captured inside the knot! Then
 mail it back along with your
 donation of fifteen dollars...*

Baylor peeks over at his pile of bills on the table. It seems bigger. Like it's multiplying.

PREACHER (V.O.)
*... I will personally untie the
 miraculous knot, and through my
 conduit, the Almighty will answer
 your prayers. Sincerely...*

BAYLOR
 ... Brother Max Scribner.

Baylor fingers the frayed scrap of string.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
 I smelled bullshit.

Baylor catches a peripheral movement. An electric stove sits next to an old console television, both in the living room. A mouse squeezes out from a burner coil onto the stovetop.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
 Then again, not much didn't smell
 like shit at Blackstone.

EXT. BLACKSTONE TENEMENT - DAY

Baylor exits to the street. The building itself looks like a huge tumor. Most of the windows have bedsheets for curtains.

A signpost on the deserted corner reads, "Blackstone Street."

BAYLOR (V.O.)
 It wasn't always like this though.

INT. PROSPECT STREET - KITCHEN - DAY - 2007

A younger, more spirited Baylor sits down at a sturdy table. He wears fresh-laundered coveralls.

Coffee steams from a cup that waits for him. He picks up a porcelain cow creamer.

BAYLOR

I knew there was a reason I loved you, baby.

In walks KIMBERLY SHAW (24), small town pretty. She carries a breakfast plate for Baylor. Her smile lights his world. He's blind to the reservation in it.

KIMBERLY

It's just breakfast, Baylor. I must be working too hard.

She leaves the plate and turns, but Baylor pulls her into his lap with his own bright grin.

She smiles again, no undertones this time. He kisses her.

BAYLOR

Damn right. A queen don't need to cook this good for nobody.

Kimberly squirms.

KIMBERLY

Go on, now. Eat your breakfast. You'll be late for work.

A drop of cream drips from the porcelain cow's mouth.

BAYLOR (V.O.)

It's been six years since Kimberly left me.

EXT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - ENTRANCE - DAY - 2007

A massive water tower lords over a compound of brick factory buildings. It bears a huge extruded sign --

"Lugosi Rubber Company"

WORKERS file in and out through a chain link gate. Shift change. A muffled industrial heartbeat pulses from inside.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - MILL ROOM - DAY - 2007

Machinery roars. Rollers big as whole rows of theater seats spin with serpentine sheets of black rubber.

A time clock chomps Baylor's card before he slots it among scores of others.

From a catwalk, the mill FOREMAN shouts over the cacophony.

FOREMAN

Brannon! You're on blender!

HARVEY SIMMONS (48), lanky redneck, slips up to Baylor, hands deep in his coverall pockets.

HARVEY

(under his breath)

Somebody's movin' up in the world.

Baylor tries to subdue a smile but can't quite pull it off.

EXT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - BACK DOOR - DAY - 2007

Baylor and Harvey sit on shipping crates. They're both stained head to toe with black carbon residue. They drag on cigarettes and suck down orange soda.

HARVEY

How 'bout you and me hit the titty bars tonight?

BAYLOR

No, I got something big goin' on.

Harvey snorts, pulls a screwdriver from his pocket.

HARVEY

Bullshit.

BAYLOR

Suit yourself.

Harvey removes a screw from the doorknob behind them.

BAYLOR (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing?

HARVEY

Home Repo.

BAYLOR
Christ, Harvey...

HARVEY
Aww, just sing already.

BAYLOR
You know that donut I got my eye on
at Cole's?

Harvey pulls a second screw, then the whole knob. Slips them
into his pocket with the screwdriver. He grins.

HARVEY
No shit?

Baylor nods. They shake hands.

BAYLOR
No shit.

On the other side of the door, someone pulls the inside knob
off trying to open it. A crash and a cuss follow.

Harvey swings the door open. DAVID BRECKENRIDGE (22), better
looking than he deserves to be, lays sprawled on the floor.

HARVEY
Who the fuck are you?

BRECKENRIDGE
Breckenridge.

Baylor offers a hand and pulls him to his feet.

BRECKENRIDGE (CONT'D)
First day.

HARVEY
No shit.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - MILL ROOM - DAY - 2007

A loud, fart-like bell signals the end of break time.

Harvey sings "High Hopes" for the other mill room boys --

HARVEY
*Everyone knows an ant, can't...
Move a rubber tree plant...*

Baylor and Harvey part ways. Harvey points at Baylor.

HARVEY (CONT'D)
*But he's got... High hopes! He's
 got high hopes...*

Baylor chuckles. Passes below the Foreman's catwalk. Watches him pow-wow with two SUITS.

HARVEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
High pussy pie, in my eye hopes...

Foreman's eyes meet Baylor's. Baylor holds a smile too long.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Baylor and his black-faced co-workers enjoy a rowdy shift-end bullshit session.

Grimy coveralls sail into bins as the men file into the --

SHOWERS

Engulfed in steam, they pass around two plastic bottles --

Baby oil and dish soap.

Eyes clamped tight, they scrub caked-on carbon from their faces. Black sludge swirls down floor drains.

Breckenridge enters last. In a room full of beer-bellies, he sports a six-pack.

BRECKENRIDGE
 Damn, I can't wait to squeegee this
 shit off.

He dumps enough oil into his hands to deep-fry a box of Twinkies then slathers dish soap on top of it.

He drenches himself under a shower head and vigorously scrubs his face, eyes wide open.

BAYLOR
 Slow down boy, don't --

Breckenridge belches out a blood-curdling squawk.

BRECKENRIDGE
 Oh, sweet fuck, my eyes!

Cheers and laughter erupt. Breckenridge rides out his rookie mistake in a fetal curl on the floor.

HARVEY

*Just what makes that little old
ant, think he'll move that rubber
tree plant?*

CO-WORKERS

*Anyone knows an ant, can't
Move a rubber tree plant!*

EXT. RAYVILLE - MAIN STREET - NIGHT - 2007

Wet hair and clean clothes, Baylor strolls with a skip in his step and a whistle on his lips.

CO-WORKERS (V.O.)

*But he's got... High hopes! He's
got high hopes...*

He stops at Cole's Fine Jewelry. Admires the sparkling rings in the window display.

CO-WORKERS (V.O.)

Carbon and lye, in my eye hopes!

Bells tinkle as NATHAN COLE (66), opens the shop door.

COLE

Mister Brannon... why am I not surprised to see you here again?

BAYLOR

I'm sorry, Mister Cole. I'm not tryin' to rush you --

COLE

It's ready, Baylor.

Baylor's face lights up. Cole returns the smile.

INT. BLACKSTONE TENEMENT - APARTMENT - NIGHT - 2013

A slapping pair of sagging, tattooed tits fill a fuzzy black and white television screen accompanied by the cut and paste moans of a fake, soft-porn orgasm.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
 Pathetic. Stealing your neighbor's
 cable just to watch "Nasty Nights"
 in black and white.

Baylor sinks deeper into his sagging couch. Cracks another
 cheap beer.

The tube chirps. Nasty Nights flickers out, replaced by a
 near-empty Senate debate on a cable channel no one watches.

BAYLOR
 Aww, come on!

He hits the mute, talks to the ceiling.

BAYLOR (CONT'D)
 You can't be done already!

The muffled sounds of a couple arguing seep through the
 cracked plaster.

Baylor tosses the remote, defeated.

EXT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - ENTRANCE - NIGHT - 2013

Baylor stands outside the gates of the abandoned rubber
 factory. No sounds of machinery. No industrial pulse.

Just a cold wind. He pulls another beer can off a six pack
 and cracks it.

A larger-than-life sign hangs on the fence --

*FOR SALE/LEASE
 SIMON BASS
 COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE*

Underneath, a photo of Simon Bass grins back at Baylor.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
 Perfect name. Douche even looked
 like a fish.

Baylor rears back and hurls his beer can at the sign, but
 misses the fence entirely. It sails into the yard.

BAYLOR
 Shit!

Miraculously, the can lands upright.

Baylor eyes the chains locking the gate. He walks over, checks the slack. Enough for a smaller guy to fit through.

He tries anyway. Rips his jacket and cuts his face on a jagged twisted wire, but squeezes in.

Baylor snatches up his beer and heads for the water tower.

EXT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - WATER TOWER - NIGHT - 2013

Baylor reaches the top ladder rung holding the six-pack with his teeth. He swings up onto a narrow catwalk.

He leans on the Lugosi "g" and just looks out. The factory sits at the edge of town, and he can see it all from here.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
Rayville, Arkansas. Population four thousand, give or take. Ten years ago it was double that.

A few raindrops tap Baylor's jacket.

He looks down. Gets dizzy. Backs up and moves with drunken caution around the catwalk.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
Even old Mister Cole had to close up shop. Just told everybody he was "retiring."

He finds a small half door in the tower wall. He reaches for the latch. Hesitates. Beer courage prevails.

BAYLOR
I'm high on the mountain, Lord.
Don't flood me.

He snatches it open. No water. He admires the rubber seal.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
If you were still in Rayville, chances are you were just too broke or too afraid to leave. Or maybe you were like me... both.

Baylor ducks through the half door into the water tower.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
Either way, you were trapped.

The half door slams shut.

EXT. PROSPECT STREET - DAY - 2007

Baylor pulls into the driveway in an '81 Pontiac Phoenix. Four-door hatchback.

A big old two-family house. Side by side. Well cared for. Fresh paint. Green grass. Flowers in the window boxes.

INT. PROSPECT STREET - BEDROOM - DAY - 2007

Kimberly sits in her underwear at a vanity doing her makeup.

She sees Baylor in the mirror. Just standing in the doorway watching her with a content smile on his face.

BAYLOR

They should pay you to wear that stuff.

KIMBERLY

I think those fumes at the mill are going to your head.

She starts on her eyelashes.

KIMBERLY (CONT'D)

Got some overtime, huh?

BAYLOR

No. Just thought I'd take the long way home. McClellan Road.

KIMBERLY

McClellan Road? That's a heck of a detour. Haven't been out there since we first started dating.

Baylor flashes a lascivious smile.

BAYLOR

Yeah, always seemed to have car trouble out there, didn't we?

Kimberly blushes. He comes up behind and hugs her. Lingers.

BAYLOR (CONT'D)

I want to go to church this morning.

Kimberly takes a deep breath.

KIMBERLY

Alright.

She goes back to her makeup.

KIMBERLY (CONT'D)

What's the occasion?

Baylor slips his hand into his shirt pocket, pulls out a little square box from Cole's Fine Jewelry.

BAYLOR

Kim?

She turns. Gasps. Down on one knee, Baylor holds the box.

KIMBERLY

Wait --

BAYLOR

Kimberly Shaw, my future has never
felt so clear --

KIMBERLY

Baylor, stop!

Baylor's beaming smile falters. Kimberly trembles.

KIMBERLY (CONT'D)

We need to talk.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - MILL ROOM - DAY - 2007

Baylor lurches along in a daze. Creeps forward in line toward the time clock.

Ahead, Breckenridge punches in. His eyes look six shades of red. He passes Baylor, gives him a nod.

Baylor nods back. Harvey Simmons nudges him from behind.

HARVEY

Let's go, sponge wood. That ring get
you so much poon you can't walk?

Baylor spins in a flash. Rage brimming, fist clenched.

BAYLOR

Not... today... Harvey.

He sees alarm on Harvey's face. Unclenches his fist.

BAYLOR (CONT'D)

Not today.

Baylor punches his time card. Slots it in the alphabetical rack above Breckenridge.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - MILL ROOM - DAY - 2007

Baylor works the massive blending machine. He flips huge sheets of heavy black rubber over the rollers.

He trims edges with circular cutter blades and starts the process all over again.

A thermometer dial flirts with 110 degrees. Baylor's face glistens with a slick of sweat and black carbon.

FOREMAN

Brannon!

Baylor looks up at the catwalk. The foreman stands with one of the two suits from yesterday.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

(to Baylor)

Lugosi wants to see you.

Baylor checks the wall clock.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Now.

INT. BAYLOR'S CAR - MOVING - DAY - 2007

A paycheck and a pink slip ride shotgun beside Baylor.

He passes a billboard with a child's photo --

*Missing: Carrie Weeks, Age 9
Gold Toyota Celica
1-888-ARK-LOST
Arkansas State Police*

Baylor stares at the smiling girl with blonde braids. Has to look away.

LUGOSI (V.O.)
 This isn't a judgement of your
 character. It's about the bottom
 line, nothing else.

INT. LUGOSI'S OFFICE - DAY - 2007

Baylor, his foreman and the suit flank the desk of CHRISTINE LUGOSI (50's).

BAYLOR
 And the bottom line says I ain't a
 valuable worker, huh?

SUIT
 We just have too many bodies here,
 Mister Brannon, everybody's feeling --

BAYLOR
 I ain't a fuckin' body, mister! And
 who the fuck are you, anyway?

FOREMAN
 Alright, Baylor. Take it easy.

Baylor settles. Lugosi slides the farewell check and pink slip across her desk.

LUGOSI
 I'm sorry.

INT. BAYLOR'S CAR - MOVING - DAY - 2007

Baylor swerves into the Unemployment Office parking lot.

BAYLOR
 Sorry, sorry, sorry.

He pulls a slow drive-by. Sees all kinds of LOSERS filing in. Changes his mind, lays rubber back out of the lot.

INT. LUGOSI RUBBER COMPANY - WATER TOWER - DAY - 2013

Pitch black.

Baylor starts awake. Doesn't know where he is. Beer cans rattle. Adrenaline drags out loud, ragged breaths.

He fumbles in his pockets. Finds his lighter and sparks it.

The flame casts the tower interior in a dim light.

Surprisingly clean. About twenty feet in diameter. Twenty feet high before the peak vanishes into darkness --

Except for a sliver of daylight that bleeds through a crack.

Baylor snaps his watch face into the flickering light.

BAYLOR

Aw, fuck no. Christ on a cracker!

He kicks open the half door. The tower floods with daylight.

INT. GAUNTLET PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY - 2013

Hair slicked back, best flannel shirt and knit tie, Baylor checks his watch and enters a long, narrow reception area.

Promotional posters line the cool blue and white walls.

At the far end of the room, a young RECEPTIONIST entirely surrounded by a circular desk ignores him.

Baylor advances. To his left, an unsettling poster suggests he keep an eye on his colon.

Pictured to his right, a gray-haired couple ferociously endorse an erectile dysfunction pill.

On an easel, a poster for an anti-depressant drug asks:

"REMEMBER WHO YOU USED TO BE?"

Baylor steps up to the receptionist at the --

CIRCULAR DESK

She finally acknowledges him with an indifferent stare.

Baylor slides a completed job application onto the desk.

BAYLOR

I'm here about the janitorial position.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes. You are.

She drags the application with her pencil eraser and it disappears behind the desk as if by suction.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
We'll call you if we're interested.

Baylor sees a quit-smoking ad behind her --

A tough guy karate chops through a giant cigarette held from the ends by two terrified wimps. The tagline:

"TAKE CONTROL."

BAYLOR
Ma'am, is there a chance I could arrange an interview today? I don't have a telephone, and I'm afraid I might miss my chance.

She looks back up with a forced smile.

RECEPTIONIST
We'll send a letter.

BAYLOR
If it's all the same, you think I could speak with someone today?

She drops the smile, peers down at her desk, flips pages.

RECEPTIONIST
You need two years experience.

BAYLOR
Been doing maintenance a lot more than two years, ma'am. Around the house and such. I'm damn good, too.

RECEPTIONIST
Mister Baylor, sweeping up after yourself doesn't give you the qualifications a professional custodian needs.

Baylor's frustration gets the better of him.

BAYLOR
Well pardon me, but just how in the fuck am I supposed to get those qualifications if nobody'll hire me in the damn first place?!

Her face tells him the conversation's over.

INT. BAYLOR'S CAR - MOVING - DAY - 2013

Baylor cruises a long stretch of two-lane highway, windows open despite the cold.

He pulls a cigarette from a pack with his teeth. Checks his pocket for a light. Empty. Looks down where the Pontiac's lighter should be. Long gone.

He pops the glove box. Fumbles through papers to reveal --

The Cole's Fine Jewelry box. It stops him cold. He stares at it, until --

The horn of an oncoming car blares. Baylor swerves back into his lane, narrowly misses the other car.

It takes a second to regain his composure.

He snatches a lighter from the glove box and slams it shut. Lights his cigarette and takes one glorious drag.

He yanks off his tie. Flings it out the window and loosens the neck buttons on his shirt.

Ahead, a sign creeps into view. It marks a side road that disappears into the hills --

"McClellan Road."

At the last second, Baylor swerves. Tires squeal as he veers onto McClellan.

Gravel pelts the undercarriage. Dust trails behind as the highway disappears in his rearview.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
Sometimes I wonder...

Ahead, the vista opens up into a rolling sea of pastures.

BAYLOR (V.O.)
If I'd never took that turn,
would I still be sittin' here
on death row?

EXT. MCCLELLAN ROAD - DAY - 2013

A lone black and white cow chews cud at a barbed wire fence. Across the road, the pasture slopes down to a large pond.

Baylor's red and white hatchback crests the hill.

BOOM!

A back tire blows out. The car fishtails twice before Baylor gets it under control. He pulls over, nerves sizzling.

He gets out. Inspects the shredded rubber left on the rim.

Baylor looks around. Not a house, not even a barn, in sight. He sees the cow, who just keeps chewing, unfazed.

BAYLOR

Got a jack?

Baylor lights his last cigarette and gets to work.

SERIES OF SHOTS - BAYLOR CHANGES THE TIRE

-- He pops the hatch.

-- He jacks up the car.

-- He swaps the blowout with a spare.

Baylor kneels, picks up a tire iron. The distant rumble of an approaching vehicle creeps up on the quiet calm.

He tightens the lug nuts. His eyes well up with tears.

He sets his cigarette down on the blowout. He weeps as he strains to crank down the last lug.

A wisp of smoke rises from his grip. The iron glows red hot in his hand. Skin sizzles. Baylor flings it to the ground.

BAYLOR

Christ! What the fuck?

He springs to his feet, shields his eyes from a --

VISION

A blinding flash -- flames swirl and shriek --fractured images -- hissing -- fear -- blistered skin --

BACK TO SCENE

Baylor staggers. Spins in the road. The cow stares back.

Another flash. Baylor screams. Another --

VISION

Screams of agony sucked from the inferno -- then guttural moans -- sexual -- the word "PRIDE" in sloppy tatoo ink writhes beneath heat vapor -- gasoline splashes --

BACK TO SCENE

Baylor trembles. Locks onto the cow. He gazes into its huge, blank eyes and sees... SOMETHING.

OUT OF NOWHERE

Baylor's car explodes forward, slammed from behind by a monster 4x4. The back end crumples like a tin can.

An earth-shaking engine roars. Glass shards blast from the blown-out hatchback window.

Baylor flies right off his feet, crashes down flat on his back. He gulps for knocked out wind.

The dust clears. A mud-caked pickup idles where the car sat. An exhaust pipe belches in Baylor's face.

The truck punches into reverse to clear the wreck, pieces of the decimated Pontiac's back end stuck in its grill.

Baylor mumbles in shock --

BAYLOR

Wait a minute.

He struggles to his feet.

The truck pops into first and guns ahead, dust and gravel spray as it flies past Baylor.

BAYLOR (CONT'D)

Wait a minute!

The truck's CB antenna slashes his face as it roars away.

Baylor snatches up the tire iron, heaves it with all his might after the truck.

The iron twirls end over end and strikes home. The back window explodes in a shower of glass.

The truck swerves, skids to a halt.

Baylor stands dead center in the road.

The driver, CHARLIE MOON (30's), sneers back through the busted window. He drops into reverse and floors it.

The truck races closer and closer, pipes blaring. Baylor stands his ground.

Charlie chickens out, slams the brakes. The truck skids to a stop, bumper two inches from Baylor.

The door flings open.

CHARLIE

Boy, you're about to get an ass-stompin!

Slurred words. He's drunk. Bad drunk.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Middle of the goddam road!

Burly and bearded, Charlie lurches toward Baylor with huge, clenched fists.

His greasy mechanic's coveralls sport a sewn-on "Charlie" name patch.

Sleeves ripped off at the shoulders, Popeye arms covered in sloppy tattoos. One reads... "SOUTHERN PRIDE."

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Goddam waste of life, you deserved to get hit --

Baylor nails Charlie in the nose with clock-cleaner right.

Charlie staggers back, hands over his face. Blood trickles through his thick fingers.

He wobbles for a second, then goes down flat on his ass.

Baylor strides past as Charlie pulls his hands away. Blood flows over his woolly moustache and beard. He moans.

Baylor lifts the tire iron from a bed of shattered glass on the passenger seat next to a half empty rye bottle.

He walks back, faces Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'm a free bleeder, you asshole!

Baylor smashes the tire iron down square on Charlie's head.

Charlie topples over. Twitches. Blood spills like a tap.

Baylor comes down again. Then again. And again. Blood splashes Baylor's face with every blow.

Charlie's spasm subsides, but Baylor keeps going. He beats head to toe and back again until he's too exhausted to go on.

Gore drips from the wrench. Baylor gasps for breath.

Charlie's face is gone. So are his hands. Baylor drops the iron, backs away. Stares in horror at what he's done.

Baylor turns. The cow stands in the exact same spot. Chews obliviously. Baylor doubles over and vomits.

He wipes his mouth, walks to the cow. Slips his hand between the barbed wires and pets her. Blood streaks her white brow.

Baylor calms. Manages a faint smile.

BAYLOR

I guess old Charlie was a free bleeder, wasn't he, girl?

Baylor looks down on the ground. Sees his cigarette, still lit. He picks it up and takes a drag.

BAYLOR (V.O.)

Yep, Charlie was a free bleeder alright... He told me so.

To request the full screenplay of "The Holstein Epiphany" please contact Doug Johnson at dojo@dojowrite.com with your name and a brief introduction.

Thank you for your interest.