

GOODBYE, SUCKERS!

Written by

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EXT. STREET - MORNING

SUPER: NOVEMBER 5, 1933 - VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA

REV. FATHER LOUIS FORGET, 59, sloughs along a sidewalk, the sounds of nearby or distant church bells refracted into pure abstraction.

INTERTITLE: "Don't let your soul warp, Father."

His frock is oil stained, collar dangling; his white hair is matted - out of place with the passing CROWD dressed in their Sunday best.

EXT. BUS - NIGHT

SUPER: OCTOBER 28, 1933 - BELLINGHAM, WA, USA

A bus, emblazoned with a gaudy banner, "Too Hot for Paris: Whoopee on Wheels," speeds northbound along a one-lane dirt road just before daybreak.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Inside the bus is bacchanalian. BURLESQUE DANCERS, CABARET SINGERS and BIG BAND MUSICIANS revel in cocktails and swing, in a haze of cigarette smoke.

Alone at the back is TEXAS GUINAN, 49. With her bleached blonde curls, buxom curves, piles of Art Deco jewels, and décolleté sequined gown, she presides over her retinue.

Texas pats a Pekinese DOG sleeping atop a sable fur coat.

She smiles warmly at her manager, JOHN STEIN, 52, wearing a gangster suit rumped from months of touring. He chitchats with a dancer but pauses to return Texas' affectionate look.

Her smile slowly fades. From her perspective, the revelers have appeared to shift frame rate, 12fps to 40fps, as if projected at the wrong speed.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The bus comes to a stop in front of Beacon Theatre, the mazda bulbs of its marquee blazing "On Stage: Texas Guinan".

A boisterous crowd of FANS jostles with REPORTERS, as the hungover dancers, singers and musicians disembark.

Next off the bus is John who offers his hand to Texas, but she shoos him away.

Bedecked in her gown, jewels and coat, her dog tucked under one arm, Texas makes a grand entrance. She throws her free arm into the air to deliver her trademark catchphrase, with warm endearment:

TEXAS  
Hello, Suckers!

The crowd whoops and cheers in response.

One YOUNG REPORTER surges forward.

YOUNG REPORTER  
Miss Guinan! Miss Guinan! How does it feel to be back in Vancouver after all these years?

TEXAS  
I haven't been to Vancouver since 1912. Have you had a break in the rain since?

The crowd laughs at this quip, as a flash bulb goes off.

YOUNG REPORTER  
And how do you respond to your critics who say you are a purveyor of vice, a profiteer off of sin?

The crowd boos at this insolence. Texas smiles warmly.

TEXAS  
I have been credited with much and charged with plenty.

The crowd laughs again, as another flash bulb goes off. The reporter persists.

YOUNG REPORTER  
You've been banned from England and France. The Catholic Women's League has started a petition to ban you from Canada. Are you concerned?

TEXAS  
Look, we've come a long way to entertain you. And we are a bit homesick. But you know what they say: home is a great place - after all the other places have closed.

The tension is relieved by this last joke. Texas struts to catch up with John and the others heading into the theatre.

JOHN

Tex, how many times I beg you not to taunt the press?

TEXAS

You know me, John. I don't care what they say about me, if they only say something.

JOHN

You're in the hot seat in Chicago, LA. You wanna get the boot from here, too?

INTERTITLE: "I would rather have a square inch of New York than all the rest of the world."

Texas throws a teasing look back to the crowd and winks.

IRIS OUT.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Archival newsreel footage, Beacon Theatre, night.

SUPER: OCTOBER 31, 1933

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Seated at the mirror, Texas applies a thick layer of makeup to sombre eyes.

Next to her is a bowl of oranges, some peels scattered about. For a moment out of the corner of her eye, the oranges appear to serenade her with *Did You Ever See A Dream Walking?* (1933)

With the abruptness of a needle zipping off a record, John, holding the dog like a football, interjects to chastise Tex.

JOHN

Of course your stomach hurts, you eat nothing but them oranges.

TEXAS

It's been sour since Portland... I think four shows a night might have been a bit ambitious.

JOHN

You used to do six shows a night  
without breaking a sweat. Let me  
get you a drink, to settle things.

TEXAS

You know I never touch that rot,  
John. I'm not about to start now.

Irritated, she glances back to the oranges, now silent.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

The scantily clad chorus is finishing its signature number,  
*Cherries*, to a raucous audience. John admires from the wings.

CHORUS

(singing)

The judge says, 'Tex, do you sell  
booze?/ I said, 'Please don't be  
silly.

Dancers mingle with PATRONS, placing cherries into their  
mouths and kissing their foreheads provocatively.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

(singing)

I swear to you my cellar's filled/  
with chocolate and vanilly!

Texas returns to the stage to exuberant applause.

TEXAS

Everybody give the little girls a  
big hand!

She takes her mark on the spotlight, as the band strikes the  
first notes of *California, Here I Come* (1924). She waves to  
hold them off.

TEXAS (CONT'D)

Let me tell you something, suckers.  
I never take life too seriously.  
Give me plenty of laughs and you  
can take all the rest. So don't  
hook up with gloom. Don't be a  
crab. Step out and enjoy life!

INTERTITLE: "Besides, it's too expensive to grow old."

The band continues with the opening refrain of the song. When  
Texas begins to sing, however, her voice has that peculiar  
mechanistic quality of a wax phonograph cylinder recording.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT (LATER)

John gets no answer to his insistent knock on Texas' dressing room door. From inside the room, the dog begins to bark.

JOHN

Tex, come on, open up. Next show's started. Full house, lots of saps. Bald ones, fat ones, old ones.

John pounds on the door.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Come on, we only got a couple more nights in this joint.

No response, other than barking.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John barges his way into the room, to find Texas curled up on the floor, barely conscious. The Pekinese is by her side.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Archival newsreel footage, Vancouver General Hospital.

SUPER: NOVEMBER 2, 1933

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

DR. J.A. MCLACHLAN, 57, clears his throat and frowns at the dog curled up with Texas in her hospital bed.

TEXAS

I can't go on with this pain, but I must go on. We have shows in Victoria that I refuse to miss.

DOCTOR

It's your only option. Appendectomy is minor surgery. Back on your feet in ten weeks.

The doctor leaves Texas aghast at the prospect of a lengthy recovery.

John enters and stands by Texas. He lights a cigarette and offers it to her, but she declines.

The latest dose of morphine is taking effect on Texas.

TEXAS

John, I'm stir-crazy, I cannot take another day in this dump. And now the doctor is saying *ten weeks!*

INTERTITLE: "Might as well be dead to be offstage that long."

JOHN

Take heart, Tex. Fans, press, they won't forget you. In fact, you're big news this morning. The papers are full of headlines that you fell dead on the stage.

TEXAS

I've always said fame is chiefly a matter of dying in the right place, at the right moment. But do send a telegram to New York, to correct them. Here's a juicy quote for you: I'm not dying.

INTERTITLE: "Like the Blue Eagle, I'm on my way to recovery!"

JOHN

Shit, you're half-seas over. Listen to me, this is serious.

INTERTITLE: "Don't be a spoil sport."

TEXAS

I'll be back milking suckers before you know it.

IRIS OUT.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Archival newsreel footage, St. Patrick's Cathedral, day.

SUPER: NOVEMBER 3, 1933

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Father Forget, livid to be interrupted in his meticulous scrubbing of the nave floor, has risen to interrogate John. The priest's spoken English has a subtle French accent.

JOHN

I'm her manager.

FATHER  
And where is her husband?

JOHN  
She ain't got one. Not no more.

FATHER  
Where is she now?

JOHN  
Vancouver General.

FATHER  
Not at St. Paul? Well I can imagine  
why. Mr. Stein, I have read about  
Miss Guinan's exploits.

JOHN  
Oh, you know how the press likes to  
make stories bigger to sell papers.

FATHER  
And the many criminal charges  
against her? Mail fraud. Lascivious  
and lewd conduct. Public nuisance.  
Bootlegging. Prostitution.

JOHN  
She was quitted on all of them!

FATHER  
In the court's eyes. Not God's.

JOHN  
Look, Father Forget, Miss Guinan is  
a Catholic, baptized proper.

Father Forget arches one eyebrow in response.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Father Forget and Texas are evenly unimpressed by each other.  
John soothes the whimpering dog in his arms.

TEXAS  
Father Forget, I do apologize, for  
John taking you away from your  
pulpit, into my den of iniquity.

JOHN  
Father, she don't mean sacrilege.



Texas' side of the banter jump cuts, like the missing frames of an imperfect archival reel.

TEXAS

Of course not. I'm a believer. I've always said, a police raid isn't an accident, but an act of God.

FATHER

You free them of their money on a Saturday night. I free their soul on Sunday morning.

TEXAS

Perhaps we have both devoted our lives to a stage, Father.

An incensed Father Forget turns to leave.

FATHER

Mr. Stein, it appears Miss Guinan remains in high spirits and has no need of my pastoral care.

TEXAS

You know me, an indiscretion a day keeps depression away.

FATHER

I offer you my blessings for your surgery today, Miss Guinan.

TEXAS

Don't let your soul warp, Father.

He exits, Texas greatly amused by his perturbation.

John places the dog on the hospital bed, at Texas' feet.

JOHN

You sure gave him the high hat.

TEXAS

Religion and war. Both a racket. Daft draft graft, as I always say.

IRIS OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

A NURSE wheels a gurney with a confident, defiant Texas past her devoted cast, including John, a handful of FANS, and the YOUNG REPORTER, holding vigil outside of Texas' room.

Texas gives a rousing speech in the melodramatic vaudevillian style of early silent cinema:

TEXAS

I want my funeral procession to be the speediest ever, with a cop on a motorcycle to lead it. I want an open casket, so the suckers can get a good look at me without a cover charge. With a bunch of college boys singing songs loud while they lower me into the ground. And they will have to padlock my coffin if they expect to keep me in it!

IRIS OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Texas is delirious with pain. Horrified, she watches one SILHOUETTE FIGURE strangle another SILHOUETTE FIGURE.

John has grabbed Dr. McLachlan by the collar.

JOHN

Fucking horseshit!

DOCTOR

(stuttering)

Advanced peritonitis, ulcerative colitis, perforated intestine...

JOHN

Help her, for God's sake!

DOCTOR

There's nothing--

The movement of Texas' lips and the sound of her voice are not synchronized, with the tinny quality of an early talkie.

TEXAS

Well, folks, your little angel has flown over those prison walls.

John pushes past the doctor and out the door.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Father Forget sits down with Texas who offers a pained smile, relieved by his presence. Again her voice is tinny and out of sync, and now in a childlike pitch. Her bravado is gone.

FATHER

Mr. Stein brought me back.

TEXAS

Good egg, that one. I do regret--

FATHER

Isaiah 43:18, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past."

TEXAS

(tearful and confused)

Father, is acting a sin? Forgive me, I can't seem to recall my lines... And down the long and silent, long and silent--

FATHER

-- the long and silent street / The dawn, with silver-sandalled feet / Crept like a frightened girl.

TEXAS

Oh, you know it?

FATHER

(smiling gently)

Harlot's House. I should have expected as much, Miss Guinan.

TEXAS

Call me Mary Louise.

FATHER

Mary Louise.

TEXAS

Put on your bonnet, Mama. I'm not good enough to save souls now.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Father Forget begins to perform Last Rites on Texas.

For the rest of their time together, he will appear, in her eyes, as though filtered through old nitrite film stock, increasingly decomposed.

As Father Forget recites the prayer, he gently touches a damp cloth to Texas' face and neck.

FATHER

O Holy hosts above, I call upon thee as a servant of Jesus Christ, to sanctify our actions this day in preparation for the fulfillment of the will of God.

Texas' eyes close, as her Confession begins--

INT. CLUB - FLASHBACK

YOUNG TEXAS, a chorus girl, jumps into the lap and feeds a cherry to an elderly nightclub PATRON, a distraction from picking his pockets.

FATHER (V.O)

Let the fire of the Holy Spirit now descend--

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - FLASHBACK

YOUNG TEXAS / TEXAS, a bride on three wedding days, with three different GROOMS. With each wedding, her dress gets more scandalous, and her grooms get younger and swarthier.

FATHER (V.O)

--that this being might be awakened to the world beyond and the life of the earth--

CUT TO:

INT. CINEMA - FLASHBACK

In a MONTAGE of film clips, Texas is on-screen stripping naked, getting ossified, fighting, murdering: *The Gun Woman* (1918), *South O' Sante Fe* (1919), *Letters of Fire* (1919), *The Boss of the Rancho* (1919), *A Moonshine Feud* (1920), *The Night Rider* (1920), *The Stampede* (1921).

FATHER (V.O)

--and infused with the power of the Holy Spirit. O Lord Jesus Christ, most merciful, Lord of earth, I ask that you receive this child into your arms--

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - FLASHBACK

A MONTAGE of arrests: YOUNG TEXAS / TEXAS handcuffed... fingerprinted... mug shots taken.

FATHER (V.O)  
 --that she might pass in safety  
 from this crisis.

Jail cell doors close to incarcerate... open to emancipate.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

FATHER  
 So let it be done.

Father Forget wrings out the cloth and loosens his collar.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Father Forget begins the Anointing of the Sick. He touches a crucifix to Texas' lips.

He dips his fingers into a bowl of sacramental oil, marks a cross on her forehead with his thumb, first in a vertical line from top to bottom, then horizontal from left to right.

FATHER  
 Per istam sanctam unctionem et suam  
 piissimam misericordiam adiuvet te  
 dominus gratia spiritus santi, ut a  
 peccatis liberatum te salvet atque  
 propitius alleviet.

Texas' breathing rattles, as Father Forget tenderly applies oil to the rest of her face and body.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Father Forget is administering the Viaticum to Texas. In her nearly unconscious state, Texas sees the priest only as a blur of bubbles, blisters, flashes, fading and jumps.

FATHER  
 And thus do I commend thee into the  
 arms of our Lord of Earth, our Lord  
 Jesus Christ, preserver of all  
 mercy and reality, and the Father  
 Creator.

He gently cups and lifts the back of her head, but she is unable to drink the eucharist wine. With a cloth, he cleans the wine that has run down her chin.

FATHER (CONT'D)

We give Him glory as we give you  
into his arms in everlasting peace,  
to be prepared to return into the  
denser reality of God the Father,  
Creator of all. Amen. Amen. Amen.

As the prayer ends, Texas' breathing slows to a stop.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Returning to our opening scene, Father Forget sloughs along a sidewalk - out of place with the passing crowd.

Across the street is the Beacon Theatre.

Father Forget stops abruptly, catching sight of a WORKMAN on a ladder, removing lettering from the name on the marquee.

The priest eyes the tour bus idling out in front, its banner removed, and its mournful chorus loaded up for a return home.

John is last to board the bus. Turning back to take a wistful final look at the theatre and the city, he fortuitously spots Father Forget among the crowd.

The two men exchange a brief respectful acknowledgment. John steps up onto the bus. Father Forget continues on his way.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Several blocks further, Father Forget finds himself in front of the marquee for the Lyric Theatre. Now playing is *Broadway Through A Keyhole*, starring Texas Guinan.

He takes a thoughtful look at the movie poster, hesitates, and then turns towards the ticket window.

FADE OUT.