

Petrified Man, a Short Adapted Scenario by R. J. Cardullo
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CONTACT: *Email:* robertjcardullo@gmail.com

SOURCE: “Petrified Man” (1939), a short story by Eudora Welty.

GENRE: comic grotesque; women’s narrative; male satire.

SYNOPSIS: The story is set in a small town in Mississippi in 1941. Mrs. Fletcher is a regular customer of a local beauty salon, where a hairdresser named Leota tends to her and makes conversation. Leota is the friend of a woman named Mrs. Pike, who has recently moved to town from New Orleans; Mrs. Pike and her husband rent a room in Leota’s home. Mrs. Pike is a very observant woman, and, based on only one sighting, she deduces that Mrs. Fletcher is pregnant. When Leota reveals this information to Mrs. Fletcher at the beauty parlor, Mrs. Fletcher grows anxious and angry, not least because Billy Boy, Mrs. Pike’s rambunctious three-year-old son, is running loose in the salon (to which he has been exiled from the local millinery shop, where his mother works). Mrs. Fletcher has not even told her beta-male husband about the pregnancy and fears that gossip about her condition will now spread. Moreover, she harbors serious doubts about being a parent, and even seems to have contemplated aborting the pregnancy—in part because its onset, rather than the last perm she had, appears to be making her hair fall out.

To get away from the subject of pregnancy, Leota brings up a traveling “freak show” that lately has arrived in town and set up shop in the vacant building next to the beauty parlor, and which Leota and Mrs. Pike have visited. Together with a group of pygmies and a pair of deceased Siamese twins (preserved in a bottle), one of the exhibits was a “petrified man,” an almost completely paralyzed individual whose digestion turned food to stone. Another performer in the show was a fortune teller-cum-mind-reader, named Lady Evangeline, whom Leota consulted on the subject of boyfriends and husbands. In her discussion with Mrs. Fletcher, Leota also mentions her own husband, Fred, who is unemployed, cares very little about money, and hangs around with Mr. Pike. Leota has unsuccessfully tried to persuade the listless Fred (of whom she says she is sick) to go to the city of Vicksburg to look for work.

The following week, Mrs. Fletcher returns to the hair salon for her next appointment. She is still anxious and uncertain regarding the matter of her pregnancy. Leota is also perturbed, but for a different reason. She explains to Mrs. Fletcher that, a few days ago, Mrs. Pike was reading a magazine about true crimes; the magazine—which belongs to Leota—contained a “wanted” article about an at-large serial rapist. Mrs. Pike recognized the criminal as Mr. Petrie, a former neighbor of hers in New Orleans; she then realized that the “petrified man” was Mr. Petrie in disguise. Mrs. Pike reported him to the police in order to get the \$500 reward. With this money, the Pikes plan on vacating their rented room and leaving town. Leota is furious with herself that she did not match the magazine photo to the “petrified man” and collect the reward money herself. Billy Boy now misbehaves again, and this time Leota paddles him with a hairbrush. As he escapes the beauty parlor, Billy Boy (the only male to make a physical appearance in the script, and an

“unpetrified” one at that) gets in the last word about Leota and Mrs. Fletcher’s gossiping, vanity, and pettiness—the pretentiousness yet banality of so much that the two women say.

LOGLINE: In a Mississippi beauty parlor in 1941, a beautician and her customer gossip about husbands, boarders, babies, and the exhibits of a traveling freak show—one of which turns out to be worth some money.

PITCH: Good old girls, a beauty salon, and one bad boy—or *Steel Magnolias* without bathos.

CHARACTERS:

LEOTA, BEAUTICIAN

MRS. FLETCHER

THELMA, BEAUTICIAN

BILLY BOY (PIKE), 3 years old

ANONYMOUS CUSTOMER (FEMALE)

GROUP OF CURIOUS LADIES (5)

OLD HORSE FACE (FEMALE)

MUSICAL SELECTIONS from:

Ashland Craft, “Good Ol’ Girls” (2019): **title sequence.**

Ruth Etting, “Things Might Have Been So Different” (1935): **radio.**

Helen Morgan, “I Was Taken by Storm” (1935): **radio.**

Kay Thompson, “Don’t Mention Love to Me” (1935): **radio.**

Greta Keller, “These Foolish Things” (1936): **radio.**

Hildegard (Loretta Sell), “For Sentimental Reasons” (1936): **radio.**

Jane Froman, “Please Believe Me” (1936): **radio.**

Dixie Lee Crosby, “Until the Real Thing Comes Along” (1936): **radio.**

Helen Ward, “All My Life” (1936): **radio.**

Mildred Bailey, “If You Should Ever Leave” (1937): **radio.**

Alice Faye, “That Old Feeling” (1937): **radio.**

Gertrude Nelson, “Where Are You” (1937): **radio.**

Frances Langford, “Please Be Kind” (1938): **radio.**

Adelaide Hall, “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love” (1938): **radio.**

Maxine Sullivan, “Moments Like This” (1938): **radio.**

Connie Boswell, “You’ve Got Me Crying Again” (1939): **radio.**

Ginny Sims, “I Gotta Right to Sing The Blues” (1939): **radio.**

Lee Wiley, “But Not for Me” (1939): **radio.**

Dinah Shore, “Careless” (1939): **radio.**

Bebe Daniels, “Imagination” (1940): **radio.**

Una Mae Carlisle, “If I Had You” (1940): **radio.**

Fred Murphy & the Blue River Boys, “You’ll Always Be My Blue-Eyed Darling” (1951): **final credits.**