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*Carla Rising*  
**Film Treatment**

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**Truman Bryant** sits alone on a wooden crate, in one passage within a network of dark tunnels the size of a city. (Text: “1921 - Sovereign Coal Co. Mine.”)

As the opening credits run, the aging miner is joined by his 19-year-old son, **Gibbs Bryant**, also a coal miner. The two men share a quiet moment, eyes closed, listening to the occasional crack and groan of wooden beams, the sounds of natural water, the cracking rock, escaping air, all accented by a single water pump, clearing the vast network of mine tunnels around them.

Gibbs breaks the silence, telling his father he “can’t listen much today,” that he’s too distracted about the growing tensions of the men, planning a strike over low pay and dangerous conditions in the mine. Truman doesn’t seem to hear Gibbs. Instead, he talks about “listening to the mine.” (“If something’s changing here, you know. The mine will let you know.”)

They are joined by other members of their crew. Gibbs’ older brother, big “**Big Todd**” **Bryant**, is lieutenant to union organizer **Sid Mandt**. The others include the diminutive ‘**Low-Coal**’ **Petry**, **Darko Dresser** (a good-natured Croatian) and Truman’s old friend, **Harm Fox**. The men try to get Truman to join the union. Sid has secretly organized the strike, to involve thousands of men in coal mines all along the Coal River. Everyone’s ready to walk, waiting for word from Sid — who needs Truman’s participation.

Suddenly, their gas-warning lamps flare. Men run for their lives. A steel coal car knocks out several posts, causing a cave-in. Sid saves the Bryant brothers, but Todd’s shoulder is badly cut and broken. Old Truman Bryant is last seen blowing a steel warning whistle, helping others escape.

Getting Todd to the camp doctor, Sid Mandt is “outed” as a secret, illegal union organizer. Caught in his own home, Sid is beaten by two company officers, **Captain Gaujot**, and his weasily-looking assistant, **Mouseface Moler**. Under the corrupt system, the two mine guards wear badges, doubling as deputies for the local oligarch, **Sheriff Riley Gore**.

Sid is bandaged up by his young wife, **Carla Rising Mandt**, who arrives with her mother, the homesteader **Mary Rising** (a tough woman in her 40s) and her son, 11-year-old **Nick**. (Nick is a strange white-haired boy, mute and mildly disabled.) Sid rejoins the mine rescue operation, but first gives Carla his handgun, which she tucks into her satchel. Later, in the clinic, Carla pulls the gun to defend herself against the violent advances of Captain Gaujot, saving herself and “Big Todd” Bryant, injured and opiated.

That night, twelve bodies are found in the mine. Gibbs Bryant kneels next to Truman and finds his warning whistle, just as an angry Sid calls the regional strike. The miners go on the rampage, taking over the Sovereign camp. The two sheriff’s deputies flee in their truck.

In daylight, Captain Gaujot and Sheriff Riley Gore watch their men evict the last miners from their company-owned homes in the Sovereign camp. Gore orders Gaujot to file county papers, charging the organizer Sid Mandt with unionism and destruction of company property.

The Sovereign men and hundreds of other striking miners construct a sprawling strikers' tent colony, in an open field by the little town of Blair. Sid, Todd and the Sovereign men view it: a strikers' tent city, a workers' melting pot. A large community tent stands in the center.

Young Gibbs Bryant helps Carla raise the canvas she shares with Sid. Gibbs also helps Carla's Uncle Harm Fox, and **Aunt Tildy** (Mary's sister). That night, Carla and Sid make love in their tent, surrounded by the strikers' community, more than a thousand strong.

The next day, Sid arrives at the Logan Courthouse to answer the sheriff's charges. With Carla on his arm, he is gunned down by Mouseface and the other guards. In the ensuing panic, scores of union miners are arrested and jailed by the sheriff. Todd Bryant flees with Gibbs, Harm Fox and Lowcoal. Gaujot corners the unarmed Gibbs, alone, in a railyard. Gibbs punches Gaujot in the face before he is saved by sympathetic railroad workers, armed with their tools. Leaving, Gaujot swears revenge on Gibbs.

## ACT II

Climbing the steep wooded road from the Blair tent camp, Mary's wagon moves toward her mountain homestead, where Sid will be buried. Strings of faded carnival pennants decorate Mary's rig, which she uses to sell food and hand-made goods. A tough woman, Mary makes it clear she wants no crowd at Sid's burial. This irritates her brother-in-law, Harm, for whom Mary carries a mysterious grudge.

Coming home, Carla's 11-year-old brother Nick retreats to a forest cave he loves. Here, he reverently lights a line of stubby candles on an underground stone shelf. Among his pocket treasures is Truman Bryant's steel warning whistle, a gift from Gibbs.

That night, Sid's friends gather at Mary's homestead for his wake. With Mary inside, Harm Fox explains (in a flashback) how he and Mary's husband, Bonner Rising, took part in a violent strike, ten years before. Bonner was shot by two company guards on a motorcycle. Harm and others brought him back to his homestead. Mary appears and finishes the story: dramatically airing her long-simmering grievance against Harm and the union men, accusing them of causing her husband's death.

"I look at you, Harm Fox, and all I see is my husband, bloodied and dying on my cabin floor. ...Now, you men have done the same damned thing to my little girl!"

Gibbs defends Harm and the miners' cause, for which Bonner and Sid gave their lives. No one can afford to be "neutral," says Gibbs, as Mary declares herself to be. Mary's obstinate fury drives Harm and Lowcoal away, off into the darkness. A tearful Carla expresses her pride for both her husband and father. Her speech wins the miners' admiration, especially from brothers Todd and Gibbs. The three of them talk before Sid's open coffin, lit by moth-stuttered candlelight. The two men quietly argue about whether they should have been armed and defended Sid. Carla confesses she carried Sid's handgun in her purse; that she offered the gun to him, but he pushed her to safety before he was killed.

At Sid's morning funeral, everyone is surprised to see hundreds of mourners, miners and their families climbing the hill from Blair. Lowcoal and Harm Fox had worked overnight, blazing the trail with carnival pennants, torn from Mary's wagon and rousing the striking miners to show up at the funeral of Sid, being buried alongside Bonner Rising.

Todd Bryant gives a stirring commemoration, establishing him as Sid's heir to union leadership. Afterward, regional union organizer **Tom Kenner** introduces himself and takes Todd to an evening meeting in the capitol city, with state **Governor Ephriam Morgan**. At the meeting, Morgan bluntly tells the union men he cannot (will not) control Sheriff Riley Gore and his private army of corporate police. Neither can the governor free some 70 union miners sitting in Gore's jail,

without charges. Finally, the governor warns the two union men against taking up arms for their cause. If they do, Morgan will have no choice but to side with the corrupt Sheriff Gore.

In Blair, the miners take over a big stone company building, the mercantile. They set it up as a union headquarters and distribution center, meeting the needs of poor, workers' families.

Gibbs becomes the firebrand, urging his brother Todd to arm the men and raid the Logan Courthouse, to "free our union brothers" in Gore's jail. Todd refuses, holding Kenner's position: Convince Gov. Morgan to investigate labor conditions in Logan, showing the need for a union.

Mary returns to town with Nick and Carla. They help her sell goods from her wagon to the growing strikers' community. In a move for her own liberation, Carla joins Aunt Tildy, working in the occupied "Union Mercantile." Later, Carla sees — and, with her silence, endorses — Gibbs and his friends, smuggling stolen crates of guns into the basement.

That night, their action seems justified when an armor-plated train chugs past the miners' tent city, unleashing gunfire on the sleeping miners and their families. All is chaos. Tents catch fire as miners struggle to defend themselves against the train. Caught in the open, Carla's brother Nick is heroically rescued by Gibbs. When Harm Fox is killed, an enraged Tildy charges the steel behemoth with her husband's rifle. She wounds a plainclothes deputy, whose pockets are subsequently picked through by the mercenary Captain Gaujot.

The next day, the strikers' community tries to recover. Mary leaves, returning to the safety of her homestead with Nick. Tildy goes into quiet seclusion in her tent with Carla. That night, Carla finds Gibbs and six others in the mercantile basement, planning a retaliatory raid on the Sovereign mine. Carla volunteers to join them, saying they'll need her to navigate the dark woods. She convinces them despite resistance from a reluctant-but-admiring Gibbs.

In a big tent meeting, Todd urges the men to stay peaceful and "stick with the union." His words fall on deaf ears. Carrying new guns, Gibbs and scores of angry strikers declare open resistance, an armed march. When Kenner arrives the next morning, Todd tells him most of the men have gone up Blair Mountain to attack the sheriff's men in Logan and "free our men in jail."

Gov. Morgan meets with US Army intelligence officer **Colonel Stanley Ford** and his superior, **General Charles Mitchell**, telling them he is caught between the striking workers and Gore's army of coal-company defenders. "This strike is out of my control," he says.

Sheriff Gore arrives. Gore and Col. Ford have a "duel of minds." In the end, Gore is told that the US naval yards, alone, "draw 30,000 tons of coal from Logan every week." Mitchell lays down the law: National security depends on that ore. Logan's coal companies will negotiate terms with the workers' union. If these negotiations fail, the US Army will intervene. Gore asks for details. Mitchell says his state-of-the-art Army Air Corps can drop bombs on the miners, including gas. "Then, the ground troops arrive," says Mitchell. Sheriff Gore smiles, promising his cooperation.

Luther Simms and his Italian friend Bartolo are among about 100 desperate "replacement workers" shipped to the Sovereign coal camp as strike-breakers. Waking up in the Sovereign community center, Simms and Bartolo realize they are prisoners of Gore's men.

Intercepted on the road to Logan, Mary and Nick are taken to meet Sheriff Gore at the Logan Hotel. She asks Gore to allow her return home. Gore takes Mary upstairs, passing **Rose** and other young women sweeping the carpets. Gore convinces Mary that Blair Mountain is dangerous, and invites her and Nick to stay at the hotel, cost-free, as refugees of the labor war. Reluctantly, Mary agrees, privately admiring the hotel's modern luxuries, unknown to her on the homestead.

Carrying packs, bedding, tools and guns, Carla, Gibbs and the Sovereign miners lead more than 1,500 men up Blair Mountain. From the ridgetop, they see smoke rising from the Sovereign mine, a sign that "replacement workers" (scabs) have taken their jobs.

The "miners army" digs in, making trenches. Gibbs and the Sovereign miners dig a large covered pit to sleep a dozen men. Uphill, they pitch a single tent for Carla. They plan around the

campfire: After some sleep, they'll move on Sovereign. Together, Gibbs and Carla voice their idealism: Gibbs' sense of justice, Carla's need for community solidarity. Gibbs presses her hand.

Leading the men, Carla moves quietly through the dark. Gibbs follows, surprised to see how comfortable she is in the woods, whose resonant sounds contrast to his memory of the mines.

The seven-member group comes to a wooded hill overlooking the Sovereign camp. Surprisingly, their one-time mining community is encircled by barbed wire and lit by harsh arc lamps: Their camp/home has become a dark and oppressive labor gulag.

The miners quietly take positions around and in the mine. Here they find two empty coal cars on the track. (The track runs from the mine mouth, into the tall wooden coal-separation plant below, crossing a high, covered wooden scaffold.) Gibbs finds a miner's headlamp in one of the cars.

The shooting begins when Lowcoal takes out the security lights, darkening the camp. Below them, a door to the "barn" opens and black shapes move out. ("Here we go...")

From her position on the hillside, Carla realizes that replacement workers are being herded out, at gunpoint. She runs toward the fence, warning her friends: "Don't shoot! They're workers! They're not armed!"

A scab is shot by a guard. Other guards reveal themselves, firing their weapons at Carla and the miners.

Carla takes her rifle, and climbs the stair tower by the plant. She kills a mine guard who is targeting the unarmed Simms and Bartolo. Simms grabs the dead man's rifle and, with Bartolo, joins Carla in the tower. A WWI Army sniper, Simms kills a company machine-gunner, a relief to the union men pinned down in the mine. Now, their position in the tower is revealed, however, so Carla, Simms, and Bartolo scamper up the covered rail track. They arrive at the top just in time to save Lowcoal from Gaujot's guards, sneaking toward the mine mouth.

Using the found headlamp, Gibbs runs into the mine to retrieve sticks of dynamite, abandoned by the men in Scene 2. As the battle rages, Gibbs and Bartolo rig charges in two cars, sending them down the rail track. At the first explosion, debris from the coal-separation plant rains on the guards, including Gaujot. The second blast topples the entire building into the company building, where the scabs were being housed. Carla and the miners flee, but Gaujot kills one, "Darko," a tragic death.

Returning to the mountain camp, the battle-wizened miners watch Sheriff Gore's "counter-revolutionaries" spread across the opposite ridge, preparing for open war. A biplane flies overhead, dropping leaflets on both sides. The federal notes say they have one week to abandon the battlefield and "go home."

"They kicked us outta our homes!" laughs Lowcoal bitterly. "If I *had* a home, wouldn't I gladly go there?"

"The Logan police turned us all into slaves," adds Simms. "Sure no 'going back' for me."

They are terrified, however, that a force of US troops could push the miners across the valley, straight into the arms of Gore's men. "Or the Army could just kill us all from the sky," says one, giving the remarkable biplane new meaning.

Overhead, Col. Ford drops the last leaflets. The plane is hit by a bullet from the Logan side. (This starts the battle.) With harrowing skill, Ford's pilot safely crashes the plane in a field. Ford notes that the war has started — involving, by his count, 10,000 angry men.

Carla spends a day in Blair, restoring the mercantile's courtyard garden with Aunt Tildy. They talk about the lives of men, their causes and their wars. Alone, they cry together over their lost ones.

The next day, Carla confronts Todd in an upstairs office of the mercantile. Todd accuses her of betraying the union — and, then, of betraying him — by joining the march with Gibbs. Carla tells

Todd he should have supported the fight; that violence “is the only thing Gore understands.” Todd shows her a newspaper, accusing the miners of killing “scab” workers.

“That’s a lie,” says Carla. “Our side didn’t kill any scabs...”

Todd implores her to talk Gibbs into returning to Blair before the Army comes. Carla accuses Todd of being a coward, of giving up the fight. Todd insists he is fighting for her, for a future life together. Confessing his longtime love, Todd tells Carla how he imagines returning to life in Sovereign. She reminds him that Sid had wanted the same thing, nothing more, and that the company killed him for it. (“There’s no going back, Todd. Not for me.”)

Angry, Todd shows her another newspaper item, a photo of Carla’s mother in Logan with Sheriff Gore. He suggest that Mary is working with the sheriff. He offers to “fix” Carla’s reputation. This only angers her. Carla stalks off, as Todd is called to another office, where Tom Kenner is meeting with US Army Col. Ford....

Sheriff Gore prepares a party in his hotel suite. Bringing two bottles of contraband scotch, Gaujot asks why they don’t just “wipe out” the force of unionists? This angers the sheriff.

“You wanna end it now, do you?” Gore yells. “Well, think again! This strike is costing us, but it’s costing those union radicals more!... The Army thinks it can come in here and end the strike. And what then? Maybe our coal operators think it’s a good idea to start paying federal taxes? That they don’t don’t *need* our protection anymore? Where does that leave us, you and me and the Baldwin firm, Gaujot? *Out in the cold*. The Army, the government, all the same: They’re only out for our cut of the pie!”

“I’ll tell you what I want,” says Gore. “I want every red-neck miner on that mountain so full of piss ’n’ vinegar, he’s gonna fire at every US tin-hat he can see.”

That night, Mary goes to Gore’s party with **Rose** and the other maids, now in evening dresses. Gore’s guests include his ranking officers and Sovereign Coal owner **George Waddill**. As Mary watches, they drink and dance to phonograph music. They drift away, leaving Mary and Gore alone.

“We have some old business,” Gore says. “I haven’t forgotten...”

The story is told in flashback: How Gore visited Mary’s homestead just after Bonner’s death. A young tax assessor, Gore informs Mary her house and land are not on the county maps.

“You’re squatting,” he says. “But you can’t lay a claim to this place until I register the land.”

He makes a deal: He’ll allow Mary to stay and farm. He’ll fix her title in ten years. In return, Mary allows Gore’s sexual advances. (End flashback.)

Now, ten years have passed. Mary holds Gore to his pledge to give her the title. He makes her submit another time. Weeping, Mary returns to her room where Nick sleeps. She takes a hot bath.

Col. Ford brings Todd and Kenner to the courthouse to meet with Gore and Sovereign’s Waddill. Gore drives the negotiation into the ground. It becomes an argument.

“There’s only one thing I want from you,” Gore yells at Kenner. “You and your murderous band leave Logan County for good!”

Kenner appeals directly to Waddill, which infuriates Gore. Despite Ford’s protest, the sheriff orders the arrests of the union men, calling Kenner a “damned radical.”

“I wasn’t born a *radical!*” shouts Kenner, in a passionate account of Gore’s longtime offenses. “...Who *made* me a radical, Sheriff Gore? You did!”

As Kenner and Todd are hauled away to jail, Ford angrily confronts Gore.

“Stick around, Colonel!” Gore sneers. “Watch me hang all these reds for treason!”

Gore leaves. Ford growls to his aide: “Get me to a goddamned telephone.”

On the mountain, the battle scenes: Periods of quiet, broken by bullets screaming back and forth across the valley. Gibbs commands the Sovereign gang. Lowcoal is half-crazy with vexation: The miners are getting the worst of it, most of their rifles not as powerful as those across the gap.

In Logan, Todd cowers in a muddy cell, “hiding” from Gaujot who fires bullets in the stone wall. Gaujot then leaves, telling Todd he’s free to go. The door is left open. Todd creeps forward.

Mary appears with her white-haired boy, Nick. She takes Todd outside and sends him off with her son, telling Nick to get them both home safe. From the shadows, Gaujot and Mouseface watch them slip off into the dark.

In the pre-dawn, Gibbs walks up the hillside. Sad and lovelorn, he crawls into Carla's empty tent. She appears, telling him to "make room." They kiss.

"Todd wants us to give up our guns, just walk away from it," Carla informs him.

"He may be right," says Gibbs. His desire to fight is gone.

Carla wants to return to Mary's homestead. Leading their group, now including Bartolo and Simms, they move off into the woods. While they are in the valley, the battle breaks out again. Swarms of bullets chirp overhead. Weirdly, though, Carla and the miners are not in danger. They walk through an oddly pastoral "no man's land" between the warring left and right, pieces of bark and branches raining harmlessly down around them. They walk in the eye of the storm, between the fighting forces overhead, on either side.

Leaving the woodland battle far behind, they emerge into a familiar field, to the hilltop chapel ruin where Sid and Bonner are buried. Leaving the others, Gibbs and Carla walk to Mary's homestead. Here, they find the smiling white-haired Nick — and the torture-shattered Todd.

Todd recovers in Mary's kitchen, accepting the situation: Alone, ee and Gibbs decide to return and talk the "miners army" into standing down. Carla re-enters. Holding her at gunpoint are Mouseface and Gaujot. She and the Bryants are their hostages.

Tying Gibbs to a chair, Gaujot gets his revenge on Gibbs, prying open his hands and slicing his palms "so you'll never make a fist again." Ominously, Gaujot then takes Carla to the barn, leaving Mouseface guarding Todd and the suffering Gibbs.

Carla fights Gaujot in the barn. Hearing her scream, Nick emerges from hiding and blows his coveted, ever-present warning whistle as he escapes into the woods. Todd clubs the distracted Mouseface with Mary's iron skillet. Together the Bryants strangle him, but not before Mouseface fires a shot through the cabin wall.

Gibbs hears Gaujot's footfall on the porch. Todd is too terrified to move. Gaujot's rifle barrel slides through the new bullet hole. Suddenly, Mouseface's covered corpse convulses. Gaujot's rifle swings toward it and takes aim. Holding the skillet, Gibbs listens—his father's "listen to the mine" lesson returns. He hears Gaujot breathing. When it stops for the shot, the miner brings the skillet down on the rifle barrel, denting it just as Gaujot fires. The damaged gun backfires, sending shards of gunbolt and wooden stock into the deputy's bullish neck. The bloodied giant flees into the woods.

Stumbling through the forest, Gaujot finds an old trail. He lies down beside it, peeking over the edge of a steep pit. Two patrols arrive from opposite directions. The leaders wave to each other, shake hands, ordering a "ten-minute break!" Lowcoal, Ben, Simms and Bartolo are in the back of one group.

Getting settled, one leader thinks to ask the other for a password. Simultaneously, they speak opposing words. The dying Gaujot watches the sudden, crazy battle: No clear sides. Gunfire in all directions. Undistinguishable from each other, enemies and friends fall together.

During the battle, Gaujot hears a guttural humming from down in the pit, at his feet. Coming up from the sinkhole, he sees a pale face. In his delirium, Gaujot sees a white-haired spectre, reaching up and grabbing his leg. It is Nick, trying to pull the captain into the safety of his secret cave but, to the dying Gaujot, the boy appears as death's angel. Screaming, the policeman rises from the hole, bloodied and terrifying. Men fire on him from all sides. The giant falls, head down into Nick's cave. The last thing Gaujot sees: The boy's candles, lined up on an underground rock shelf.

Scrambling up, Nick watches the last combatants flee, then runs home.

Lowcoal, Ben, and Simms follow Nick to Mary's place, carrying the body of Bartolo. The Sovereign miners bury the bodies and clean up Carla's home. The next day, the miners go, Todd in

the lead. Gibbs and Carla will wait for Mary another day, with Nick. (It is two days before the US Army deadline.)

Gibbs sleeps in Mary's bed, his bandaged hands hanging high from the bedpost. Carla comes to him, dressed in a cotton shift. She kisses him. When Gibbs moves to free his hands, Carla tells him no, stay still, and leads their quiet love-making. Nick sleeps warmly in a blanket on the porch.

Gen. Mitchell and Col. Ford walk through an encampment of 1,200 men. Ford gets on a train, Gen. Mitchell wishing him "good luck with your plan."

Carla and Gibbs cross the abandoned battlefield. Nick jumps in and out of trenches, collecting brass cartridges. Across the valley, Logan kids happily do the same. The US invasion is tomorrow.

Col. Ford steps off the train in Logan. He meets two federal men. At the hotel, they find Sheriff Gore, drunk. Mary watches as the US marshals charge Gore with breaking US liquor laws. She holds the title to her land, which Gore has finally given her.

At Blair, a series of hurried departures. Ordered from the state, Todd will "go jobbing" with Simms. Asked what he will do, Gibbs says his hands might heal enough for him to "drive a truck or something." The other men board trucks and trains, bound for different points.

"Sometimes, it's important for you to act like you're whupped – even when you ain't," says Lowcoal. "They still need us. We'll come back and fight another day."

Carla and Tildy sit together in the mercantile's courtyard garden they'd weeded and planted. Tildy will care for Nick "until Mary turns up." Carla says she'll miss the garden.

"I figure the company will just tear it up when they get back," Tildy says. "They'll ruin all our work, tell everyone what 'awful' things we did."

Carla puts her arm around her aunt's shoulder.

"No, Aunt Tildy," she says. "They won't say anything about us — or any of this — at all."

Carla and Gibbs set out on the open road. They join scores of others, a river of people, soon branching off — left and right north and south — then splitting again. The strikers take a hundred divergent paths into the American landscape.

Later: A squadron of biplane bombers passes over the workers' abandoned camp at Blair. A single shell falls. It hits the beautiful covered bridge, which goes up in flames, igniting some remaining tents. Flying to the mountain, the planes bomb the empty battlefield. The woods go up in flames. It's an open, dead landscape, as cratered and sterile as the moon.

As rain falls, US Army soldiers slog into Blair, largely abandoned now. The troops find no enemy, only poor refugees.

For days afterward, the rain comes and floods both the miners' camp and the hilltop battlefield. The water sweeps all evidence — all memory — of the miners and their fight into the overflowing river.

#### FINAL NOTE:

Special grand juries handed down hundreds of indictments in connection with the 1921 "Blair Mountain War," including 325 for murder and 24 for treason. There were a handful of convictions.

Signed in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) granted U.S. workers the right to organize unions and bargain collectively across the country. In 1935, the state banned the practice of county sheriffs deputizing private company guards.

Today, coal-mining companies want to blast away Blair Mountain for the coal lying beneath it. Environmental groups are fighting the practice, "mountain-top removal," which disfigures the remarkable mountain landscape beyond recognition.