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Excerpts from 'Dust Bowl Refugees'

*1934. A dying Midwestern town. The stage is covered in dust. A statue of The Virgin Mary stands front and center. Dark blood is flowing heavily from its eyes and mouth. A few down-and-out pilgrims and newspaper men are crowding around it, some bowing before it. Sitting on a park bench off to the side are two old hoboes named ARISTOTLE and VIRGIL. The sound of a gust of wind heavy in dust blows through. They try to cover up as best they can.*

VIRGIL

(wipes dust out of his eyes with rag) Hooey, this dust really is murder, I tell ya!

ARISTOTLE

(spits, coughs) I hear ya, mister. I'm suckin' in so much of it my stomach think we must be eatin' a five-course meal or sumpin'. Ain't been filled like that in years!

VIRGIL

Five-course meals. Heh! I don't think my stomach would even know what to do with that much food anymore. Even if I was able to get my hands on it.

ARISTOTLE

Funny ain't it? How we adapt that way. You live off scraps long enough, eventually your body'll begin to think that scraps is just normal. Be content with less. Mind over matter and all that.

VIRGIL

Opposite's true as well. Them big fat fellas Like we almost trained ourselves to need less to live on.

ARISTOTLE

Exactly. The limit of what's too much or too little keeps bein' pushed back farther and farther. Me, I can go days now without eatin' a crumb but I don't even remember the last time I been hungry. Like you said, I wouldn't even know what to do with 'three decent meals a day'.

VIRGIL

Decent meal'd kill me for sure now! I bet my stomach's all but shrivelled up to the size of a chick pea.

ARISTOTLE

Could you imagine bein' done in like that? By the very thing you longed for. By, like, a corned beef sammich or sumpin'?

VIRGIL

Heh. I'd have to undergo rigorous trainin' just to be able to even be in the same room as a corned beef sammich.

ARISTOTLE

Gotta build up a tolerance to it first for sure, hee-hee!

VIRGIL

You can't go back to eatin' corned beef sammiches just like that. Gotta work your way up to it, really earn it. First you gotta start small and get used to eating, say, a light snack again. Then you move on to bigger stuff to get your stomach to expand back to its previous corned-beef-eatin' size.

ARISTOTLE

Got it all figured out, ain't ya!

VIRGIL

What can I say? I got corned beef on mind these days.

ARISTOTLE

Can't blame you, mister.

VIRGIL

Not that I'm hungry or nothin'. I just miss the simple pleasures of sittin' down and eatin' a sammich you made with your own two hands, with things that was lyin' around the house. Like it weren't nothin' special.

ARISTOTLE

Ain't nothin' lyin' 'round the house no more.

VIRGIL

Ain't even a house!

ARISTOTLE

Nowadays, you gotta get everything "at the store". And to justify the fact that the store gone' charge you about half a sawbuck for a damned corned beef sammich, they gotta add all this fancy "fusion" shit to it, make it an *experience* or whatever. To the point that your corned-beef sammich ain't even recognizable anymore!

VIRGIL

Everybody just tryin' to hustle everybody now. Things can't just cost what they worth anymore.

ARISTOTLE

Ain't enough to provide goods and services that folk actually need anymore. Gotta make 'em beg for it too. Squeeze 'em for all they got.

[...]

ARISTOTLE

I don't know, friend. Everyone seems to agree it's a omen of sorts [...] You know like that 'what's good for the goose is good for the gander' type of thing? I don't know if I'm using that expression right.

VIRGIL

I think so.

ARISTOTLE

I never was good with all them fancy expressions. I don't know why I even try. Feels like it's only in English really, and by that, I mean American English, that we do that.

VIRGIL

Do what?

ARISTOTLE

Use shortcuts like that, idioms. Like all them talk about geese and ganders were gone make it clearer to anybody. I don't know about you, but I been ramblin' around this country for nearly 35 years and I only seen maybe three geese in that entire time. And I can sure as Hell guarantee nobody know what in the fuck a gander supposed to be neither.

VIRGIL

I don't know. I think it creates a sort of commonality between folk.

ARISTOTLE

A common-what?

VIRGIL

Like, like a collective unconscious, where we all share these same images of things. Makes communicating easier.

ARISTOTLE

I think I know what you're talkin' about. One time I took opium with an old woman from Missouri and for about 48 hours we was able to read each other's thoughts.

VIRGIL

Yeah. Like that.

ARISTOTLE

Eventually, both our minds became indistinguishable from one another. Our wants and desires, and even memories melded together. Our very personalities was fused into one.

VIRGIL

Shoot!

ARISTOTLE

I found myself hankerin' for franks topped with my mother's homemade mayonnaise even though in reality, I never knew my mother. Or rememberin' things like the cool summer nights in Branson even though at the time I'd never even been to Branson!

VIRGIL

And 48 hours later it all went back to normal?

ARISTOTLE

Yeah! Although some of her memories're still there. Or rather the memories of me remembering her memories, know what I mean? The feelings attached to them are still there. Which I suppose is all a memory really is at the end of the day.

VIRGIL

Me, my memories always play more like picture shows, you know?

ARISTOTLE

Ohh, ain't that interestin'! Could you imagine if all our memories was made into pictures.

VIRGIL

I don't know how good a picture that'd be.

ARISTOTLE

Of course it'd be good! 'Cause it's real.

VIRGIL

Maybe. But would people relate?

ARISTOTLE

That don't matter. You ain't doin' it for them. You do it for you and you hope some folk respond to the vulnerability of it. Feel a kinship or sumpin'.

VIRGIL

Maybe.

ARISTOTLE

All I know is that if they made a picture out of my life, I'd have Fay Wray play the love interest.

VIRGIL

Nice. Me, I'd have Kay Francis.

ARISTOTLE

Kay Francis? That ain't a very original answer.

VIRGIL

You don't like Kay Francis?

ARISTOTLE

Ain't that. Just seems like a easy answer to me. Everybody loves Kay Francis.

VIRGIL

And nobody likes *Fay Wray*?

ARISTOTLE

Heh. Good point, mister. I suppose I just don't go much for them "*women's pictures*" she's always in.

VIRGIL

Well if we judge an actor based solely on her previous body of work then that actor would never be able to branch out into other roles, thus condemning her to keep on starring in the kinds of pictures you don't like her in. It's a vicious cycle.

ARISTOTLE

You mean a self-fulfilling prophecy, no?

VIRGIL

No, a vicious cycle. A self-fulfilling prophecy is when you come into a situation with certain false expectations and the fact that you already have said expectations leads to them eventually comin' true. It would be like sayin' "Kay Francis is only good in them women's pictures she's in". And even if it ain't true—and as a matter of fact it ain't, 'cause she also does comedies, musicals, and gangster pictures just to give you an idea—it don't matter 'cause if you get enough people to think like that goin' in—especially studio executives with money on the line—then they'll think that any picture they see her in is one of them "women's pictures" and when they realize it ain't they come outta there disappointed. It could be the best picture in the world but if it ain't like what they were told it'd be, it makes 'em angry for some reason. Folk get angry, the picture flops, and it's all poor Kay Francis' fault. Everybody concludes that she ain't able to handle any other kind of role than in them women's pictures. So, you see? The idea that she cannot be good in any other kind of picture kills any chance of folks likin' her performances before they even see 'em!

ARISTOTLE

Well, ain't that what you just said?

VIRGIL

(beat) Shit, I guess it is! What's a vicious cycle then?

ARISTOTLE

A vicious cycle would be more like, say, Kay Francis stars in a real clunker. One of them pictures she didn't wanna do but was part of her contract or sumpin'. The critics turn on her and

proceed to rip her and everybody involved a new asshole. This would be enough to shake anybody's confidence. And so, when she arrives on set for her next picture, she's rattled, scared to mess up again, and under an extra amount of pressure to make sure this one don't flop, especially if she's playin' lead. Now all this extra shit floatin' around in the back of her head mean that she ain't as focused on the task at hand as she usually is. She don't seamlessly lose herself into her character like before. The performance inevitably suffers, the critics see this and write yet another bad review, thereby sending her further down her spiral of self-doubt which further affects her actin' abilities. The cycle keeps on perpetuatin' itself.

VIRGIL

Oh, I see. Like scratching a mosquito bite to make the itchin' go away. But scratchin' it only makes it worse.

ARISTOTLE

Pree-cisely.