

Asylum  
by  
Janet Clarke

Copyright 2011  
Janet Clarke  
Janetgoodman@yahoo.com

FADE IN:

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY - 1890

PHINEAS BLAKE (20s) stands before JUDGE ADAMS (50s).

GUARDS flank Phineas on either side. He's cuffed and bound, clad in rags.

Two well-dressed spectators watch the proceedings.

CAROLINE DE COURTIER (20s) wrings her hands. FRANKLIN DE COURTIER (50s) stands at her side; an imposing figure.

BENTHAM

Phineas Blake, thou shall step forward.

Bentham removes his glasses and reads from parchment.

BENTHAM

You stand before us accused of multiple crimes. Theft from your employer. Indecent actions towards Caroline de Courtier, a woman far above your rank.

One of the guards SNICKERS at Caroline. Franklin lays a protective hand on her shoulder.

BENTHAM

According to witnesses, you threatened violence towards Franklin de Courtier, when he properly acted to protect his daughter's virtue.

Franklin glares at Caroline. She looks at her feet. Phineas glances towards Caroline, a plea in his eyes.

BENTHAM

It has been suggested that you be remanded to Hastings Penitentiary for a period of twenty years. The court has rejected the request, as ill suited for your crimes.

Caroline's face lights up.

BENTHAM

We believe a term of incarceration at Battings Asylum to be more appropriate. Release in five years, upon proof of rehabilitation.

CAROLINE

Five years?

BENTHAM

Take him away.

Franklin winks at Bentham. Phineas lunges forward - is detained by the guards.

PHINEAS

Caroline!

CAROLINE

I will wait for you!

The guards drag Phineas from the room.

INT. BATTINGS ASYLUM - DAY ROOM - MORNING

The door slams behind Phineas. He looks around, frightened.

PATIENTS hunker at tables and mumble. Others pick at scabs. RATS scurry by their feet.

INT. ASYLUM CELL

Phineas sit on the floor and writes in a journal.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Dearest Caroline, I have arrived at the Battings in one piece. Thank God for the small blessings in life.

INT. DINING HALL - AFTERNOON

Phineas sits down at a table.

A PATIENT squats at the other end. He's bound in a straight jacket, his hands tied. A bowl of porridge is laid out before him.

The man shoves his face into the bowl. He grins at Phineas. Bits of food stick to his cheeks.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

In some ways, it is better than jail. But it will take adjusting to. I have no doubt of that.

INT. ASYLUM CELL - LATER

Phineas huddles in a corner and continues to write.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

I will send you letters every day. I have no fear for my safety. But the boredom will be bad. And the loneliness worse. At least until I may plan my escape.

INT. COURTYARD - DAY

Phineas sits in the courtyard, far from other INMATES.

Patients throw trash at each other. A DEAD MAN lies in the corner. His COMPANION kicks him and CACKLES.

An ATTENDANT sits nearby and cleans his fingernails with a knife. Phineas grabs his elbow, points out the corpse.

PHINEAS

That chap over there. I believe he's dead.

ATTENDANT

Yeah. So he is.

PHINEAS

Don't you think something should be done?

ATTENDANT

They die here all the time. We'll pick him up 'round dinner, when there's room in the carriage.

Phineas SIGHS and turns his gaze to the courtyard.

A LONE FIGURE stands at a table, across the room. A hood covers it's features. Eyes glint from the darkness, bore into Phineas.

Phineas walks towards him, entranced.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

I have yet to meet anyone capable of conversation. The attendants are uninterested. The inmates, infirm.

Phineas reaches the figure. He stares down at the table.

A pack of playing cards lies on the table. A bowl of porridge is discarded nearby.

Phineas catches a glimpse of a slashed throat. Sees flashes of other visions - equally bloody.

He stumbles back into a GUARD. The guard glares at him in disgust.

GUARD  
Food's not that bad.

He takes the bowl and walks away.

GUARD  
(mutters)  
Thought that one had his marbles...

Phineas glances back. The figure is gone, but the cards are still there. He tucks them into one of his pockets.

INT. ASYLUM CELL - LATER

Phineas plays solitaire. His journal lies on the table.

PHINEAS (V.O.)  
It's been almost a month since last you wrote. Surely, my darling, you haven't lost hope? Five years may be long. But someday we will walk again in the sun.

Phineas flips a card. A rotted hand taps it - slides it to the appropriate stack.

Phineas leaps from the table and bangs on the door. A GUARD looks in.

GUARD  
What now?

PHINEAS  
Let me out. For God's Mercy, I beg you!

He stares over his shoulder. The SPECTRE moves closer and touches his arm. Maggots wriggle from an open cheek.

The guard doesn't seem to see it.

The door opens suddenly. Phineas staggers out. The guard hands him a chamber pot.

GUARD  
Use this in the hallway. Out of my sight.

Phineas looks back. The creature is gone. But bloody fingerprints remain on his skin.

GUARD

Go on. I don't have all day.

Phineas stares at the guard. Then at the pot.

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

INT. PRISON CELL - EVENING

Phineas stares out at the courtyard.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Two months, my dearest, without a word. I only have hope left to sustain me. And memory of our love, to keep me warm.

A horse-drawn carriage CLATTERS across the yard. Phineas' face lights up at the sight.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Each day I wait for the carriage to arrive. The driver brings packages for the inmates. At least for those who still have families. Those that care, and have not yet forgotten.

FOOTSTEPS echo in the hall. Phineas peers out the peephole with anticipation.

A GUARD opens the door. There's a nightstick in his hand. No package or letter. Phineas' face falls.

The guard pulls him from his cell.

GUARD #1

What chu waitin' for - pudding for brains? Time for supper.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Phineas falls in line with a number of INMATES.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Your silence drives me mad. Even more than this place, and it's unhappy inhabitants.

The INMATE in front of Phineas scratches his rear.

Phineas looks away, catches glimpses of GHOSTS. Dead things, which stand in shadow.

The line stops as a GUARD opens a cell. The room is black. The voice inside is shrill.

PANICKED INMATE (O.S.)  
No! You can't make me go.

Another guard joins his companion at the entrance.

PANICKED INMATE (O.S.)  
The walls move. The shadows - they talk.

Guard #2 marches into the room.

PANICKED INMATE (O.S.)  
You cannot make me bear the visions! I -

THUNK. The unseen inmate hits the ground. The guards drag the unconscious prisoner out between them.

Ghosts beckon to Phineas from the walls - reach out to him with rotted hands.

PHINEAS (V.O.)  
I cannot bear it anymore, my love.  
Without your words, I have nothing to  
sustain me. If they will not come to me,  
I must go to them.

Phineas breaks from the line. He slips around a corner and spies a door...

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

Phineas sneaks across the lawn. He reaches the fence. It looms eight feet high; strung with razors. He looks down at wet soil.

A SHOUT echoes from the asylum. Phineas digs like a dog. He reaches a hand under the fence and touches freedom, just a few feet away.

GUARDS rush across the yard, waving large sticks. Phineas flattens himself against the fence.

PHINEAS (V.O.)  
I cannot blame you, Dearest Caroline.  
Surely your father has intercepted my  
letters. He never did care for our love.

Blows rain down on Phineas' head. The guards get more energetic with each blow...

INT. DE COURTIER MANSION - EVENING

Franklin sits on a couch, Phineas' letters in his hand. The fireplace before him blazes with light.

Caroline whirls around and shows off her dress.

FRANKLIN

Two more letters. They arrived today.

CAROLINE

I know what they say. I've read them before.

There's a KNOCK on the door. Caroline catches her breath.

FRANKLIN

What do you wish me to do with them?

CAROLINE

Take them away. They look dirty.

Caroline flings open the door and greets a HANDSOME YOUNG MAN. He's dressed in his finest, with top hat and coat.

Caroline turns to her father.

CAROLINE

Don't wait up tonight. We're going to the theatre. And then a dance!

Franklin tosses the letters into the fire.

INT. ASYLUM CLINIC - NIGHT

TWO GUARDS slam Phineas into a chair.

GUARD #1

Tryin' to escape? Doc won't like that, not one bit.

They bind his wrists with leather straps.

GUARD #2

Guess he don't like our hospitality. And we've done so much to keep him cozy.

GUARD #1

Gets cold in those cells. Maybe he needs some warmin' up.

They fix electrodes to his temple. A white coated DOCTOR checks the fitting.

Guard #1 leans close. Phineas winces at his breath.

GUARD #1

After the first shock, you won't feel a thing.

The doctor pushes a button. Phineas SCREAMS as the first volt hits.

Ghosts melt from the walls. The spectres watch the torture, sympathy on their faces.

Phineas trembles. He HOWLS as the next treatment hits.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Phineas sits in fetal position.

He stares at walls covered in scribble. "Five years minus 90 days" is written in red. The wrong color for ink, it looks like dried blood.

The chamber pot lies on the ground next to a rock.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

I now understand how a man goes mad.  
Months have passed with no word from you.  
I see shadows everywhere. Things that  
move, but have long since died.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Phineas sits in the courtyard. Something writhes in the corner just out of view.
- The faces of laughing INMATES. Some alive. Others dead.
- ROTTED CORPSES approach Phineas in his cell. He bangs on the chamber pot with a rock. They retreat back into the walls.
- Caroline dances happily with her new beau.
- Another round of electroshock. Phineas SCREAMS.

Phineas scrawls in his journal.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

By day, I stick near guards and inmates.  
Their presence keeps such things at bay.  
Hastings would have been better. The men  
they keep are at least alive.

SOMETHING moves in the corner, too dark to see.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Sounds make them leave, so I put up a  
clamour. But I fear the peace of sleep.  
And the vulnerability that it brings.

A DARK FIGURE melts from the wall. Several more follow;  
dark, nasty and dead.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

Every night I face unspeakable visions.

Phineas reaches for the chamber pot. His hand goes limp.

PHINEAS (V.O.)

I grow tired. Let them take me. Five  
years is too long to fight.

He stands up. The figures close in, surround him  
completely. The Dark Spectre holds out a hand.

There's a pack of cards in it's palm.

Phineas looks at the offering. He takes the deck and  
heads to a table. The dead take seats on the floor.

Phineas shuffles the cards. One of the ghosts throws out  
pebbles. They CLATTER and roll; substitute chips.

The undead fan their cards. Phineas draws one of his own.

A GUARD looks in - watches Phineas play cards with  
himself.

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER.

Phineas sits at the table, surrounded by new-found  
friends. Their faces are rotted, but friendly.

He deals cards and chats (MOS.)

PHINEAS (V.O.)

It's been so long since I've seen your  
face. I forget it's configurations, your  
beautiful eyes. But at long last, I've  
found my peace. We all want friends, no  
matter our station in life... or death.  
These will keep me sane, until next we  
meet.

Phineas puts down his hand with a SNAP.

PHINEAS

Gin.

He grins, and rakes in the pebbles.

FINAL FADE OUT: