

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

by
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Based on the lives of Ernest and Lydie Marland

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Escape Artists
10202 W. Washington Blvd.
Astaire Bldg., 3rd Fl.
Culver City, CA 90232

OVER A BLACK SCREEN.

VOICE OF GERALD FORD

*America is still one of the
youngest nations in recorded
history.*

INT. MARRIOTT, WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT (1976)

SCENES around the hotel at night. LAUNDRY WOMEN toss bunched white sheets into industrial washing machines. A JANITOR mops the marble floor of the lobby. A BELLBOY hits the glass of a vending machine in the break room: his bag of potato chips is stuck mid-fall.

VOICE OF GERALD FORD

*Long before our forefathers came to
these shores, men and women had
been struggling on this planet to
forge a better life for themselves
and their families.*

INT. MARRIOTT, WASHINGTON D.C., LAFAYETTE SUITE - CONTINUOUS

A COCKTAIL PARTY is winding down. Piano jazz and black-tie POLITICOS saying their goodbyes. The tasteful catering in the room has a patriotic theme. A TELEVISION plays, inaudible, in the background. It's DAN RATHER interviewing a TALKING HEAD in anticipation of a big speech.

VOICE OF GERALD FORD

*In man's long, upward march from
savagery and slavery, one peak
stands highest in the ranges of
human history. That is the United
States of America.*

A MAID (70s) enters the suite. Quietly, with the practiced invisibility of hotel workers. A MAN IN BLACK TIE at the door, the party's host, says something to her that's inaudible underneath the party sounds, and points her toward the bathroom. She pushes her cart there.

At the suite's bathroom: a POLITICAL WIFE, drunker than is prudent at these things, balances herself on the door-frame. She looks the MAID in the face and walks away toward her husband, who is waiting with her FUR COAT.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The MAID enters the bathroom. Champagne glasses on the sink. Vomit fills the toilet to the lid, and is all over the floor.

As she surveys the room, we get a better look at the MAID. Severely wrinkled and missing most of her front teeth. Gray hair, large drooping eyes. She's in bad shape.

VOICE OF GERALD FORD
*I am proud of America, and I am
proud to be an American. Life will
be a little better here for my
children than for me.*

Now, while Ford's voice plays: The MAID uses a plunger to unclog the toilet. Now she's on her hands and knees scrubbing the vomit from the floor. Using a toilet brush vigorously. Tossing a broken glass in a plastic bag. Two used condoms into the bag. Squirting disinfectant. Aerosol de-odorizer. Washing her sponge and brushes in the bathtub. Scrubbing the bathtub.

INT. MARRIOTT, WASHINGTON D.C., LAFAYETTE SUITE - TEN MINUTES LATER

Guests gone, the Maid is cleaning up the room.

She removes dirty plates from on top of the television and, in the foreground, we see the source of the voice we've been hearing. It's: *PRESIDENT GERALD FORD, giving the 1976 American Bicentennial State of the Union address to Congress, on CBS.*

GERALD FORD (ON T.V.)
*We have not remade paradise on
Earth. We know perfection will not
be found here. But think for a
minute how far we have come in 200
years. It has happened here in
America. It has happened to you and
to m--*

The sound of the MAID's vacuum drowns out the voice of the President.

CUT TO BLACK.

Presentation credits.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The MAID is waiting for an elevator. Trashbags from the pre-speech party hang off her cart.

Washington, D.C. Winter, 1976.

The MAID's reflection parts in the middle of the metallic doors as an elevator arrives. Inside it is a MAN in his 70s, carrying a briefcase.

Maid steps forward, realizes the elevator is occupied, and steps back (that is, "I'll get the next one.")

But she glances up and her eyes meet those of the Man. A moment. He stares at her. He's seeing a ghost.

The doors start to close. He steps forward.

MAN
Excuse me --

The doors have closed. The silver elevator now reflects the Maid's image back to her again and she looks at herself. Paralyzed.

She turns and hurries down the hall with her cart. Going anywhere that is away from the elevator. Fast. Then, a loud voice behind her.

MAN (O.S.)
WAIT. Excuse me!

He's coming through the FIRE-STAIRS DOOR. She turns a corner. His FOOTSTEPS, urgent. He's close behind. She takes her master key from a ring on her apron. Opens the door to a SUPPLY CLOSET. Goes inside.

INT. SUPPLY CLOSET - NIGHT

Locks the door. It's dark in here. Stacks of white towels, small shampoo bottles, soap. The Maid is catching her breath.

RAP. She's startled by a firm knocking on the closet door.

MAN (O.S.)
Hello? Hello.

She's trying not to breathe. More knocking.

MAN (O.S.)
(quieter)
Can you open the door?

Then the knocking stops. He's gone away?

No. A note, scrawled on a piece of Mariott paper, slips under the door. The Maid looks down at it.

It says: **IS YOUR NAME LYDIE?**

Now she's shaking. She lowers herself to the ground, in the darkness.

Hold there.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
Hey! S'your name Lydie? HEY!

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
IS YOUR NAME LYDIE ROBERTS?

A TRAIN CONDUCTOR with a handlebar moustache is speaking to a lump of clothing in the shape of a girl. The lump has pulled her clothes over her head and is holding on to the seat. She doesn't answer.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
SPEAK UP!

Still doesn't answer. The Train Conductor pulls her forward, yanks her dress down. Looks at a tag that has been pinned to her dress, identifying her: LYDIE ROBERTS. DEST: MR. ERNEST MARLAND. ARCADE HTL. PONCA CITY, OKLA TERR.

This is LYDIE, age 5. A small girl. Beautiful, though her seriousness would keep you from calling her cute. She's dirty and wears a dress that looks like she's worn it every day for a month, or six.

She holds a FEATURELESS DOLL (home-sewn, a blank face) tight to her chest.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
Time to get off. Let's go!

He pulls her firmly. She doesn't relent.

He grabs her by the waist forcibly to pick her up. Hard enough to bruise her. She struggles and, realizing he's stronger, she BITES him.

He recovers and SLAPS her in the face.

She stares down at the ground, stoically. A purple hand-shaped mark across her cheek.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM, OKLAHOMA - MORNING

Super: Cherokee Outlet, Oklahoma Indian Territory. 1906.

A train station, no more than a platform in the middle of the plains. A couple of hastily constructed buildings and some roads leading away.

Train Conductor pushes Lydie forward. A Coach Driver, 40s, is chewing tobacco.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
(to a Coach Driver)
Goddamn animal! Little bitch bit
me!

Shows his marked arm. Conductor raises a hand to Lydie. She doesn't flinch.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
(to Coach Driver)
Will you drop her in town?

Coach Driver nods. Lydie, holding a suitcase and her DOLL.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR
That gets infected, I'm gonna track
you down and do for you, girl. I'll
do for you!

The Coach Driver manages Lydie toward his waiting horse-drawn coach, where two other PASSENGERS are waiting.

EXT. ROAD TO PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie sits in a horse-drawn coach with the other passengers, who look at her.

She looks over the side. Plains and prairie. Cottonwood and elm trees. And construction. Men building fences.

A hand-painted billboard of a cowboy in a rodeo, advertising: MILLER BROS 101 RANCH REAL WILD WEST SHOW!

A couple of PONCA INDIANS on horses. They are dressed in a hybrid of native and European clothing: loincloths over trousers, holding black London-style umbrellas over their heads.

Now, we're entering town. It's the set of a John Ford Western. Ponca City, Oklahoma Territory. The only twentieth-century flourish is the line of telegraph poles down Main Street.

The coach pulls over at a two-story building with a widow's walk and the sign ARCADE.

INT. ARCADE HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

A steamer trunk is heaved onto a pile. The sweaty HOTEL MANAGER, 40s, is trying to organize dozens of pieces of luggage as he speaks to the Coach Driver.

HOTEL MANAGER

(as he piles bags)

Well I don't know why because I sent the tellie myself. The aunt's upstairs but she's bed-ridden with pneumonia or some goddamn thing, and the uncle's away. We told them don't send her.

(then, a thought)

Her uncle's working out in the Red Beds, three hours' ride. There's a 3:30 from the Cross if you're quick.

Coach Driver pushes Lydie forward and hurries out. Hotel Manager goes back to the luggage.

We linger on the stairs of the hotel. A woman in a shawl, 30s, is watching the scene. We will later recognize her as VIRGINIA MARLAND.

EXT. OIL FIELD - DUSK

A coach arrives at a work-site carrying a dozen LABORERS. The men are dusty and leather-skinned, would make Dorothea Lange portraits look like glamor photos.

EXT. OIL FIELD - DUSK

The field foreman, SPOT BENNETT, 27, is counting out the number of workers needed as they come off a coach.

BENNETT

Three, four, five ...

(to a Young Hand, who is
maybe 14)

Hold. You done rig before?

YOUNG HAND

Two seasons in Tunk Field, sir.

He nods and waves the Young Worker on.

BENNETT

Six, seven ...

Bennett looks onto the coach, and noticing the small girl behind the couple of remaining workers.

He climbs into the wagon, looks at the note and envelope pinned to her dress.

EXT. OIL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The noise of an OIL DERRICK. It's deafening. Details of the machinery, plumbing the depths of the earth for buried treasure.

Lydie watches Bennett go to confer with a man in his 30s in a cowboy hat who is dangling from the top of the derrick tower, blackened with grease, attending to some mechanical problem. We'll learn soon that this is ERNEST MARLAND -- not yet one of the ten richest men in America, but give him time.

The conversation, although shouted, is inaudible over the noise of the well and plays out in pantomime. Bennett hands Ernest the envelope that was pinned to Lydie.

Bennett points at Lydie, and Ernest takes a long look at her. Then he orders Bennett toward her.

Bennett returns to Lydie, takes her hand, leads her toward an ENCAMPMENT OF TENTS.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - DUSK

The whistle that signifies the end of the work day. Men descend from the wells, jumping one after another. It's a kind of ballet, dark figures descending from towers as far as the eye can see.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - EVENING

Ernest splashes water on his face, pulls off his torn shirt, washes himself. He's muscular, a dark tan, three days' beard.

BENNETT (O.S.)
D'int say a word all day.

Ernest dries his face with a rag.

ERNEST
She's terrified.
(taking the envelope from
his pocket; to Bennett)
Her mother didn't even tell her
where she was going. Packed her off
in Pittsburgh while she slept.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

The flap of the tent opens and Ernest enters, holding a lantern in one hand and a single pear flower in the other.

He looks at the cot where Lydie should be. It's empty.

He scans the room. An untouched dinner tray. A moth fluttering around a lamp. She's gone.

But now he sees something move very slightly.

It's Lydie. Sitting on the floor, next to an apple crate. She is covered to her head with a blanket, looking down and almost imperceptibly rocking back and forth. Her Featureless Doll's head sticks out along with hers.

Ernest pulls up an apple crate and sits in front of her. She doesn't look up.

ERNEST

I don't know how to talk to
children so I'm just gonna talk how
I talk. I'm Ernie Marland. I'm your
uncle.

He offers her the pear flower. She still doesn't look up. He withdraws it. Ernest speaks quickly, unsentimentally.

ERNEST

(then, quietly)

What we're looking at's this. Your
mother loves you a great deal but
she can no longer afford to take
care of you. Your aunt and I can't
have children but we *can* afford to.
So your mother's decided to
terminate her parental rights and
send you to live with us.

Lydie looks at the ground.

ERNEST

Now, I know you and I aren't blood
kin and this looks like a bad hand.
You'll have a mind to run away and
I don't blame you. I want to run
away from home myself half the
time.

Still nothing. She's stone.

ERNEST

Point is, we're very happy to have
you here and we're going to love
you like you're ours.

He offers his hand, but she doesn't move. Now Ernest notices the dinner tray on the table she's crouching near. There is a fork and spoon, which are untouched. Next to them, a knife.

In the glow from the lanterns, he can see there's BLOOD on the knife that has rubbed onto a white napkin CLOTH. But the meat on the plate is uncut.

Ernest looks at Lydie. He goes forward and pulls the blanket off her.

Lydie's arms are red with blood. SHE HAS CUT HER ARMS in two dozen places and she is bleeding.

ERNEST

Oh my God. Oh my God oh my God.

CUT TO:

LATER. By candlelight.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Rhoades has brought up six of her own, she'd take good care of her --

ERNEST

(end of discussion)

She'll stay here.

Ernest looks back at Lydie, who is asleep and bandaged. She is holding her Featureless Doll, which is stained with her blood.

ERNEST

She doesn't leave my sight 'til she's healed.

Doctor hesitates, opens his mouth to speak. But Ernest is holding the entrance flap of the tent open. The Doctor shrugs, leaves.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Ernest is sleeping on a crate next to Lydie's cot. He is leaned over onto the cot so that his arms enfold her protectively. Lydie is lying awake.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - DAWN

The sun casts the long shadows of the derricks on the fields.

Ernest takes Lydie's hand and walks her to the encampment near the derricks. She is wearing a MAN'S SHIRT tailored with scissors, long sleeves to cover her bandages.

Ernest sits her on an apple box and puts two thick books in her hands: Audobon's Birds of America, volumes one and two.

EXT. OIL FIELD - MORNING

Men in line, being served breakfast by a COOK.

Nearby, on her apple box, now outfitted with a makeshift sun-shelter around it, is Lydie. She looks at the men.

The Cook is heaping potatoes on the Rigger's plate.

RIGGER
(looking past the Cook, at
Lydie)
Girl's the goddamn Grim Reaper. Sat
starin' at us all yesterd'y too.
Don't talk, don't smile.

The person behind them, who has overheard them, is ERNEST.

ERNEST
(holding out two plates to
be served)
Seems to me most people's smiles
are a lot of horseshit, don't you
think?

The Cook dishes out food to Ernest.

RIGGER
Course, Mr. Marland. Yes, sir.

He smiles at Ernest, then decides he shouldn't smile. Then turns away.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

Ernest puts down a plate for himself and one for Lydie. He's brought her to a table to eat with him and Bennett. He looks over Lydie's shoulder: two MEN ON HORSEBACK are approaching.

The Men on Horseback are Indians. Chief White Eagle, 60s, dressed in a cowboy hat and a European-style coat, is attended by WILLIE CRIES-FOR-WAR (known as Willie Cries), 25, his translator.

The Indians look at the rigs as they approach.

Ernest and Bennett stand. The Indians dismount.

ERNEST
Good morning. Offer you some
breakfast?

White Eagle and Willie Cries look at the potatoes and oozing stew on their plates. Cries shakes his head and Ernest gestures for them to sit.

ERNEST
(gesturing at her)
My niece, Lydie.

White Eagle and Willie Cries look at her.

WILLIE CRIES

(to Ernest)

Chief White Eagle regrets that he comes today to revoke his hospitality.

ERNEST

(thrown)

Did you get my letter? I asked if he could just be patient --

White Eagle speaks to Willie Cries in PONCA, their tribal dialect, and Cries translates.

WILLIE CRIES

This Chief feels he's been more than patient. He reminds Mr. Marland that you are standing on land that is sacred to the tribe.

Cries talks back to White Eagle, who in turn speaks fervently in Ponca; Cries relays to Ernest. Lydie stares at the Indians.

WILLIE CRIES

This Chief told you that drilling here was making bad medicine. You told this Chief there would be profits for him. He must not remind Mr. Marland that there is no rock oil and there are no profits.

ERNEST

Well, not yet, but we're--

White Eagle is speaking passionately.

WILLIE CRIES

This Chief says the reason there's no oil is that the earth doesn't want the rivers underground disturbed. He informs Mr. Marland that he is ending the lease now.

ERNEST

(under his breath)

Oh Jesus Christ --

He stands, then regains composure, sits.

ERNEST

Tell him that we've come upon an anticline, which always means crude beneath. Almost always, 90 percent guaranteed.

(MORE)

ERNEST (cont'd)
 Now, that's not a hunch, that's
 science.
 (to the Chief, miming a 45-
 degree angle)
 Rocks. Pffffwwwwww!

That is, a child's approximation of a spurt of oil. Bennett
 raises his eyebrows. Chief remains unmoved.

ERNEST
 (turning to Willie Cries,
 desperate, quiet)
 Willie. My friend. Every penny I
 have is sunk into this. We can work
 the rigs through the night, 24
 hours, I just need another month, I
 promise --

Cries turns and translates this for the Chief, but the Chief
 isn't listening. The Chief is staring into the eyes of Lydie.
 She is staring straight back at him. The Chief says something
 in Ponca.

Then, unexpectedly, the Chief leans over the table and
touches Lydie's face. Lydie stares back.

Cries looks at White Eagle, surprised, and responds in Ponca.
 White Eagle speaks back, then indicates for Cries to
 translate.

WILLIE CRIES
 This Chief says he will extend your
 option for two weeks. But it's not
 for you he does this. It's for your
 niece.

Ernest takes a breath, smiles at the Chief.

ERNEST
 Thank you, sir. Thank you.

Now White Eagle stands and walks a few yards away. Willie
 Cries nods to Ernest and Bennett, and walks after him. When
 they've gone:

BENNETT
 90 percent guaranteed?

ERNEST
 Wha'd you want me to tell him? That
 we were going after a mouse in a
 haystack with a harpoon?

CUT TO:

A short distance away, White Eagle is kneeling in the soil. Lowers his head to the ground. Willie Cries watches, and Ernest comes alongside him.

WILLIE CRIES
(by way of apology for the
spectacle)
He's asking the earth for
forgiveness.
(a beat)
He's a foolish old man. He doesn't
see yet that all the old things are
already dead.

White Eagle puts dirt on his face.

ERNEST
Why did he change his mind for my
niece?

WILLIE CRIES
Just some nonsense.

White Eagle's actions are creating a scene among the MEN. A few of the Field Workers, making their way toward their stations, point and watch, some laughing.

WILLIE CRIES
Our tribe aren't from this place,
Mr. Marland. We were evicted from
home and marched here by soldiers
forty years ago.

White Eagle on his knees, intoning to himself.

WILLIE CRIES
This Chief says the Ponca are
ghosts because we're always
searching for home, but now we'll
never find it. Not in this world.

Chief bows down again, hiding his face.

WILLIE CRIES
When he looked at your niece, he
said he could see she was a ghost
like us.

Ernest looks over at Lydie.

WILLIE CRIES
I told you. Just some nonsense.

Cries nods to Ernest and goes to the Chief.

A beat. Then Ernest approaches Lydie, takes her by the hand, and leads her back toward her apple box in the field.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

A gramophone is playing a song -- "I'm Tying the Leaves So They Don't Come Down." A dog is barking at the phonograph.

We move past a poker game in progress...

FIELDHAND

You'll raise shit, y'ain't got shit left to bet with!

And to the derricks, illuminated by kerosene lamps. Ernest is there, alone. He's working through the night.

In the lower framework of the tower, a DRUNK MAN sleeps. It's so loud here, it's a wonder he can.

One of the Field Workers stokes a cooking fire a few meters away.

Suddenly, an unfamiliar SCREECH from the well. ON Ernest -- paralyzed for a moment.

The cooking fire FLARES up ten feet in the air. GAS. Which precedes oil deposits.

The man sleeping in the tower is jolted awake.

EXT. CAMP NEAR THE OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

Lydie is in a cot, sleeping under the stars.

A high-pitched whistle then piercing SCREAMS can be heard from the direction of the wells, startling Lydie awake.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

The screams are screams of joy. Ernest's face is already painted black by the spray.

ERNEST

LAMPS! LAMPS! LAMPS!

Two BUCKET BOYS are pouring water on the kerosene lamps which are flaring up dangerously with the release of gas.

Now the scene is lit only by moonlight. The SCREECH continues, deafening. A couple of the men turn and turn and turn a pipe with a giant wrench.

In a moment, the well is SPURTING OIL from the top.

A sleeping giant is awake. The oil GUSHES down to the dry ground in thick rivers.

The wind picks up the spray so that a thin black mist spreads over the entire camp, now awake and celebrating.

Faces painted by oil. Fire and primal howls. A pagan rite.

Ernest closes his eyes and lets himself get drenched.

The DOG, also turning black, doesn't know whether to bark at the still-spinning gramophone or at the more colossal event nearby.

And now LYDIE appears next to Ernest. He doesn't notice her.

She takes his hand.

He looks down at her. Then picks her up and lifts her to the sky, getting her as soaked in oil as he is.

He swings her around fast, dizzy... until she SHRIEKS. It's the first sound she's made in the film and, for the first time, she is smiling.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - DAY (A WEEK LATER)

Ernest is now cleaned up, looking respectable. Oil is gathered into pools in the ground and a derrick works in the deep background. Cars have pulled up and DISTINGUISHED OLD MEN are congratulating him. Lydie stands by his side.

ERNEST (V.O.)
My dear wife, I'm writing today
with more good news.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

ERNEST (V.O.)
The wildcat has held at 5,000
barrels and the surveyors say it's
a sure gusher.

Ernest writes by candlelight. The camera moves past him and the following MONTAGE happens during Ernest's letter:

EXT. ARCADE HOTEL - DAY

A 1906 Ford Model N stops in front of the hotel. Out step Ernest and Lydie.

ERNEST (V.O.)
Lydie is improving every day. She
turned 6 last week, making her the
same age as the century.

Waiting at the door is VIRGINIA MARLAND, 32, pale and pretty. She shakes Lydie's hand, and Lydie hands her field flowers.

ERNEST (V.O.)
She calls me Father now, soon
she'll call you Mother.

INT. ARCADE HOTEL - DAY

A GOVERNESS takes off Lydie's dress.

Lydie is in a bathtub, having her hair washed. The bathtub water turns black with dirt and oil.

Lydie appears at the door of the DINING ROOM of the hotel. Scrubbed, dressed, hair combed and neat.

INT. PONCA CITY HALL - DAY

A hand slides papers across a table and we pan up to Ernest, Virginia, and Lydie, standing between them.

They are signing adoption papers.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Lydie is sitting at a desk that has been set up in a field. With her TUTOR, a woman in her 50s.

ERNEST (V.O.)
One of the fieldhands calls
Oklahoma the Garden of Eden,
because the only history here is
the memory of us who live here now.

TUTOR
Je prends.

LYDIE
Je prends.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

C.U. of a FLASH POLE. It ignites, flashes, and smokes. A PHOTOGRAPHER pulls the flash cartridge out and installs another.

ERNEST (V.O.)
Maybe that's true. Maybe you and I
can start over here. Maybe we can
be happy again.

The reverse: Ernest, Virginia, and Lydie Marland stare at the camera, posing in a family portrait. Another flash.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - DAY

The black-and-white portrait is now in the hand of Virginia, who places it on a mantel-piece.

ERNEST (O.S.)
I'm taking Lydie outside.

Virginia turns and we follow her gaze to a room full of NEW FURNITURE, which is being unwrapped by MOVING MEN. Ernest is carrying two TENNIS RACKETS and a ball.

VIRGINIA
We still have all of upstairs.

ERNEST
(he kisses Virginia)
We have a tennis court now. She has
to learn to play.
(to Lydie)
Come.

HOLD on Virginia, watching the two of them go.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, TENNIS COURT - AFTERNOON

ERNEST
Knees bent like before. Right,
left. Right, left.

Ernest serves the ball, gently. Lydie misses it.

ERNEST
That's all right. Now, again.

He serves and she misses again.

ERNEST
Get behind the ball. Don't be
scared of it.

Ernest serves. Again, gently.

This time Lydie HITS the ball, and the following is a continuous shot: Lydie returns the serve, as above; the camera follows the ball back over the net to Ernest, who hits it back to her gently; Lydie returns the serve, and again we follow the ball over the net to Ernest who hits it back; and when we arrive back on the other side of the net, Lydie hits the ball much harder. Lydie is now 22 years old.

It's 15 years later. Lydie is much better at the game, and so is Ernest, who is in his mid forties.

If anything, Ernest is more handsome. He has that brand of rugged good looks that only appear at 40.

They're playing vigorously.

Lydie hits a deep back-hand to the left corner and Ernest can't get there in time. He exclaims. She's won. Ernest walks toward her, shaking his head.

ERNEST

Only because of my elbow.

LYDIE

Your elbow always suddenly hurts
when you lose.

Super: 1922

They go toward the house: a mansion with formal gardens behind. And now we get our first good look at the adult LYDIE. She's carelessly beautiful. The childhood wariness in her eyes is gone, or at least hidden, and she moves with confidence and certainty.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - AFTERNOON

Virginia, also 15 years older, is supervising the last activities of food preparation.

VIRGINIA

(looking off-screen to
Lydie and Ernest)

I sent Margaret to call you half an hour ago.

Lydie and Ernest enter.

LYDIE

He's 0 for 3 now.

Lydie comes up behind Virginia and puts her arms around her neck, stealing one of the hors d'oeuvres.

VIRGINIA

You're soaked! Go and get cleaned up. They're arriving.

ERNEST

The only guests who arrive on time are bankers and bores. They can wait.

Virginia shakes her head, then looks into the dining room, where one of the servants, MARGARET, in her 60s, is laying out silver.

VIRGINIA

Oh what is she doing? She's using
the wrong set... Margaret!

Virginia goes off to scold Margaret. Meanwhile, Ernest is leaning down looking at some cannisters of seltzer water that the servants are preparing for the bar.

ERNEST

Lydie, come look at this...

She comes to see what he's doing and Ernest lifts up a pressurized cannister and SQUIRTS it at Lydie's face, soaking her. She screams out.

He keeps squirting until the cannister runs out of seltzer, Lydie, dripping wet, goes for another cannister. Presses the top and retaliates, chasing Ernest out of the room in a stream of water.

The SERVANTS look at each other and suppress smiles.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - LATER THAT EVENING

Red, white, and blue decorations around the formal gardens. It's a Fourth of July party in full swing. A BAND plays jazz.

Ernest and Lydie, drinks in hand, are raising their glasses in a toast with PEARCE, 70s.

ERNEST

I'm afraid in Ponca City we do not
recognize the state of Prohibition.
We do recognize the state of
Inebriation.

Bennett approaches, overhearing.

BENNETT

(mock-pious)

Decadence don't belong in the
wholesome heartland. I call it un-
American.

ERNEST

(to Pearce)

I believe you know Spot Bennett, my
right-hand man.

Bennett shakes Pearce's hand.

ERNEST
 (to Bennett)
 And since when is decadence un-American?

Pearce, Barclay's of London: a Noel-Coward English accent.

PEARCE
 Decadence is *quintessentially* American! America is the only country that went from barbarism to decadence without civilization in-between! ...

Pearce engages Bennett, and Ernest and Lydie see an opportunity to sneak away. They walk arm-in-arm, through the crowd.

ERNEST
 I'll give him that the 'barbarism' bit was clever.

LYDIE
 But not his. He stole that from Oscar Wilde.

ERNEST
 And how is it that my innocent flower has been exposed to Oscar Wilde?

LYDIE
 (casually, cheerfully)
 I chewed through the restraints and made a break for the library. By the time they noticed the empty cage, I'd been through all of Wilde and half of Lawrence.

ERNEST
 I was warned: "Don't send her to college. She'll return more intelligent than you and completely ruined."

A man is waving at Ernest from a few feet away.

ERNEST
 (under his breath)
 If it isn't the vice president of the Bank of New York. Big smiles.

LYDIE
 (cheerfully)
 On your own.

She lets go of his arm, smirks.

ERNEST
Wicked girl.
(to an OLD MAN, as Lydie leaves and he approaches)
Cotty! Welcome!

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - EVENING

A large red firework explodes.

EXT. PARTY, NEAR THE POOL - NIGHT

The orchestra is now playing a riff on the Star-Spangled Banner in the background.

A couple of the YOUNG MEN are manning the fireworks cannons, gin glasses in hand.

A few are having a swimming race, fully clothed. Two others do handstands on the side of the pool, and fall into the water from there. The Jazz Age, Fitzgerald's Lost Generation losing themselves.

Angle on BEN WILCOX, 26, handsome. And at the moment, more or less drunk. He sees Lydie from a few feet away, gets his balance, and plants himself next to her. She hasn't yet seen him.

WILCOX
(whispers)
Can you talk to me?

LYDIE
(turning)
Sorry?

WILCOX
(conspiratorially)
I have a problem. I am drunk and my new boss is watching and I need to appear normal. So can you pretend to be riveted by my conversation?

Lydie turns casually and sees that Ernest is watching her and Wilcox. She checks in with Ernest with her eyes, then back to Wilcox.

LYDIE
But I'm not good at pretending.
You'll have to tell me something riveting about yourself if you want to rivet me.

Now she stands in front of him and lets him talk. He's drunk, but not incoherent. After a moment ...

WILCOX

When I was in France during the War, there were these birds whose song was exactly the same pitch as the sound of an incoming rocket. I was so terrified of those birds that I used to shoot them out of the trees. Even after we'd won the War, when there were no more rockets, I'd shoot the bastards anyway because, as far as I was concerned, guilty by association.

LYDIE

(kind of riveted,
actually)

Not bad.

WILCOX

Thank you. My name is Ben, by the way. Wilcox.

LYDIE

I'm Lydie.

WILCOX

Your turn, I'm-Lydie. Confess something. Rivet me.

She looks toward where Ernest is going into the house. Ernest gestures with his head for Lydie to follow.

LYDIE

But look. Your boss is going inside. I think you're safe now.
(shaking his hand)
Thank you for the pretend conversation.

WILCOX

You're pretend-welcome.

She smiles and starts to leave.

WILCOX

I didn't catch your last name, I'm-Lydie.

LYDIE

I didn't say it.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, THE GRAND ROOM - NIGHT

Lydie walks into the Grand Room, a ballroom of sorts, where Ernest is standing off to the side. She's intercepted by MRS. MARSDEN, 40s, wife of a local grandee.

MRS. MARSDEN
Where's your mother got to? We're
sending a search party!

LYDIE
She wasn't feeling well, she's gone
to bed. I'll tell her you were
asking for her?

Ernest has now approached Lydie, smiling his apology to Mrs. Marsden as he takes Lydie away.

ERNEST
Do you know any unspeakably
beautiful women who'd be willing to
dance with me?

LYDIE
I can't think of any, so I'll have
to do.

Ernest holds out his hand and Lydie takes it. They go to the floor and dance.

ANGLE on Wilcox watching. The couple is graceful and radiant.

Wilcox walks over to PRONER, 20s, a Marland Oil employee.

WILCOX
Who is that girl with Marland?

Proner, drunk, puts his arm around Wilcox.

PRONER
That, amigo, is the sole heir to
the fortune. They keep her fenced
in like the unicorn in the
tapestry.

On Lydie and Ernest.

PRONER (O.S.)
Her Majesty, Miss Lydie Marland.
Princess of the Prairie.

This news sobers Wilcox up fast. He watches Lydie and Ernest dance, now trying to recall his conversation with the boss's daughter.

CUT TO:

The dance-floor from the stairs. Virginia Marland, a shawl pulled over her party dress, watches Ernest and Lydie together.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION -- 3 A.M.

The party has wound down. A few stragglers help each other to their cars.

INT. ERNEST AND VIRGINIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lydie, still in her party clothes, enters Virginia's bedroom. Empty bottles of pills, Virginia half-asleep in bed. Margaret sits next to the bed.

LYDIE
(whispers)
Get some sleep, Margaret.
(looking at the empty
bottle)
All of these?

Margaret nods and goes.

Virginia opens her eyes and sees that Lydie has replaced Margaret. She touches Lydie's face.

VIRGINIA
You're a good girl. You're a good
girl, right? You're good. You're
good.

EXT. OUTSIDE PONCA CITY - MORNING

Early morning over the Plains.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - EARLY MORNING

Lydie comes down the stairs. She stops in the hallway, where she sees Ernest sitting on the couch of his office. Goes to the door.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, ERNEST'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A bottle of whiskey next to him and a foggy amber glass in his hand.

LYDIE
Early for that.

Ernest looks at her, sits up a bit.

ERNEST
Not if you haven't slept.
(he holds up a milk
bottle)
(MORE)

ERNEST (cont'd)
If you mix it with this, it's a
kind of breakfast drink. Sit.

Lydie sits on the couch next to him, putting her arm around him and looking at the papers spread around.

ERNEST
Napoleon spent another night on
Elba. Your mother wanted to be
alone.

LYDIE
You look like you've seen every sad
thing twice. Is business so bad?

ERNEST
Business has never been better.
Tonkawa came in at 8,000. Almost
too good, act of God or the devil.
(then, as much to himself
as to Lydie)
When your mother gets into her
states, we can't hold it against
her. It's my fault, you know. She
was never ill before we married.

LYDIE
How is it your fault?

He offers her the milk-and-whiskey concoction, she refuses it. He takes a drink.

ERNEST
There are *things*, Lydie. That's the
thing -- that there are always
things. She was pregnant back in
Pittsburgh. I went out to work the
Cumberland, door to door asking
toothless farmers for their mineral
options. She got sick, I wasn't
there, she had a miscarriage. "With
complications."
(beat)
And the world stopped turning,
round and round.

LYDIE
What could you have done?

ERNEST
Not a thing. Not a goddamn, blessed
thing. But I should have been
there.
(a long moment)
And now it's time to start the day.

He gets up, kisses Lydie on the forehead, leaves.

EXT. PRAIRIE - VARIOUS ANGLES

New grass. Birds. A couple of clouds in a blue sky.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - DAY

Lydie enters smiling, carrying two white flowers.

Margaret is in the hallway.

LYDIE

Look, trout lily. That means
winter's broken.

When she looks at Margaret's face, her expression changes.
Pre-lap the sound of screaming.

INT. ERNEST AND VIRGINIA'S BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Virginia is in her bed, suffering the painful very last
stages of stomach cancer.

Lydie enters to find: Ernest kneeling at Virginia's bed. A
doctor, ABRAHAM SOPHIAN, attending to her.

Virginia sees Lydie appear at the door.

VIRGINIA

I don't want her in here! Get her
out!

Lydie stops at the door.

VIRGINIA

I never wanted her! She brought it
into this house!

Ernest turns and shakes his head at Lydie ("Pay her no
mind"), who goes pale.

ERNEST

(back to Virginia)

Shhhh. We're here, my love. We're
here.

VIRGINIA

(through her teeth)

You didn't love me. You never loved
me.

SOPHIAN

(whispers across the bed,
to Ernest)

[It's] morphine, Mr. Marland.

Ernest moves close to put his arms around her.

VIRGINIA
Don't you touch me! You get out! I
know!

Sophian puts more morphine into the drip.

VIRGINIA
(to Ernest)
I know you! I KNOW.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lydie collects herself outside the door to Virginia's room.

VIRGINIA (O.S.)
(from the other room)
I know! I know.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

Ernest and Lydie stand at the front of a crowd of mourners as a preacher reads a Biblical verse.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

The mourners are breaking up. Lydie puts her arm around her father and they walk away from the grave.

ERNEST
Ride with me.

EXT. THE PLAINS - AFTERNOON

A silver Bentley drives down a road in the middle of the plains. Suddenly it turns off road, toward a swell in the landscape, kicking up dust.

It's an odd sight to see this bejewelled car baja-ing in the dirt, as if Merchant and Ivory took a wrong turn into a western.

EXT. NEAR HILLTOP GROVE - AFTERNOON

The Bentley is parked at the bottom of the hill. Ernest and Lydie walk up a slant of trees on the hillside, their mourning clothes getting dirty.

ERNEST (V.O.)
This is the first place I ever took
your mother when she came here.

EXT. HILLTOP GROVE - AFTERNOON

In the grove, among the trees, are wooden scaffolds. There
are human-sized sacks on the scaffolds.

ERNEST
It's a Ponca cemetery. The Ponca
don't bury their dead.

POV: Hanging between some of the trees, in the branches, in
platforms built between them, are more human-sized sacks.

ERNEST
The white men say it's because of
the coyotes. The Ponca tell you
it's so the dead can be seen by the
Great Mysteries. So it's easy for
their souls to find their way back
to the sky.

If he were the type to cry, he would. Ernest leans back so
that he's lying on the ground, looking up to the Ponca dead.

Lydie lies on the ground next to him. A wind blows and one of
the suspended Ponca dead swinging in the tree.

ERNEST
She did love you.

LYDIE
I know.

We look down on them on the ground from above.

INT. ERNEST'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Ernest, his sleeves rolled, has stacks of papers spread in
front of him.

On his desk is a picture of VIRGINIA. He moves the picture to
where he can see it better, looks at it for a moment, then
continues to read.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - MORNING

The Marland Oil board having a meeting around a table in an
elaborately carved wooden room. The door opens fast and
Ernest enters.

The Board men look up. Bennett, bewildered.

BENNETT

We weren't expecting you in today.

Ernest looks exhausted. He's still wearing the shirt from last night. Hasn't slept, but he's all business. He drops a stack of papers on the table, takes his seat at its head.

ERNEST

When Sudik came in, up blackjack country, we didn't make an offer. Tell me why's that.

BOSKIRK, an executive in his late thirties, speaks up.

BOSKIRK

We knew Standard wanted it, sir. No chance in hell of outbidding them.

ERNEST

That's what we thought. That's what they wanted us to think.

Ernest reaches into his briefcase and produces a stack of documents.

ERNEST

Last night I had a look at the Standard lease from public records. Came across something of interest. (holding up the stack) The dates.

He drops the stack on the table.

ERNEST

According to this, Standard Oil took twenty-one days to make their deal with Old Lady Sudik. Those boys they sent sat starin' at their shoes from breakfast to bed three weeks before they had go-ahead from New York on their numbers. This tells me something.

The board is quiet.

ERNEST

This tells me those suits can't piss in a puddle without approval from Rockefeller two thousand miles away. We could've been in Old Lady Sudik's kitchen with a cherry pie and an offer before they could even ask directions to her farm. (beat)

We kissed off 10,000 barrels a day. We were lazy.

Pierce, 60s, speaks up.

PIERCE
It was just one well, Ernest.

ERNEST
Just one well.

The Board is quiet. Ernest stands.

ERNEST
It was just one glint at Sutter's
Mill, started the California Gold
Rush. Stand up.

The Board members look at each other.

ERNEST
Stand up. STAND. Out of your seats,
up!

The men awkwardly stand.

ERNEST
It starts now. Now on, we're not
gonna sit blueballed waiting for
some boardroom back east to decide
what bones we can pick over. We're
not in the Old States any more.
We're Oklahoma men. Our state is 40
years younger than the Standard Oil
Company, and we're hungrier. I mean
for us to start acting like it.

CUT TO:

We're beginning a MONTAGE. ERNEST and BENNETT stand in a
field with a map, pointing to a field next to an OLD FARMER.
A goat strains on a rope to reach them.

ERNEST (O.S.)
We see good dirt, we move in for
the kill, we do it *fast*.

CUT TO:

BACK WHERE WE LEFT OFF IN THE BOARD ROOM.

ERNEST
Standard's size is their advantage,
but it's also their liability.

Ernest is now walking around the room. The men, even the
graybeards, are getting excited.

Pre-lap the sound of drilling.

CUT TO:

LOOKING DOWN INTO A WELL: A DRILL BIT hits slate and there is a whistle of gas. The screen turns black. OIL.

INSIDE A PIPE looking at a circle of light. OIL fills the pipeline and darkens the circle.

CUT TO:

BACK WHERE WE LEFT OFF IN THE BOARD ROOM.

ERNEST

Takes an elephant a long time to turn around. By then, the mouse already has the peanut.

Pre-lap the sound of a TRAIN WHISTLE.

CUT TO:

OIL SPURTS out of the pipeline into a storage container.

TRAINYARD: DETAIL of a hand dipping a brush in red paint. Painting the new red MARLAND OILS TRIANGLE LOGO.

A FIELD OF OIL DERRICKS as far as the eye can see -- Christmas Tree wells, conical assemblies of pipes and valves.

TRAINYARD AGAIN: A wide shot reveals that the Painter has already painted the red MARLAND OILS LOGO on a dozen other tanker cars.

The sound of flashbulbs, and we begin to hear a big-band version of the song "I Guess I'll Have To Change My Plans," which continues throughout this MONTAGE:

EXT. OMAHA, NEBRASKA - DAY

A ceremony in front of a sign that features the red Marland triangle.

ERNEST

On behalf of the board and employees, I declare the 400th Marland Oils station... open!

ON THE DAIS. Ernest and Lydie cut the ribbon with giant oversized scissors. Flashes. Applause.

A 12-piece BAND is playing the song we've been hearing.

EXT. PONCA CITY - DAY

Ernest and Lydie cut another ribbon in front of the large Marland Oil Headquarters, a stucco ten-storey building.

Next to them is WILLIE CRIES-FOR-WAR, now dressed in an expensive suit. Flashes.

EXT. KANSAS - DAY

Ernest and Lydie cut another ribbon. Flashes. Applause. Ernest kisses Lydie on the cheek. A NEWSREEL CAMERA films them.

CUT TO:

ERNEST

Lemme tell you something about "experts." "Experts" said four years ago that only a gopher's got good reason for digging a hole in Texas. So tell Dry Hole Charlie I said damn right we're going ahead...

Ernest is speaking to the Press. Ten or twelve Reporters and Photographers, after the event. He is arm in arm with Lydie.

Two REPORTERS watch from within the press hordes.

REPORTER 1

(eye on Lydie)

She sticks close by him.

REPORTER 2

(sotto)

Do you blame her? Every eligible woman in America wants to be her step-mother. Not to mention half the *ineligible* ones.

REPORTER 1

(looking down at his pad)

How many zeroes are in a hundred million?

INT. TRAIN, MARLAND'S PRIVATE COACH - LATER

Mahogany and leather. Gold-trim. Large M's carved into the wainscoting.

Ernest and Lydie are still dressed in their clothes from the Kansas station opening. They are finishing a bottle of wine. Sitting opposite each other, feet up on the seats.

They are laughing. It's that time of night and stage of drinking where everything is hilarious.

ERNEST

What about Mrs. Allen? Did you meet her?

LYDIE

The Emily Dickinson of Wichita. But she only writes Bible poetry.

(imitating Mrs. Allen's thick Wichita accent)

All I need to know, dear, is "God" rhymes with "good" and "evil" rhymes with "devil."

ERNEST

I'll go you ten-to-one she's making bathtub gin between revival meetings.

The laughter abates. A moment of eye contact between them.

ERNEST

Sleep.

He kisses her on the cheek. Gets up and goes to his cabin.

ON Lydie. Her face is reflected in the window, over the dark plains passing by.

EXT. PONCA CITY - DAY

Thriving now. The money from the Ponca wells is spreading. Cars everywhere. New Art Deco-inspired buildings. No longer the Wild West, but a 1920s boom city.

The conspicuous exception to the prosperity is a PONCA INDIAN who sits on the sidewalk, talking to himself. A couple of WHITE OKLAHOMANS walk by, paying no notice.

EXT. PONCA CITY MAIN STREET - DAY

Lydie leaves a shop and walks down another street with packages.

WILCOX (O.S.)

S'cuse me.

She turns.

WILCOX

You won't remember me. We met about year ago. More than that.

LYDIE
 The pretend-conversation.
 (offering her hand)
 Mr. Wilcox.

WILCOX
 (shaking her hand)
 Miss Marland.

LYDIE
 You've learned my last name.

CUT TO:

A moment later. They are walking.

WILCOX
 I can't say it's a hoot and a holler, exactly. I crunch numbers, write checks. Keep up the royalties on the Newkirk and Tonkawa lines, wherever those are.

LYDIE
 You haven't been out to the Red Bed?

Shakes his head.

LYDIE
 Then the fields are just a piece of paper to you. You should go there.

Lydie's 1927 Mercedes-Benz 36 has now pulled up alongside them. Her Driver gets out and holds the door for her.

LYDIE
 I have to exercise the horses tomorrow, the Red Bed's as good a way as any. Do you ride?

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

From overhead. Lydie and Wilcox are riding horses westward.

LYDIE (O.S.)
 The first thing my father made me do when I arrived was learn the names of the flowers and the birds.

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

They have stopped near a stream where the horses are drinking.

LYDIE
In English and in Latin.

Lydie and Wilcox are sitting on the ground drinking from canteens. In a field of yellow flowers. She stretches out a garland of flowers she's tied together. Judging its length.

LYDIE
Maybe a few more.
(he hands her more)
He used to march me out as a girl
to test me on what I'd learned. I
hated him for it, but now I'm
grateful.

WILCOX
(birdsong nearby)
What's the name of that, then? That
bird that's singing.

LYDIE
I'm being tested now?

WILCOX
Absolutely.

LYDIE
(she'll play along)
Sturnella neglecta. The western
meadowlark. I don't see her,
though.
(scanning, then pointing)
There.

She whistles to the bird.

LYDIE
They look the same as the eastern
kind, but they have a completely
different song. They're like
people. You can tell where they're
from by their accent.

Wilcox makes a sound, trying to imitate Lydie's whistle. He
can't do it.

LYDIE
You are from Boston, you'll never
survive out here. Lips like this.
Look at me.

She does it, he imitates; fails again. She whistles again, he
emits a screech that alarms the horses.

LYDIE (O.S.)
Why here?

EXT. A LOW RISE IN THE PLAINS - DAY

They are riding again. Lydie's horse (CYRUS) is not necessarily happy that he is wearing the garland of yellow flowers.

WILCOX

Why what?

LYDIE

Why choose here after the War? Why not seek your fortune in Chicago or New York?

WILCOX

Space.

Lydie looks at him.

WILCOX

I decided that if I ever made it out of Argonne Forest alive, I was coming to the wide open West. No more living in foxholes or trenches or graves. Just empty space. A place where you can breathe.

They've now come to the crest of the rise in the ground and are at a promontory. Spread out before them, the Ponca field.

It's no longer a back-woods camp of a few oil derricks but a sprawling city of rigs, rails, towers, and men. Beyond the field, the vast expanse of the Great Plains.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION -- AFTERNOON

It's raining. From a distance, we watch Lydie and Wilcox descend from their horses. A GROOM takes the horses away.

Lydie extends her hand to shake Wilcox's in saying goodbye. He responds by kissing her on the lips. A moment. Then:

WILCOX

Tomorrow?

LYDIE

Tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, ERNEST'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ernest has been watching the scene from his window.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - A MOMENT LATER

Lydie hurries inside, wet. Ernest comes to the door of his office.

ERNEST

Good day?

She looks up, surprised. Smiles.

LYDIE

Until the rain. Cyrus hates getting wet.

She comes to him, kisses Ernest on the cheek, heads upstairs.

LYDIE

(re: her soaked jacket)
It came on so suddenly.

ON Ernest, standing at the door.

EXT. PONCA CITY - MORNING

A sunny day. Cloudless skies.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - MORNING

Wilcox is bouncing a tennis ball up and down on his racket. He is wearing tennis clothes. Walking through the gardens toward the house.

Before he arrives at the house... ERNEST intercepts him and says something we can't hear. They turn and begin to walk away from the house, talking.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Lydie comes down the stairs wearing tennis clothes and carrying a tennis racket. She looks at a clock.

LYDIE

Has anyone been by?

MARGARET

No, miss.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

Lydie is still in her tennis clothes, sitting slumped in a chair.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie, smartly dressed, approaches ALICE, 30s, the secretary at the main reception desk.

LYDIE
Is Mr. Wilcox in, Alice?

ALICE
Mr. Wilcox has been transferred to
Los Angeles, the Seal Beach field.
Happened yesterday.

Lydie is at a loss. Turns. As she leaves, Alice calls to her.

ALICE
Would you like to leave a message?

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE, PONCA CITY - DAY

Outside the more or less respectable boarding house where Wilcox has been living, he is loading up a 1927 Ford truck with boxes and suitcases.

Lydie appears next to him. He looks at her, then continues packing things.

WILCOX
(not looking at her)
He said if I saw you again, I would never work in the oil business. He can ruin anyone he chooses. It's not my fault.

He is cold, emotionless, keeps doing what he's doing. She walks away. When she's a few feet from him--

WILCOX (O.S.)
Tell him I wasn't after your money.

She turns back. He's looking at her.

WILCOX
Tell him when I met you I didn't even know who you were.

He goes back to packing. Lydie thinks for a moment, then leaves.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, HALLWAY - EVENING

Lydie opens the front door and slams it, the sound echoing in the marble hallway. Ernest comes to the door to the library. They look at each other. Then she storms up the stairs.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, GRAND ROOM - NIGHT

Lydie is crouching in front of the fireplace. She hears a door open, doesn't look up. Footsteps.

Ernest crouches next to her, also looking at the fire. After a moment --

ERNEST

(quietly)

In our position, we have to question people's motivations. We can't have these jackals biting at our heels.

LYDIE

(not looking at him)

You think everyone is a jackal because you are.

ERNEST

(after a beat)

I would have held my tongue and given him the keys to the kingdom--

She turns and looks him in the face.

ERNEST

If I thought you could ever fall in love with him.

He gets up to leave the room and she turns to the fire again.

ERNEST

(before leaving)

He didn't protest. His first thought was protecting his career, not protecting you. That's when I knew he wasn't worth the dirt beneath your feet.

He leaves. Lydie keeps looking into the fire.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - AFTERNOON

Ernest's car and driver pull up in front of the house.

CHAUFFEUR

Are we waiting for Miss Marland, sir?

ERNEST

I don't think she'll be joining us tonight.

He starts to get in the car, then looks up at the front door.

It is LYDIE. She is dressed impeccably, descends the stairs, and gets in the car behind Ernest.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

The car pulls away. They sit on opposite sides, not speaking.

INT. JAMES HOUSE - A FEW HOURS LATER

The dessert course of a well-appointed dinner party. A few empty bottles of wine. Spirited, ebullient, and sparring conversation.

Ernest and Lydie sit at a table with WYNN JAMES, 60s, and his wife ARLENE; JESSE, 40s, and his wife LILLIAN; POTTER, 40s; and SHAW, avuncular, 70s.

WYNN

But why should the Indians work?
They've got everything they need.
If you teach them to want things,
then they'll work.

JESSE

We've introduced enough diseases to
the Indians, thank you very much,
we don't need to give them
capitalism as well...

Laughter and here-he-goes-again groans.

SHAW

(passing the dessert)
For which there is no known cure.

Lydie, sitting staring at her glass. Ernest stares at her staring.

POTTER

(he's been drinking)

But surely we owe them. And not
just the Indians for that matter.
Those of us who have, owe. Ernest,
for example...

(over groans)

No, let me finish. Ernest has a
business, a very *successful*
business, in which he has worked
hard. But his wealth comes out of
the earth. He didn't *make* the oil.
He has a claim on the land, but
essentially he is taking something
that -- you could argue -- like
air, belongs to everybody. So,
therefore, does he owe me anything?

JESSE

Well certainly not you in particular.

WYNN

What he owes everyone is to be prosperous. When business is prosperous, people work, people eat.

WYNN

That's the way to lift people up. Not Red October and blood in the snow... That's how business works. Those are the rules.

POTTER

Oh, that's just the robber barons' old stand-by --

ERNEST

Someone *invented* the rules.

Ernest hasn't spoken all night, so when he does, the room goes quiet.

ERNEST

When you challenge the rules of the game, then all outcomes are possible. That's what Oklahoma is - new rules. In the beginning, all the world was Oklahoma.

A beat.

POTTER

May I suggest that we continue this over something more potent than wine?

Ernest and the men get up to go into the drawing room. Lydie starts to follow. But the hostess intercepts her.

MRS. JAMES

Miss Marland? The smoking room is for the gentlemen.

Lydie locks eyes with Mrs. James leads her, arm in arm, away from the drawing room toward the parlor. Where the ladies are retiring for tea and cake.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, FOYER - LATER THAT NIGHT

The front door opens in the dead-silent foyer.

Ernest and Lydie enter, she starts to go up the stairs. Before she goes:

ERNEST

I know you had a miserable time.
But thank you for coming.

She finally looks him in the eye.

LYDIE

What I can't figure out is how you
could do what you did to me and
still have me not hate you.

She walks up to Ernest and SLAPS him on the face. Then hits
him again. Hard. Again and again. Finally, he takes her arms
to stop her from striking him.

The way he holds her is more than a position of restraint.

In black silhouette, in front of the lit stairway, he holds
her and they lean into each other, forehead to forehead.

ERNEST

(whispers)

When I saw him kissing you, I
nearly killed him.

They stand like that for another beat, breathing hard.

Ernest loosens his grip and leaves.

INT. POOL - LATE NIGHT

Underwater. The sound of Ernest's breathing.

In the indoor pool, Ernest is naked in the pool, swimming
hard, doing laps. The pool is lit by moonlight through the
windows and the lamps that line its perimeter.

Ernest's swimming and breathing become more and more labored,
and finally he grabs hold of the side of the pool. Pulls
himself out, onto the ceramic tile floor.

He lies on the cold tiles in the kerosene glow, thinking.

Pan up to reveal that: LYDIE, in her nightgown and bathrobe,
has been watching him from the window that looks over the
swimming pool.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE - DAY

A BOY opens a cage where a RED FOX WITH A SILVER TAIL is
cowering. The FOX springs out of the cage and bounds out
toward some undergrowth.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE - DAY

A pack of hounds come over a hill, followed in close pursuit by a dozen RIDERS on horses in a mix of earth-tone and scarlet hunting coats. Riding hats. It looks more like an English estate than western Oklahoma. Among them is the English M.F.H., Master of Fox Hunt.

M.F.H.

(galloping to Ernest)

They lost her scent, sir. We should cover ground in cross-lines.

ERNEST

(also on horseback)

I'll circle the rise. Lydie, you go toward the pond.

Lydie turns Cyrus and gallops away. She jumps the horse over a log into a hollow of low bushes and trees, slows him down to scan the bushes. Something moves.

It is the SILVER-TAILED FOX.

The fox looks at Lydie and Lydie looks at the fox. A long moment.

She opens her mouth to alert the others. But she hesitates.

The fox shows no fear. She holds Lydie's gaze, long and intense. Lydie can't move, doesn't want to. Then the fox darts into the bushes.

CUT TO:

A MOMENT LATER.

Lydie comes up the hill on her horse. Ernest, Bennett, and the MFH at the crest.

ERNEST

Any sign of her?

LYDIE

No sign.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE, PICNIC GROUNDS - DAY

An elaborate lunch for the hunting party, attended by servants, laid out on picnic tables. Lydie sits at one table, Ernest at another.

DAVIS, 26, is arguing with his girlfriend GEORGIANE, 22.

DAVIS

Not at all. What I said was that
there are predators in the wild
anyway.

GEORGIANE

And what I said was, *For instance?*
What predators eat foxes? Foxes
don't even live here. I'm glad you
didn't catch her. Good for her.

As Georgiane speaks, Lydie gets up and walks into the woods,
her exit barely noticed.

Ernest, at his table, spots Lydie going into the woods.

ERNEST

S'cuse me.

He follows her at some distance behind.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE, FIELD - CONTINUOUS

His POV: Lydie stands in the tall grass, thinking. Perhaps
she's hoping to see the fox again.

Her right hand is on her hip and she's silhouetted in the
setting sun over the hunting grounds. The sight of her figure
in riding clothes in that pink light is breathtaking.

Ernest approaches her, through the grass. She doesn't see or
hear him coming. He touches her on the shoulder, startling
her. She turns around.

Then, very suddenly, Ernest grabs and kisses Lydie on the
lips. It's a long and deep kiss. She puts her arms around
him, kisses him back.

BENNETT (O.S.)

(from a distance)

Ernest?! We're doing the toast!
Where have you got to?

The kiss is broken. They look at each other, both in a kind
of disbelief. Ernest goes back the way he came.

Lydie touches her mouth. He's kissed her so hard her lip is
bleeding.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE, ENTRANCE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Lydie rides off the game reserve and down the street.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - EVENING

Ernest enters. A young BUTLER -- CLAY BATES, 20s -- takes his hunting coat.

ERNEST
Is Lydie back?

CLAY
No, sir.

Ernest starts to walk away. He stops, turns back.

ERNEST
Who the hell are you?

CLAY
I'm Clay, sir. The new under-butler. You hired me Tuesday.

ERNEST
Right, good. Welcome. If my daughter comes in, let me know.

CLAY
Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

Ernest goes up the stairs.

EXT. PONCA CEMETERY - EVENING

Lydie sits, her arms around her knees, at the foot of one of the trees that hold the dead. In the moonlight, she can see the Plains stretching out in front of her.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

Lydie arrives back at the house. A porter takes her horse.

INT. LYDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She enters her bedroom, removes her riding boots. Takes off her jacket. When she turns, she notices:

Taped to her mirror is a piece of paper on which is written: a very large ?

Lydie takes down the paper, sits on her bed. Her finger traces the curve of the question mark. Again and again, as if it were someone's body, the curve of someone's back.

INT. MARLAND OIL, BOARD ROOM - AFTERNOON

BOSKIRK

Now if you look at the map, it's plain as anything that Humble got around the 4800 by incorporating the old claims as Indian charter.

A SECRETARY approaches Ernest quietly with a white envelope with his name on it.

SECRETARY

(whispers)

I was told it was urgent, sir.

Boskirk keeps talking as Ernest opens the envelope. Inside is a piece of paper.

He unfolds it. Written on it is a very large !

BOSKIRK (O.S.)

Ernest?

Ernest is smiling. Boskirk hands him an annotated map but Ernest doesn't respond. He gets up and leaves the room.

General confusion. Before the board members have even had a chance to react, the Secretary pokes her head into the room.

SECRETARY

Mr. Marland says the meeting's adjourned.

We begin to hear Bach on piano, the aria from the Goldberg Variations...

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Lydie is playing the piano alone.

Ernest, still wearing his clothes from the board meeting, comes to the door of the room where she's playing.

He stands watching her. She doesn't notice him for a long time. Then she looks up, stops, mid musical phrase.

He has taken the folded paper with the ! out of his pocket and is holding it up toward her. They stare at each other.

INT. ERNEST'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

He closes his door, pushes her up against it.

ERNEST

We can't.

LYDIE

I know.

Ernest kisses her and they cling to each other. It's almost brutal, the release of years of pent-up energy and longing.

He steps back, away from her. Shaking his head. But Lydie steps toward him. Now she is the aggressor, kisses him.

She holds his shirt collar hard and it rips. Slowly, he gives in. He undoes her dress, exposing her breast.

He looks at it for a long time. Lydie takes his hand and puts it on her breast. He leans into her and puts his mouth on it.

Jump-cuts and time cuts. It feels like time repeating, fracturing; slowed-down, accelerated.

Now they're naked. Ernest enters her. She cries out. She has never done this before. Then she takes a breath and lets him continue. She looks in his eyes. She is happy.

INT. ERNEST'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Lydie is lying awake, in Ernest's arms. She untwines herself, gets out of bed. She stands for a moment looking at his body, naked and muscular, asleep. She moves her hand over his leg, keeping it half an inch above his skin, not touching.

INT. HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Lydie, having put on some of her clothes, closes the door gently.

She turns from the door and is startled. Margaret, with her gray hair and penetrating eyes, is standing watching her. She looks at Lydie, Lydie at her.

LYDIE

(as casual as possible)

Good morning, Margaret.

Lydie goes past her, enters her own room, and closes the door.

ON Margaret. Pre-lap the sound of applause.

EXT. POLO FIELDS - DAY

A well-dressed CROWD watches a ceremony preceding a polo match.

WILL ROGERS

But 'fore any of that, we would like to thank Mr. E.W. Marland for sponsoring today's event. Round of applause, please.

Applause. On a stage constructed at the end of the field: The POLO PLAYERS, wearing distinguished uniforms. Ernest and Lydie, dressed in fine clothes. WILL ROGERS, 50s, in his trademark cowboy hat, at the microphone, speaking.

WILL ROGERS

Course, the papers say he owns ten percent of the oil in the world, so the S.O.B. can afford it!

(laughter)

Ernie Marland removed the cushions of his couch last week and found a million dollars down there!

(laughter; then,

scratching his head)

"Now, I wondered where that went!"

More laughter.

EXT. POLO FIELD - DAY (AN HOUR LATER)

Close to the ground, we watch a polo ball fly across the dirt and a thunderous stampede of sinew and hoof follow in pursuit.

EXT. POLO CLUB STANDS - DAY

Ernest sits between Lydie and Bennett. They are watching the match from the VIP area.

BENNETT

(leaning in to whisper to Ernest)

You're being stared at.

Ernest casually looks across the stands. His POV: a BLOND WOMAN in her early 40s is staring at Ernest.

BENNETT (O.S.)

Janice Young. Oklahoma's most eligible widow.

ERNEST

(out loud)

It's no use. Lydie is the only girl in my life. Aren't you dear?

Lydie smiles. Ernest's hand is secretly rubbing her thigh.

EXT. RECEPTION, AFTER THE POLO MATCH - DAY

Lydie and Ernest are holding hands, speaking with a couple of the Polo Players. Lydie is radiant and laughing.

Mrs. Marsden, whom we last saw at the Fourth of July party, is watching them.

MRS. MARSDEN

Something's changed. Don't you think she's different?

MRS. JAMES

She's always so different from everyone else in the world that it's hard to say when she's different from herself.

INT. POLO CLUB STABLES - LATER

Lydie is pressed up against the wall of one of the horse stalls.

Ernest is inside her. His hand is over her mouth. The polite conversation of the polo match crowd outside, audible.

He climaxes.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, ERNEST'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margaret is making Ernest's bed. She knocks a cuff-link off his night table; it clinks on the floor; she bends to pick it up.

Reaching under the bed, she sees a white mass underneath, and reaches in to retrieve it. Crumpled in a ball are white sheets that have on them a prominent red stain, like a Japanese flag.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, ERNEST'S OFFICE - DAY

CLAY

Margaret has quit, sir. She left this morning.

Ernest, sitting at his desk opening mail. He looks up on hearing this.

ERNEST

After twenty years, she quit without telling me?

CLAY

She asked me to give you this.

Clay hands Ernest an envelope and turns to leave.

Ernest opens the envelope. Inside is a black-and-white photo of Margaret with Virginia Marland.

Ernest looks at Margaret's envelope. Then turns toward the window, thinking. It's starting to rain.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - AFTERNOON

In the rain, Ernest leaves the house with a suitcase. His Chauffeur takes it from him and holds open the door.

ERNEST (V.O.)
Dear Lydie, When you read this I
will be on my way to Lubbock. I've
been asked to have a look at the
Desdemona field and decided to do
it now.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Ernest stares out the window, the reflection of the Plains superimposed over his face.

ERNEST (V.O.)
I feel these past weeks like God
has split me apart with a railroad
axe and pulled out my heart with
His hand. So I think the time has
come that we must make decisions.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - LATER

Lydie is let in, out of the rain, by Clay. Carrying a handful of packages.

ERNEST (V.O.)
I wanted to give you time to be
alone. To think. To give you the
chance to leave, if that's what you
want.

She sees an envelope sitting on the table near the stairway. It says LYDIE.

ERNEST (V.O.)
If you choose to go to New York or
Chicago or Paris, you will be given
everything you could ever want for
a life there.

She picks up the envelope, opens it.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, GARDENS - AFTERNOON

ERNEST (V.O.)
I'll be back in a month's time. If
you've gone when I return, I'll
love you forever as my daughter.

Lydie walks out to the lawn, in the rain with the letter.

ERNEST (V.O.)
If you are here, then we must set
about making the impossible
possible.

She finishes reading the letter and stands in the garden,
soaking wet, as the rain pours down.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, PONCA CITY - MORNING

No longer just a platform in the middle of the Plain, but a
proper station.

Ernest descends from his private carriage and scans the
crowd. People kissing, parents greeting children, porters
fussing with luggage. He scans the faces. No Lydie.

Now, a porter with a luggage cart stacked high pulls his cart
away, revealing: LYDIE. Looking at him. Waiting.

INT. CAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ernest and Lydie are in the back of the car in an embrace.
They are holding on to each other as if for dear life.

The DRIVER looks in the rear-view mirror at them. It doesn't
look sexual, exactly, but it's bizarre.

What the Driver can't see is that Lydie, her head buried in
Ernest's collarbone, slowly and gently licks his neck.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, HALLWAY - DAY

Clay, holding a platter with lemonade. Two Butlers behind
him, bringing lunch trays.

INT./EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, VERANDA - DAY

Clay emerges from a door, looks up at something, and then
puts his head down, turns discreetly, goes back through the
door. With his hand, he orders the Butlers behind him to turn
around.

Now we see what he saw: PUSH IN on Ernest, dressed in his train clothes, standing outside KISSING Lydie, the formal Versailles gardens behind them.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION, ERNEST'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ernest dresses in shorts and an athletic shirt while Clay picks up clothes behind him.

ERNEST

Clay.

(Clay looks at him)
I no longer intend to lie about the recent developments in my life, at least not in my own house. So if there is any reason you would like to be relieved of your duties, I will give you full severance pay and will not raise any objections.

CLAY

I can't think of any reason, sir.

Ernest smiles slightly and nods.

CUT on the sound of a loud crack.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION SQUASH COURT - DAY

Ernest and Bennett are playing a vigorous game of squash. Loud echoes of ball on racquet. A volley of a few hits. Now Bennett hits the ball into the side wall. Reckless.

ERNEST

Again? What's wrong with you?

Bennett catches his breath. Then, because he can't avoid it any longer:

BENNETT

(quietly)

It's dangerous. People aren't stupid. They're figuring it out. If you end it now, there's no harm.

On ERNEST.

BENNETT

You're going to destroy everything.
We've worked too hard.

Now, in a sudden burst of energy, Ernest throws his racket at the wall. It smashes and breaks.

BENNETT
You can't do what you're doing!
You're not above the rules!

ERNEST
You think I CHOSE this... ?

BENNETT
THERE ARE RULES, ERNEST --

Now, Ernest RUSHES Bennett and pins him against the wall.

ERNEST
... YOU THINK I WOKE UP AND SAID,
TODAY I'M GOING TO INVITE YOUR
SCORN AND STARES AND YOUR GODDAMNED
PITY?! YOU DON'T CHOOSE! YOU DO
NOT CHOOSE.

A moment. They look eye to eye. Ernest is going to punch him. No.

BENNETT
(quietly)
You don't choose your feelings. You
choose your actions.

Ernest lets go and smooths the shoulders where he grabbed Bennett's shirt.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION SQUASH COURTS - HOURS LATER

It's the middle of the night. Ernest is shirtless, drenched in sweat and hitting balls against the wall vigorously. Over and over again until he's ready to collapse.

He lets himself fall to the ground, catching his breath.

CUT TO:

A black screen with light poking out at the top and bottom.

LYDIE (O.S.)
This is insane. You're insane.

EXT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - DAY

It is the POV of Lydie, who is blindfolded, being led out of the house by Ernest. She reaches to remove the blindfold.

ERNEST
Don't you dare!
(helping her down)
Careful. Step.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE GAME RESERVE - DAY

Ernest drives his own Rolls down the road. He drives past construction vehicles.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE - DAY

The car drives up a temporary road and comes upon a clearing. Part of the hunting grounds have become a massive construction site.

EXT. MARLAND GAME RESERVE, CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

ERNEST

Ready.

He removes the blindfold from her eyes. She takes in the scene: woods. Dirt overturned and workmen everywhere. A MASSIVE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT is underway.

LYDIE

The game reserve.

ERNEST

No longer only the game reserve.
The future site of the single most
glorious house ever built on the
American Plains.

LYDIE

But we already have a house.

ERNEST

We have a house. What this will be
is home.

He gets down on one knee in front of her and takes a RING from his pocket.

ERNEST

(very matter-of-fact)
Saying yes will make your life
unbearable.

She looks down at him.

LYDIE

Saying no will make my life
unbearable. So I guess we're stuck.

She extends her hand for him to put the ring on. We pull out to a wide shot of them in front of the construction site.

CLERK
(pre-lap)
And also at the bottom. Perfect.

INT. PONCA CITY HALL - DAY

Ernest signs a document.

CLERK
(to Lydie)
And now you, please, Miss Marland.

Clerk indicates two places where Lydie should sign. She does.

CLERK
(stamping the papers)
We have officially annulled the
adoption of Ms. Lydie Roberts
Marland by Mr. Ernest Marland.
These are your copies.

ERNEST
(he takes the papers)
While we're here, we'd like to sort
out some other paperwork.

CLERK
(looking down at his
files)
Certainly, sir.

ERNEST
We'd like to apply for a marriage
license.

Clerk looks up, laughs. Ernest isn't joking.

ANGLE ON a headline in the New York Times in a man's hands.
E.W. MARLAND TO MARRY ADOPTED DAUGHTER; OIL MAN PLANS WEDDING
WITHIN A MONTH.* (*New York Times, Jan. 6, 1928. This, and
all headlines, are real.)

INT. STANDARD OIL COMPANY, PARK AVENUE, NY - DAY

The hands holding the paper belong to WILCOX. Hold on him.

ANGLES ON Gargoyles looking down from high stone perches.
Corbels carved with the prairie flowers of Oklahoma
supporting a Juliet-style balcony.

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

A CROWD DRESSED FOR A WEDDING, leaving their cars, entering majestic stone gates. They are seeing the now-completed mansion on the hunting grounds for the first time.

JUDGE (O.S.)

And do you, Lydie Roberts, take Ernest Marland as your husband...

As we hear the sound of the wedding vows, the guests look up and around in awe. Ernest wasn't exaggerating. It is the most glorious house ever built on the Plains. Already being called the PALACE ON THE PRAIRIE. 55 rooms. 7 man-made lakes on the property. 43,561 square feet spread over four stories, its sprawling architecture is somewhere between that of a Spanish-style hacienda and Roman villa. Every inch either custom-built or imported from a Florentine palace or Venetian villa.

JUDGE (O.S.)

... to have and to hold, in sickness and in health ...

ANGLE on the painted wooden ceiling of the Great Room, like Charles Foster Kane's Xanadu. Painted figures and scenes depict the history of Oklahoma in long narrative lines. 24 karat gold trim, hammered leaf-thin.

EXT. THE PALACE, LAWNS - DAY

And finally we settle on the Palace lawn small wedding party, two dozen guests, including BENNETT and his wife. Ernest and Lydie exchanging vows.

JUDGE

...from this day forth, for as long as you both shall live?

LYDIE

I do.

EXT. THE PALACE, FORMAL GARDENS - LATER

A small wedding reception. In formal gardens that are literally modelled on those at Versailles.

Around the reception: Lydie and Ernest are cutting a modest wedding cake. Guests -- including two society women, MRS. IVORY and MRS. BYRD -- watch. A Waiter gives them drinks.

MRS. IVORY

(quietly, to Mrs. Byrd)

All little girls think they're going to grow up to marry their daddies. She's actually done it.

POV on Lydie cutting the cake.

MRS. BYRD
They're not *blood* relatives. I
think they're romantic, in a way.

MRS. IVORY
I think they're a walking Greek
tragedy.

Applause for Lydie from the crowd gathered around her and Ernest. He kisses her.

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

MEN unload a very large WOODEN BOX from a truck.

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ernest is walking back and forth, speaking to workmen off-camera.

ERNEST
Back a bit. Back, back. Good.

EXT. THE GARDENS - DUSK

A couple of RACCOONS drink from one of the fountains in the gardens. They look up, alarmed to hear footsteps.

Lydie and Ernest are taking a walk in the garden.

ERNEST
Did you know that this end of the
garden was the old field in the
game reserve? The clearing over the
rise with the bunchgrass?

LYDIE
The place where you kissed me.

Ernest smiles, nods once. As they come over a hill.

ERNEST
I came over the hill and out of the
trees and saw you standing... right
there.
(they come out of the
shrubs)
Most perfect sight I have ever
seen.

Their POV coming out of the shrubs: in the pink light of the sun setting behind, in the exact spot where he saw Lydie in the field, now the garden -- is a MARBLE STATUE OF LYDIE with her right hand on her hip, looking off into the trees.

It's Ernest's earlier POV, during the hunting party, re-created in white Carrara marble.

ON Lydie. She looks at Ernest and then approaches the statue like it's alive, like it might move or bite. She touches its face. Turns and looks at Ernest again.

INT. ERNEST AND LYDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

They are lying in bed, naked. Ernest holds her. She's looking at the ceiling. She says the following very slowly, even sadly.

LYDIE

I don't ever want to think about
how much I love you. Because if God
read my mind and found out-- He'd
kill you to punish me.

EXT. PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie walks down the street, beginning her shopping errands. A Woman with a Child looks at Lydie and pulls her Girl closer. Lydie has a "That was odd" moment, but continues walking.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

LYDIE

(to a Clerk, cheerfully)
Writing paper, please. Usual kind.

The Clerk goes off to get it and Lydie glances down at the newspaper rack: On top, the Ponca City News, a tabloid type of paper.

The headline: SCANDAL IN PONCA CITY. "Princess of the Prairie" Marries Her Father! A photo of Lydie and Ernest beneath.

Another: Marland's Adopted Daughter Becomes His Bride. (*New York Times, July 15, 1928.)

CLERK

Here you go, Miss Marland.
(a beat)
Mrs. Marland.

INT. THE PALACE, LYDIE'S DRESSING ROOM - MORNING

Lydie is getting dressed for a semi-formal affair, looking in a mirror, trying on different hats. Ernest sits trying on hats to make her laugh.

ERNEST

So what do the good ladies talk about at the Founders' Luncheon?

LYDIE

Themselves. What's in the dessert. Raising money for an opera house in Tulsa that they are never going to build.

(re: a feathered hat on Ernest)

Oh that one suits you.

He appears behind her and puts his arms around her waist.

LYDIE

I suppose someone has to go to these things.

(re: a hat)

This one?

ERNEST

Kiss me.

(she does)

Again.

(she does)

Again.

(she does)

LYDIE

(shaking her head)

This could go on for hours.

ERNEST

That was the plan. Again.

EXT. FOUNDERS' LUNCHEON, OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

It's a garden party of society ladies -- or as close as Oklahoma City gets to society ladies in the late 20s. Well dressed women, champagne, sun-dresses, hats, and gloves.

Lydie steps up to the table at the entrance where a forty-ish woman, Mrs. Blake, is the gatekeeper.

LYDIE

(smiling)

Good morning. Lydie Marland.

Mrs. Blake scans, or pretends to scan, a list in front of her.

MRS. BLAKE
I'm afraid you're not on the list,
Mrs. Marland.

LYDIE
(cheerfully)
Surely I am. I used to be on the
committee.

MRS. BLAKE
Space was very limited this year.
I'm sorry, we just didn't have the
room.

Lydie's POV: It's a sparsely attended garden party. Lydie spots Mrs. Marsden, who makes eye contact with her for a moment. Then quickly turns away.

Lydie recovers quickly, looks back to Mrs. Blake.

LYDIE
(pleasantly)
My mistake.

She smiles. Walks away, out of the garden.

Once she's out of sight, her smile disappears. She takes off her hat. Takes a deep breath and collects herself.

INT. ERNEST AND LYDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ernest and Lydie are having sex in bed. He is close to climaxing and he suddenly stops, rolls off Lydie, next to her. As they catch their breath.

LYDIE
Why not?

He hesitates. Then--

ERNEST
Virginia got pregnant and that was
the end. Not you. Never you.

HOLD on Lydie, staring away.

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - DAY

Two IRISH WOLFHOUNDS make a fuss near Ernest's ROLLS ROYCE.

Ernest and Lydie stand in the driveway. He is packed for a business trip, and his car idles.

ERNEST

I won't go unless you promise
you'll be all right.

LYDIE

I will pout and brood and be
inconsolable for two weeks. But,
yes, I will be all right.

(he kisses her)

Be safe.

(to Bennett)

You too, Spot! And make sure he
sleeps!

Lydie waves as the car pulls away and the wolfhounds pursue.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ernest and Bennett. As they depart.

BENNETT

The women have been damned cruel to
her. Crueller than men could ever
be. We don't have the imagination
for it.

ERNEST

They're not counting on the fact
that she has, and always *has* had,
something they never will.

BENNETT

And what's that?

ERNEST

The talent to be alone.

Lydie gets smaller and smaller as the car recedes. She
whistles for the wolfhounds to follow her inside.

INT. THE PALACE - MORNING

Clay is ironing the morning paper, the Oklahoma Gazeteer. He
folds the paper and looks down at an item at the bottom of
the front page.

A photo of Lydie and Ernest. The headline: FAMILY AFFAIR: New
Secrets From the Shame of Ponca City.

Clay thinks. He removes the page from the newspaper.

INT. THE PALACE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Red wine is poured into a glass. Lydie is finishing a candlelight dinner alone in the enormous room.

Clay waits on her.

LYDIE
Pages one and page three of the paper were missing today. Do you know anything about that?

Clay hesitates. Then:

CLAY
No ma'am. Delivery boy must have made a mistake.

He is now putting food on her plate.

LYDIE
Please have a word with the delivery boy. Tell him he doesn't have to make mistakes any more.
(she looks up at him; a moment between them)
Tell him it's all right.

CLAY
(quietly)
I will, ma'am. I'll tell him.

Clay starts to leave the room.

LYDIE
And Clay ...

He stops, turns.

LYDIE
Tell him I said thank you. If you see him.

ON Clay. He bows. We begin to hear music in a MONTAGE:

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - DAY

The music is a very late Beethoven piano sonata, one of his last. It continues over the next scenes.

Lydie is planting flowers, on her hands and knees.

INT. THE PALACE - AFTERNOON

Lydie, her sleeves rolled up, supervises the placement of a PAINTING in the cavernous Great Room. It depicts a Ponca Chief.

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - ANOTHER DAY

Lydie finishes planting a flower, her last one. She looks at her work. A WIDE SHOT reveals that she's planted hundreds of them in a line.

INT. THE PALACE, BALLROOM - DUSK

The piano music we've been hearing is Lydie's playing, on a grand piano. She's getting used to being alone.

CLAY

(entering)

Mrs. Marland. There's a woman at the door who wants to come in.

Lydie barely looks up from her music.

LYDIE

It's too dark to see the gardens properly now. She can have a look if she likes.

CLAY

Mrs. Marland?

Now Lydie looks up.

INT. THE PALACE, HALLWAY - A MOMENT LATER

ON Lydie. She hurries through the very long corridor until she arrives in the foyer.

Where a couple of servants, bouncer-style, are ready to toss out a WOMAN IN HER EARLY FIFTIES.

She's dressed in her best clothes, but they are fifteen years out of date; ragged at the seams; and of a completely different color palate than the clothes we have seen thus far. Her skin and bearing are those of an alcoholic.

WOMAN

Hello, Lydie.

Lydie walks up close to look at her.

Then, the servants are astonished when Lydie takes the WOMAN by the hand and leads her through the Palace like a child leading an adult to see some wonder, a rainbow puddle or a dead bird.

Through the grand rooms of the Palace. The Woman regards the place almost with suspicion, like the ceiling might fall in on her.

Lydie brings the Woman to a spot on a sofa. Sits her down. Reaches for a photo in a frame that has a prominent spot on the table next to the sofa. Puts it in the Woman's hand.

ON the photo. The 5 year-old Lydie we saw earlier, with her Featureless Doll. She's in the lap of a WOMAN in her late twenties.

The Woman looks at the photo with more brittleness than nostalgia.

WOMAN
I was pretty.

Lydie sits on the floor with her head on the lap of her mother, JEAN ROBERTS.

INT. THE PALACE, SMALL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Lydie and Jean are eating an intimate dinner. The table is the only warmly lit spot in a dark room.

Clay puts a bowl of vegetables on the table.

LYDIE
No one knew anything. Sarah stopped getting letters. Then, nothing.

Jean waits until Clay is gone from the room. Watches him leave.

JEAN
I suppose Virginia told you my drink troubles, to turn you against me.

When Jean speaks, it's almost always to the objects in front of her. She hardly ever makes eye contact.

LYDIE
She didn't.
(beat)
She died.

JEAN
I know. Made the national papers.
(beat)
Just like you.

She leans across the small table. Now she looks Lydie in the eye.

JEAN
(almost conspiratorially;
but it's a compliment)
You did good. You didn't let him
go. That was the right thing. That
was just the right thing.

Jean's hand is shaking from alcohol withdrawal. She pulls it back.

LYDIE
(quiet)
If you knew where to find me, why
didn't you come?

Jean is suddenly very serious. Takes a moment.

JEAN
The only thing I ever did in my
life that I'm proud of was putting
you on the train that night.

Now her eyes don't move from her plate of vegetables.

JEAN
I was afraid if I ever came to see
you-- it would all go away.

INT. THE PALACE, GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

LYDIE
(putting towels down on
the dresser)
I've put two here and there are
more in the closet. If you need
anything, you just come down the
hall and get me.

JEAN
Lydie?

Jean gestures for her to come and sit on the bed next to her. Which Lydie does. Jean says the following looking at the floor.

JEAN
(very quietly)
You make sure you protect yourself
in case he ever puts you out. You
put some money away. A little every
time he gives you some. And you
keep a suitcase packed so if you
need to go, you can go. And you
don't need to ask him for nothing.

This advice is the only thing she has to give her daughter.
So Lydie listens, says nothing. Touches Jean's hand.

Now Lydie stands and kisses her mother on the forehead like a
child. Jean is looking at the floor.

LYDIE
Ernest is back tomorrow. You'll
meet him.

Jean nods, not looking up.

LYDIE
You promise.

Jean nods again. Lydie leaves, quietly closing the door. Jean
sits on the bed in the dark room. Hold there.

EXT. THE PALACE, LYDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Later that night, Lydie is lying awake.

EXT. THE PALACE - MORNING

A couple of prairie chickens are feeding on the grass
outside.

INT. THE PALACE, UPSTAIRS HALL/ GUEST BEDROOM - MORNING

Lydie walks down the hall smiling, holding a breakfast tray
with everything she could think to put on it.

She knocks, opens the door of the guest bedroom...

JEAN IS GONE. Lydie puts the tray down and sits on the bed.

EXT. THE PALACE, LAWNS - DUSK

The wolfhounds sprint ahead to greet Ernest, who is getting
out of a car. Lydie follows. Runs into his arms.

INT. THE PALACE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lydie and Ernest are on a sofa in front of a fire. He strokes her hair.

ERNEST
She didn't say goodbye?

Lydie shakes her head. A moment.

LYDIE
I thought she might not, so I left money under her towels. A lot. That's what she came for. I wanted to save her the indignity of asking.

(a beat)
I shouldn't have. Before, she couldn't afford enough to drink herself to death.

INT. THE PALACE, ERNEST AND LYDIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Clay hands Ernest his clothes, dressing him, while Ernest stands at the window watching Lydie ride off on a horse, alone.

INT. THE PALACE, RIDING STABLES - DAY

Lydie combs Cyrus' mane as Paul, a stable boy, works nearby.

LYDIE
Woah. Calm. Calm.
(to Paul)
He's had a mean eye all day.
(to Cyrus)
Why are you grumpy?
(as she looks at his ears)
Maybe his ear problem is back.

PAUL
Should I bring him to the vet,
ma'am?

Cyrus bristles when Paul tries to touch him.

LYDIE
I'm not sure he'd let you. He's been bucking like a bull. I'll take him.
(stroking Cyrus; to him)
You need to go to the doctor? Hmm?

EXT. PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie rides Cyrus through the street, alongside automobiles.

INT. VETERINARY STABLE - DAY

The wide-open, Guernica-like eye of a horse, seen up close.

DR. PENDER, a veterinarian, shines a light into Cyrus' eye, while Lydie pets and comforts him.

PENDER

In my professional opinion, our friend's problem is...

He puts down the light, shakes his head.

PENDER

That he is in a bad mood.

CUT TO:

Lydie is mounted on Cyrus again. Pender strokes him. Lydie and the vet are talking. Pender's a kind old man, and it's nice to talk to someone.

PENDER

I've always found horses to be hypochondriacs, while dogs can be half dead, they'll still wag their tails and lick your face. Which begs the question...

LYDIE

Why do we say "healthy as a horse" and "sick as a dog" ?

MOTHER (O.S.)

He's worse! He's worse he's worse.

A MOTHER carrying a REDHEADED BOY, 2 or 3 years old, enters the stable.

Pender goes to the Redheaded Boy, feeling his forehead.

PENDER

We'll cool him down. Go and get water from the pump.

Mother goes off to get water. She's terrified.

LYDIE

(bewildered)

You treat children here?

PENDER
 (lifting the Boy)
 I help when I can.
 (putting the Boy onto a
 table)
 But I'm an expert in bovine joint
 diseases, not children.

He opens the Boy's mouth, looks down his throat.

LYDIE
 Why didn't she take him to a
 doctor?

PENDER
 She can't afford it. Hardly any of
 them can.

LYDIE
 Any of who?

PENDER
 (feeling the boy's throat)
 The locals. The workers from the
 fields.

LYDIE
 But the workers from the fields are
 our employees.

EXT. THE PALACE, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dr. Pender's old car pulls up in the driveway amidst a dozen Rolls Royces, Bentleys, Duesenbergs. A semi-annual meeting of the Marland Executive Board is in progress.

Lydie gets out of Pender's car, carrying the Redheaded Boy.

His Mother follows behind, carrying the boy's things.

INT. THE PALACE, FOYER - DAY

Clay is startled by the sight of Lydie charging ahead with the Redheaded Boy in her arms.

LYDIE
 (to Clay)
 A doctor's been called. Let me know
 the second he arrives.

Lydie starts to go up the stairs with the Redheaded Boy in her arms, followed by his Mother. But on her way up, Lydie sees a half open door where the Marland Oil board meeting in the dining room, over lunch, is taking place.

She stops, turns around, goes to the door. Gestures to the boy's Mother to wait a moment. Lydie goes in.

LYDIE
DYING!

INT. THE PALACE, DINING ROOM - DAY

Heads turn as Lydie, covered in dirt and sweat, stands holding the Redheaded Boy in her arms.

In this room of gold-plated silverware and floral arrangements and impeccable suits, her entrance is like Medea in the last act wandering onto the stage of a comedy of manners.

LYDIE
I found him dying!

ERNEST
(standing, bewildered)
My God, Lydie. What's --?

LYDIE
This is how Marland Oil treats the children of our workers! Cared for by a horse doctor because he can't afford a real one!

Lydie seizes a crystal glass of water from a place setting in front of an EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, pours some on a silk napkin, places it on the child's forehead.

ERNEST
Lydie, you need to calm down.

Ernest approaches her, but she pulls away.

LYDIE
Us living here in all this,
children dying under our noses!
They should guillotine us, all of
us...

Clay pokes his head into the room, nodding at Lydie. The doctor has arrived. Lydie turns around and leaves. The room, in a quiet state of shock.

INT. THE PALACE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

DR. GORDON, 60s, and Lydie confer at the end of the hall. She shakes the doctor's hand, and he leaves. She enters a bedroom.

INT. THE PALACE, A BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lydie is sitting next to the Redheaded Boy, who is tucked into bed. The Boy now has his eyes open, and is drinking from a glass. His mother is asleep.

LYDIE
(to Redheaded Boy)
The doctor says you need to get
some sleep.

Lydie looks at the Boy, who just stares back at her. Then she gets an idea.

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

Lydie turns on the light and looks among the suitcases and boxes. She finds a box toward the back, pulls it out.

INT. THE PALACE, A BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lydie opens the box. Dust rises as she reaches in and pulls out her FEATURELESS DOLL, which we haven't seen since the early train and oil field scenes. We may notice that the DOLL has very faint pink stains -- what remains of the blood of Lydie's cuts to her arms all those years ago.

Lydie dusts the doll off, kneels next to the bed where the Redheaded Boy is lying.

LYDIE
When I was five, this was my best
friend. He has magic powers to make
you sleep. You're going to borrow
him.

She puts the doll in Redheaded Boy's hands.

LYDIE
What I love best is that his face
is empty. So he can be anybody you
want.

She is quiet for a moment. Then she gets in bed next to Redheaded Boy. She strokes his hair. Begins to hum him to sleep.

INT. THE PALACE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ernest is watching Lydie lying next to the Redheaded Boy. She would have made a good mother.

INT. THE PALACE, ERNEST'S BEDROOM - LATER

Ernest is already in bed, lying awake, when Lydie gets into bed beside him.

They are quiet for a beat.

Ernest turns and puts his arm around Lydie. She doesn't flinch. She's staring at the wall.

LYDIE
Did you recognize that boy?

A long pause. Ernest shakes his head.

LYDIE
He's me.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

DERRAH
With all due respect, this is beyond absurd. No company does this. *U.S. Steel* couldn't afford medical care for every single one of its employees and their families. It would cost ridiculous amounts of money.

LYDIE
We *make* ridiculous amounts of money.

Meet THOMAS DERRAH, 40s, the Chief Financial Officer of Marland Oil.

DERRAH
We do what employers are supposed to do. We *pay* our employees. We can't see to their every need and tuck them into bed at night. Look, Ernest ...

LYDIE
(suddenly very severe)
You may address *me*, Mr. Derrah. As his heir, I am a voting member of the Board and your superior at this company, thank you.

Derrah, shaken by her ferocity. He (and we) didn't know she could talk like this -- a Hapsburg queen putting a disrespectful courtier in his place. He takes a deep breath, addresses Lydie.

DERRAH

Look, Mrs. Marland. Lydie. We can't just think of what we personally might like to do. We have to think of the good of the company.

LYDIE

We are the company. The company's name is our name. We are responsible. We can't buy people and use them and then drop them when they become something other than names on paychecks to be signed.

DERRAH

(conciliatory)

Why don't we make a point of looking into this at the board meeting in the spring...?

LYDIE

(to Ernest)

Now. They need this now. The only thing that counts is now.

INT. ERNEST'S OFFICE -

Ernest sits by a green Tiffany-style desk lamp. Drinking from a tumbler of scotch. Thinking.

INT. DERRAH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Derrah is working late. Ernest, packed up to go home, stops at the door to his office.

ERNEST

You know what Emerson says? "An Institution is the lengthened shadow of one man."

(a beat)

Do it.

INT. PONCA CITY CLINIC - DAY

Lydie comes around a corner, where a CROWD of a hundred people -- Marland Oil employees -- wait in line.

NURSE

(addressing the crowds)

I promise that everyone will be seen.

(MORE)

NURSE (cont'd)
If you'll please just be patient
and form the line over to this
side. This side please, thank you.

Lydie takes in the scene. Then a voice takes her out of her reverie.

WOMAN WITH CHILD (O.S.)
Are you in line, ma'am?

Lydie gets out of the way. Smiles at the Woman.

LYDIE
No. Please, go ahead.

CUT TO:

Headline of Newspaper: NEW YORK SUN. Oklahoma Oil Company to Guarantee Employee Health Care. Workers Will Receive Free Doctor, Dental Visits; Medicine. Subhead: A Precedent?

This is being read in a room at ...

INT. STANDARD OIL COMPANY, PARK AVENUE, NY - MORNING

The 1930 New York skyline is visible out the window.

A Young Man with a wry smile.

YOUNG MAN
Free cough syrup for babies today,
storming the Bastille tomorrow. Has
Mr. Rockefeller seen this?

Young Man hands the newspaper to someone sitting across a desk, and we follow the paper across. Sitting at the desk, now older, with a moustache, and wearing a distinguished suit, is BEN WILCOX.

Wilcox looks at the headline and shakes his head at the question. Thinking.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CLINIC - DAY

Lydie joins Ernest, who is waiting for her outside. People continue to gather inside the clinic.

Ernest and Lydie walk away, arm in arm.

ERNEST
It's a success.

LYDIE
It's not enough. It's not nearly enough.

EXT. MARLAND OIL REFINERY - DAY

A man hands out envelopes with employee wages.

As various workers open their envelopes, there is a buzz. Confusion. Men comparing the contents of their envelopes with those of their neighbors.

ANGLE on a Shift Boss, reading the note enclosed with his salary, to the Refinery OFFICE WORKER next to him.

SHIFT BOSS

(reading)

Upon careful consideration, Mrs. Marland and I have decided that it is necessary to implement not only a living wage, but a saving wage for Marland Oil employees. We have therefore ordered an immediate and universal wage increase of twenty percent. Best wishes. E.W. Marland.

Shift Boss puts the note down.

OFFICE WORKER

Say again?

EXT. GRAND STREET, PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie walks along the street on her way to a store. As she passes a Woman with Two Children.

WOMAN

Morning, Mrs. Marland.

Lydie smiles, nods. Another, older WOMAN, with shopping bags.

OLDER WOMAN

Lovely breeze today, Mrs. Marland.

LYDIE

Lovely.

She walks further on. A couple of MEN tip their hats to her.

INT. BENNETT'S HOUSE - EVENING

A STRING QUARTET plays Vivaldi. Waiters serve hors d'oeuvres.

Bennett, the host, pours champagne for Lydie. Fifteen or so Guests, and Bennett's wife JOYCE, circulate.

BENNETT

(quietly)

(MORE)

BENNETT (cont'd)

That man talking to Claudia is
Reverend Engell. Pastor of First
Methodist.

Bennett indicates JAMES ENGELL, a balding man in his fifties wearing clerical clothes.

BENNETT

Try to talk to him tonight. Get him
on your side. Rumor has it you've
rubbed him wrong.

He gives her the glass of wine.

BENNETT

The power balance in any town is a
china shop. He feels threatened by
the way you and Ernie have been
talking. And he reads the scandal
sheets.

ON Lydie. She doesn't respond.

BENNETT

Pull in your horns a bit.
(lifting his own glass to
toast with her)
Make friends.

INT. BENNETT'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - EVENING

The fifteen guests are taking their seats at a long dinner table. Someone pulls out a chair for Lydie.

CUT TO:

ERNEST

Lydie and I have decided that Mr.
Horatio Alger's stories are fairy
tales unless ambition is backed by
education.

The dessert course. Shaw, pouring Ernest more wine. He's already had a lot.

ERNEST

The clinics are only the beginning
of what we intend to do. The next
thing is going to be a school for
the field workers. So they don't
always have to be field workers.

Shaw, his tipsy avuncular self, claps Engell on the shoulder.

SHAW

Seems to me they're filling the gap
 where the Church should be,
 Reverend! They're upstaging you, my
 man!

Engell responds quietly.

ENGELL

The Lord tells us that material
 success will not come to all of us
 in this lifetime. I think we risk
 pride to think that we can
 eradicate suffering by worldly
 means alone.

ON Lydie.

ERNEST

(with good humor)
 Well, we can't eliminate it,
 Reverend, but we can certainly do
 our part to alleviate it.

ENGELL

(smiling, but emphatic)
 A paternalistic stance on the part
 of employers discourages
 independence, Mr. Marland. It
 creates a society of deadbeats with
 outstretched palms.

Then, a voice from the end of the table.

LYDIE

What is your first memory, Reverend
 Engell?

ENGELL

I can't say I recall, Mrs. Marland.

LYDIE

Mine is rooting through the trash
 for food.

Uncomfortable silence at the table. Even Ernest has never
 heard this. Mrs. Bennett, bravely, offers--

MRS. BENNETT

Perhaps the ladies wish to retire
 for cake?

Lydie doesn't flinch.

LYDIE

(to Engell)
 My mother wasn't a deadbeat.
 (MORE)

LYDIE (cont'd)

She worked in a factory that made
leather undersoles for shoes.

She takes off her high-heeled shoe and puts it on the table,
indicating the undersole.

LYDIE

God didn't make this. A person had
to make this.

Bennett averts his eyes, studies the tablecloth. At a loss.

LYDIE

My mother made some mistakes. But
when you're poor you have to do
everything right. So she had no
second chance. She sent me away and
fell down and never got up again.

She takes a red-wine stained napkin from the Guest next to
her.

LYDIE

But, you see, *this* is the east
coast, where my mother lived.
(that is, the napkin)

Layer upon layer of history and
misery and the old way of doing
things.

Now she takes her own napkin from her lap. It's unstained.
Perfect white.

LYDIE

This is Oklahoma.

(a beat)

Things can be different here. We
can give people a chance in hell of
succeeding by providing them with
dignity and security so that if
they fall they can stand up again.
Here. In *this* world.

She puts the napkins down on the table.

LYDIE

That's what we intend to do.

(then, smiling to Mrs.
Bennett)

Can you pass the sugar, please?

INT. BENNETT'S HOUSE, FOYER - LATER

Two Guests in evening clothes are watching Lydie and Ernest
say goodbye to the Bennetts in the hall.

GUEST
(to Guest 2)
She's not what I expected.

GUEST 2
What did you expect?

GUEST
Any woman with a hundred million
dollars and a dream is dangerous.
But an educated, attractive one --
that is very nearly untenable.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Lydie leans in and puts her head on Ernest's shoulder. He kisses her on the cheek and leans his head into hers.

ERNEST
You know, you ask an awful lot of
the world.

LYDIE
Who knows? Maybe I'll get it.

INT. THE PALACE, HALLWAY - MORNING

Clay opens the door for Ernest, who has a bunch of trout lily in his hands and looks excited.

ERNEST
Is Mrs. Marland upstairs?

CLAY
No sir. She's already gone out to
the site.
(a beat)
Put those in some water?

Ernest nods. Trying to conceal his disappointment.

EXT. MARLAND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - DAY

Lydie is on a construction site, sweating in the heat, speaking to an architect.

He holds plans in his hands, and Lydie gestures and points at a wall to the school, apparently changing something about the design.

LYDIE (O.S.)
Two names?

INT. CONSTRUCTION OFFICE, MARLAND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - DAY

A hut on the grounds of the future school, construction going on outside. The school ADMINISTRATOR, Johnson, has given Lydie a list.

LYDIE

Two people have signed up for the school when we have the capacity for four hundred?

JOHNSON

The list was circulated to every employee, Mrs. Marland. I saw to it.

LYDIE

Then why?

INT. CAR - DAY

Lydie looks out the window. Her car is heading into the Ponca Field Refinery.

LYDIE

(to Chauffeur)

I'll walk from here.

EXT. OIL FIELD - DAY

LOUD NOISE of the oil wells as Lydie walks into the field. The Ponca Field is not recognizable as the once-desolate stretch of frontier. It's now a full-fledged industrial site, the noisiest five miles in America.

From a distance, we watch Lydie say something we can't hear to the Field Foreman. He nods vigorously.

LYDIE (O.S.)

(pre-lap, loud)

My name is Lydie Marland and I'll be very brief.

ANOTHER, QUIETER PART OF THE FIELD.

LYDIE

First of all, I know you're making the company proud with the hard work you're doing in these fields. Without you, there is no company, and Mr. Marland and I will never forget that.

Lydie is standing on a wooden table to address the FIELD WORKERS in this section -- about two hundred of them -- who have been gathered together in a large open space. There's a bit of Joan of Arc about the whole thing.

LYDIE

But my hope is that you won't always be working here. My hope is that you'll move up the ladder. At our company, or at another.

ON the Workers.

LYDIE

But the only way to do that is through education. Because a man with a school diploma who's half as smart as you are is right this moment getting hired somewhere to do a job that pays twice as much. That doesn't seem fair to me.

A few of the MEN look at each other.

LYDIE

I know you've heard of the new school, and I'm leaving a sign-up list here. The classes will be held after working hours and I hope-- I hope you'll give it some thought. Thank you for taking the time, and good day.

FIELD WORKER 1

Excuse me, ma'am? Can I say somethin'? ... We sure appreciate what you're doin', ma'am, you of all people. Thing about it is, we're still working after working hours. Near every one of us does overtime, works second, third jobs. Even with the new wages, we got to.

General agreement from the men. ON Lydie.

FIELD WORKER 1

If you could wave a magic wand and take away the payments on my house, ma'am, I'd be more'n happy to work normal hours and go to school. Way things stand, it just ain't rigged in our favor.

INT. MARLAND OIL BOARD ROOM - DAY

Sitting around the table. The Board: Bennett, Boskirk, Derrah, five or six older men, and Ernest and Lydie.

BENNETT

We can subsidize the cost of land on the north side. The company has a stake in those lots, we can take a voluntary deferral.

LYDIE

I don't understand why we don't provide housing.

BOSKIRK

You give people houses, you're telling them where to live.

BENNETT

People have their dignity. You can't feel proud of a home gotten through some other man's charity.

DERRAH

The real reason they can't get a leg up is that they're borrowing for their houses then paying extortionate interest rates at the banks. There's the root of the problem.

LYDIE

So why don't we just buy a bank?

This stops the conversation. Some of the Board members look at each other, or at Ernest.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The meeting has broken up. Lydie waits in the hall. Before Ernest can join her, Boskirk takes his shoulder and speaks very quietly.

BOSKIRK

She's pulling on the tail of the tiger.

Hold on Ernest, thinking.

LYDIE (V.O.)

The only way to do it is to do it.

INT. ROLLS ROYCE - AFTERNOON

LYDIE

The old men will always say no. That's what old men do.

ERNEST
They're not wrong.

LYDIE
Whose side are you arguing?

ERNEST
Our side. Yours and mine --

LYDIE
If we don't speak for the men in
the field, no one does --

ERNEST
(interrupting, and stern)
For Christ's sake, Lydie, they're
our employees, not your children.

LYDIE
(quietly)
No. I don't have children. My
husband won't allow it.

A beat while this sits in the air.

ERNEST
(looking out the window)
You know why that is. Only thing on
God's earth I'm afraid of is losing
you.

LYDIE
Is that right?
(now she looks out the
window too)
Or are you afraid people will see
you with a child and say "Marland's
son is also his grands--"

ERNEST
(interrupting her,
punching the seat, a
flash of rage)
NO.

It came out as a roar, surprising even him. His face says
she's said something aloud that he knew and never said to
himself.

LYDIE
(to the Driver)
Stop here please.

She looks at him, then gets out of the car.

HOLD on Ernest.

EXT. PONCA CITY, STREET - DAY

Lydie walks down the street. She's holding back tears.

INT. THE PALACE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Lydie sits naked in an ornate porcelain clawfoot bathtub. Ernest comes into the room. She looks away. He crouches behind her and puts his arms around her. She still looks away, squirming out of his arms like a kid. He persists. He leans in over her, getting his shirt wet, and he kisses her on the neck. She lets him.

ERNEST (V.O.)
Good morning, gentlemen.

INT. SECURITY STATE BANK OF PONCA CITY - DAY

EMPLOYEES are assembled in the small bank lobby.

ERNEST
I want to let you know that under
my ownership, bank business will
carry on exactly as it was before,
with just one change.
(to the bank manager)
Lance, how much are interest rates
for home loans at the moment?

LANCE
Twelve percent, sir.

ERNEST
All right, then. Now they'll be six
percent.
(tips his hat)
Good day, gentlemen.

General confusion among the bankers. He heads for the door.

ERNEST
(an afterthought)
Make it five. Just sounds better,
doesn't it?

EXT. THE PALACE, LAKE - DAY

People stream into the open wrought-iron gates of the Palace. A sign that reads: MARLAND ESTATE OPEN HOUSE EVERY SUNDAY -- BRING YOUR FAMILY!

Dozens of people are having picnics, throwing balls, swimming on the grounds of the Palace.

LYDIE, in her swimsuit, is having a water fight with some local kids. She's acting like one of them. Playing Sea Monster and grabbing a 5 year-old girl in her arms as the girl screams and laughs out loud.

ERNEST watches her from the side of the lake.

ON THE HILL NEAR THE MAIN HOUSE: a CAR pulls up on the road with a screech, parks at an angle on the grass. Out steps a MAN IN A SUIT -- JAMES BARKER, bank president, 50s. He may have been drinking.

Bennett, nearby, approaches. Barker looks straight past Bennett and spots Ernest -- who is far away at the lake, unaware of the scene. Barker is headed toward the lake, but Bennett intercepts and blocks him.

BARKER
(to Bennett)
Get outta the goddamn way. EY. EY!

Bennett holds him back. BARKER'S WIFE, by now, has gotten out of the car and hurries after her husband. Their KIDS (boy and girl, ages 5 and 9) watch from inside the car.

BARKER
(to Bennett)
You give Ernie Marland a message.
You tell him... You tell him the
president of Ponca National wants
to know, how can other banks
compete with somebody who doesn't
care if he takes a loss?! You tell
me that. You know, I've got kids,
Bennett...

Barker's Wife now takes him by the arm and directs him back toward the car. By now, various picnic-goers are watching the scene.

BARKER
Goddamn circus.
(then, to Bennett, as he's
led away)
You tell him that! You tell him.

Bennett watches them go, then turns back toward the lake, thinking.

EXT. MARLAND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

LYDIE
We have to be finished in time.
People have signed up. Classes
start in four days.

ARCHITECT

We're using every available worker
within a hundred miles, ma'am.
We've sent to Tulsa for more, but
they haven't arrived yet.

She looks up at the building and sees a CREW of dozens
working. But the building is nowhere near finished.

LYDIE

We'll have to work on Sundays.

ARCHITECT

(after a beat)

Yes, ma'am.

LYDIE

And put *me* to work.

EXT. MARLAND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - DAY

The Architect carries a large blueprint, consulting with a
Builder. The camera follows him and pans up to:

LYDIE. She is wearing a kerchief. Standing on a ladder with
her sleeves rolled up. Painting the side of the school. She's
been at it for hours.

Construction crews do the more skilled work at the other end.

Now, a group of SIX WOMEN approach from behind Lydie's back:
Mrs. Marsden, Mrs. Blake, Mrs. Matthews and the SOCIETY
LADIES.

They look at each other when they see Lydie. She's dirty and
covered in paint.

Mrs. Marsden screws up her courage.

MRS. MARSDEN

Mrs. Marland?! Lydie?

Lydie looks down from the ladder, wipes her brow.

MRS. MARSDEN

They told us at the house you'd be
here. We wanted to-- well, Mrs.
Blake will...

MRS. BLAKE

We know that in the past there's
been some confusion about your
invitation to the Founders' Lunch.
So we wanted to personally extend
the invitation this year.

MRS. MATTHEWS
Over tea, perhaps.

LYDIE
That's very kind, but just now I'm
afraid I have work to do.

She nods politely, smiles. Goes back to work.

Mrs. Marsden, Mrs. Blake, and the society women look at Lydie; and the unpainted school; and at each other.

CUT TO:

The SOCIETY WOMEN are on ladders and apple-boxes, their fine clothes rolled up at the sleeves and splattered, helping Lydie paint the school.

ON Lydie. She turns and looks at fifty-something Mrs. Blake on the ladder next to her, painting with surprising vigor. Lydie turns back to the wall she's painting and smiles to herself. Then we pull away to ...

EXT. CHURCH, PONCA CITY - MORNING

Rev. Engell standing on the steps of his church. His service is ending and his congregation is leaving church. He looks across the street at the work going on.

INT. BOARD ROOM, STANDARD OIL COMPANY - DAY

Various SUITS sit around a plush board room. Gilded Age, robber-baron architecture in dark wood.

SUIT 1
This one's from the Kansas City Star.

(reading from a newspaper)
"Since the market crash, we must all acknowledge that there is more to industry than the making of money. We are going to pay dividends in happiness to the community."*

SUIT 2
And the roads in Ponca City are made of chocolate with candy-cane trees.

Shaking of heads, a chuckle or two.

SUIT 1
It gets much, much better.
(another newspaper)
(MORE)

SUIT 1 (cont'd)

"We must seize the chance in this country for a more enlightened form of capitalism. I can no longer conceive toward what ends we should permit those who earn extremely large dividends to give no share of the earnings to the employees whose intelligence and honesty have made these large earnings possible."*

(*Ernest Marland, interviews with Kansas City Star, 1931).

SUIT 3

He's Red as a fire engine.

Beat. Then the boss speaks. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR, 50s.

ROCKEFELLER

Pursue it. The fields are solid earners. But make sure his little utopia doesn't rally around him in the press. Dig and find something. Discredit him.

Now Wilcox speaks up.

WILCOX

We don't have to dig, sir. Don't forget -- he's married to his daughter.

EXT. MARLAND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - DAY

The building that Lydie and the Society Women were painting is now completed. Lydie, Ernest, the Women, and some TOWNSPEOPLE and CHILDREN, on the count of three, pull on a rope and a banner falls from a stone pediment that reads MARLAND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE.

The banner falls onto the heads of Lydie and some of the kids. They fight their way out of it and laugh. APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

Ernest, having a drink a few feet away from the reception crowd, watching Lydie speak to a YOUNG FIELDHAND, his WIFE, and their 8 year-old SON. Bennett stands next to Ernest.

ERNEST

(to Bennett; after a moment)

You missed it. There was a band.

BENNETT

I was busy running that little oil business that pays the bills. Some of us still attend board meetings.

Ernest smirks. They start to walk to a quieter place.

BENNETT

J.P. Morgan wants to broker new financing. We need the Texas options to stay competitive and the estimates are in the tens of millions. Even we can't afford to play a lone hand on that.

ERNEST

What are they offering?

BENNETT

Co-investment. Standard would have a stake in the company, but Morgan's found a mom-and-pop company willing to take the other chunk. The Clover Oil Company.

Ernest, quizzical.

BENNETT

Their real name, I swear. Owned and operated by Mr. Jed Clover. Episcopalian from Gunnersburg, Ohio, with old family money. Prepared to buy a 22 percent share.

ERNEST

What's the downside?

BENNETT

Still looking for it. The Clovers would keep Rockefeller at bay, we'd get capital while maintaining ownership --

ERNEST

(interrupting)

Don't trust them. No such thing as beans for nothing.

BENNETT

We need the cashflow, Ernie. Either we make this deal or we cut all our programs. That's just the reality.

Ernest looks back again at Lydie, now with her arm around the Fieldhand's 8 year-old Son.

ANGLE ON -- a hand shuffling cards, again and again.

INT. THE PALACE, PARLOR ROOM - NIGHT

Ernest is sitting at a table alone, a decanter and a glass in front of him. He picks up the heavy receiver of a telephone, dials some numbers.

ERNEST
(into the phone)
Make the deal.

EXT. AROUND THE PALACE - MORNING

Quiet morning on the grounds of the Palace.

ANGLES ON: The topiary of the formal gardens. A DUCK extends his wings to scare off a rival in the pond.

ON THE TERRACE: Lydie reads a newspaper. Suddenly, a low rumble. She looks up.

A BIPLANE flies low overhead, then circles and comes back again. Lydie stands, puzzled.

Now the biplane gets lower, and lower, and LANDS with a bounce on the lawn of the Palace.

Clay has come outside, as perplexed as Lydie.

LYDIE
Are we being invaded?

Now the PILOT lifts the glass to the cockpit and removes his aviator goggles. It is Ernest.

EXT. THE PALACE, LAWNS - A FEW MINUTES LATER

From a distance, we watch Ernest lead Lydie by the hand toward the plane. She's resisting.

ERNEST
I had a lesson this morning.
Nothing to it, you could train a monkey to fly it.

LYDIE
Then find a monkey.
(he's pulling her and
she's laughing)
Nope... Stop...

ERNEST
Your projects have had you long enough. Today I have you.

He scoops her up in his arms and carries her to the plane.

Pre-lap the sound of the engine.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE PLAINS - DAY

Virgin prairie. Undulating swells where the land rises and falls.

Ernest and Lydie flying over a part of the continent that will never again be Lewis-and-Clark pristine. The last gasps of the American frontier.

ON LYDIE looking down. It's stunning. Ernest makes the plane dive lower. She screams as if on a roller coaster.

They fly above part of the NORTH AMERICAN CRANE MIGRATION -- thousands of majestic white birds on their way to their nesting grounds on the Platte River. It's one of the most miraculous sites in all of nature.

Now they're flying low. They pass over a group of FARMKIDS who are playing stickball.

The kids jump and scream and wave their arms as the plane passes. They're fascinated. They've never seen an airplane.

Lydie screams like one of them and motions for Ernest to turn back and do it again.

The plane turns and zooms just twenty feet over the heads of the Farmkids. Lydie is loving it, turns back to watch the jumping children get smaller and smaller.

EXT. FIELDS - SUNSET

Quiet now on the plains. The middle of nowhere. The biplane on the grass in the distance.

Ernest and Lydie are on the ground. He lies across her lap. There's a pile of picked flowers on the ground next to him. He holds a blue flower up to her. She speaks slowly and quietly.

LYDIE
Viola sagittata. Arrow-leaved violet.

Another.

LYDIE
Evigeron strigosus. Daisy fleabane.

An incantation, a private poetry between them. He holds up another, but before she can answer.

ERNEST
I've arranged to take the loan so
we can keep-on as we are.

She kisses him on the forehead. Gently, carefully.

ERNEST
Do you hate me that you're not a
mother?

She takes a long moment. Then she kisses him gently and takes
the flower in her hand.

LYDIE
Hypoxis hirsuta. Star grass.

A wider shot. The sun's setting.

INT. CHURCH RECTORY - DAY

An Old Woman leads Engell into the living room where a
Christmas wreath hangs and a man in a suit is sitting. Engell
looks at the man.

ENGEELL
Can I help you?

The man stands, extends his hand.

WILCOX
Good morning, Reverend. My name is
Ben Wilcox.

INT. THE PALACE, GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

A fifteen foot Christmas tree towers over the room. Lydie
emerges from the kitchen with a tray of red cookies.

LYDIE
They're supposed to be Santa
cookies, but they didn't come out
right. They look more like devils,
don't you think? Satan cookies.

ERNEST
(re: a Christmas ornament
made by a child. It says
LYDIE.)
Look.

CUT TO:

Lydie is on a ladder hanging Christmas cards on the wall near
a very large Christmas tree.

Ernest takes cards out of envelopes, hands the cards up to her, and drops the envelopes in a red box.

ERNEST
From our future equity partners.
Gracious family photo enclosed.

The photo: A black-and-white portrait of churchy people -- a mother, father, and four children -- standing in front of a photo studio background.

LYDIE
"Mr. Jed Clover and family send prayers to you and yours for a blessed Christmas." My God, the daughters look dour.

ERNEST
And so would you be if your father made you live in Gunnersburg, Ohio.

The Clover daughters stare ahead in the photo.

ERNEST
On the subject of dour ladies --
(another card)
The President-Elect and Mrs.
Roosevelt Wish Us A Happy 1933.

INT. AN EMPTY BANQUET ROOM IN A PONCA CITY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Wilcox is sitting on the edge of a long table addressing two dozen or so Ponca City residents: they include BARKER, the bank president; a PRIEST; a SCHOOL PRINCIPAL; the PONCA CITY NEWS EDITOR; some CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS.

Wilcox's eastern sophistication is suddenly absent. He speaks in a laid-back, folksy way. Dropping the Gs at the end of words.

WILCOX
First-off, I'd like to thank the Reverend for gathering you together today.

He gestures to Engell, who nods.

WILCOX
Now, I know you're busy folks, so I'll talk straight and fast with you. Bottom line is that we are thinking of investing heavily in this community, but we feel it's important to win over the hearts of the people first.
(MORE)

WILCOX (cont'd)
That's where community leaders like
yourselves come in.

On the faces of those gathered.

WILCOX
You may read about Standard bein' a
big heartless octopus in the press,
but I can't say that the press has
ever given a big business a fair
shake. Truth is, we're just regular
hard-workin' folks like yourselves.
We represent the values of self-
reliance and, maybe unlike some
other folks you know about, we
insist on the very highest moral
standards for ourselves and for our
families. Cause, as the Book says,
"No good fruit can come of a
poisonous tree."

INT. THE PALACE, HALLWAY - DAY

A decorated Christmas tree and Christmas cards in the
background.

Lydie is writing out Christmas cards. Writing addresses using
the red box of Christmas card envelopes we saw earlier.

She writes: MR. JED CLOVER AND FAMILY, CARE OF CLOVER OIL
COMPANY --

But Lydie looks to the right of the return address. The
postmark says: PARK AVENUE STATION. NEW YORK, NEW YORK.

INT. THE PALACE, ERNEST'S OFFICE - DAY

Lydie rifles through stacks of papers on Ernest's desk.

She comes upon a letter from John Rockefeller, STANDARD OIL
COMPANY. Now she looks at the engraved return address on the
stationery. 620 Fifth Avenue. Clipped to it is the envelope
it came in. The envelope says PARK AVENUE STATION. NEW YORK,
NEW YORK.

Lydie compares the Clover Oil Christmas Card postmark with
the Standard Oil postmark. They're identical.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - DAY

A PHOTOGRAPHER takes a picture of Ernest shaking hands with
John Rockefeller. Then of Ernest and Rockefeller sitting.

EXT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - CONTINUOUS

Lydie hurries out of her car, holding the envelopes.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - A MOMENT LATER

SECRETARY

They're still at the signing, Mrs.
Marland. We can't disturb --

Lydie bursts into the room.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, RECEPTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where Ernest is being congratulated by well-wishers.

A reception to celebrate the signing of the deal. Standard executives and Marland Oil executives. Drinking champagne and eating finger foods.

Heads turn as Lydie walks into the room and pulls Ernest away, by the arm.

ERNEST

(to a Guest, as he's
dragged)

Excuse me.

As soon as they're a few feet away.

LYDIE

Don't sign the deal.

ERNEST

Done already.

(looking at her face)

Are you all right?

LYDIE

Have you ever met Jed Clover and
his family?

ERNEST

I've been corresponding with him
for months.

LYDIE

(interrupting)

In person. Have you ever laid eyes
on him?

Ernest very slightly shakes his head. Lydie produces TWO ENVELOPES and holds them in front of Ernest.

LYDIE
The postmarks.

She hands him the envelope from the Clover Christmas card, then the one from Standard Oil. Ernest looks at the postmarks. Identical.

LYDIE
Jed Clover is a front. He is
Standard Oil.

Now Ernest is in something like shock. He has to sit down.

ERNEST
(putting it together out
loud)
The stock we sold to Rockefeller
plus the stock to the Clovers is
fifty-five percent. Controlling
interest in the company.

Ernest, now sitting, looks across the room to where John Rockefeller is having his picture taken. Smiling.

ERNEST
That sonofabitch just bought
Marland Oil.

INT. THE PALACE, ERNEST'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Stacks of documents around them, a bottle of whiskey.

ERNEST
What can we do?

BENNETT
Stay cordial. Hope for the best.
(beat)
Maybe they'll sit back and collect
their checks and won't interfere.
(another beat)
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Bennett leaves.

A beat. Ernest calmly takes the bottle of whiskey in his hand and then he HURLS IT against the wall.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, PONCA CITY - DAY

Wilcox enters, speaks to the Receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Mr. Bennett, the gentleman from
Standard is here.

INT. MARLAND OIL BOARD ROOM - DAY

The eleven board members are standing around getting coffee and settling in.

The Receptionist leaves as Wilcox enters the room with a briefcase. Bennett goes to him.

BENNETT

(shakes his hand)

My friend. Ernest will be happy to see you back in the Outlet again.

WILCOX

Mr. Marland hasn't been asked to attend today.

Wilcox sits in Ernest's seat, begins to remove documents from a briefcase.

WILCOX (V.O.)

(pre-lap)

The first item for discussion on your list will be the management changes.

CUT TO:

A moment later. He's passing around papers.

WILCOX

Standard has a responsibility to maintain its aura of respectability to its shareholders. There are aspects of Mr. Marland's personal life that are not well regarded in the press and we no longer wish to have him as the public face of the company.

BOSKIRK

His name is the name of the company. How can he not be the public face?

WILCOX

We will also be phasing out the use of the name Marland Oil.

The Board members look at each other.

WILCOX

I'd like to jump right in to our evaluation of the expenditures report.

He picks up a copy of the papers he's been passing.

WILCOX

Line items to be eliminated are flagged in the right column and include but are not limited to: Subsidized home loans. Employee medical benefits. The operation of Marland Industrial School. Stock grants, life and accident insurance for employees.

(amused at this one)

Free golf and equestrian lessons.

(turning a page)

Moving on to page two...

INT. MARLAND OIL BOARD ROOM - LATER

The meeting is emptying out. Wilcox is packing up his papers. He lifts his briefcase from the table and walks out the door, running into ERNEST.

Who has been waiting for him at the door to the board room. Wilcox steps to the side, Ernest blocks his exit. Now they're face to face.

ERNEST

(quietly)

You're not going to win.

WILCOX

(equally quiet)

We've already won.

LYDIE (O.S.)

Ernest?

He turns. Lydie waits with her hand extended for him to come. For a moment, it's a triangle of the three standing within a few feet of each other. Wilcox looks at Lydie. It's the first time he has seen her since the day he left Ponca City.

Now Ernest turns from him, goes to Lydie, takes her hand. As she leads him away, he looks back to Wilcox.

INT. HOTEL, PONCA CITY - EVENING

Wilcox, drinking a glass of port. A stack of documents on the table in front of him.

The telephone rings. Wilcox answers.

WILCOX

Hello... Thank you, I'll hold.

Wilcox picks up the phone and its wire and goes to stand by the window.

WILCOX

Yes, sir... I've been going through the statements and I have some very good news.

Wilcox looks out the window.

DERRAH (O.S.)

(pre-lap)

No, I won't call it that because it's not malfeasance.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, ERNEST'S OFFICE - DAY

DERRAH

(arguing emphatically)

He never drew a clear line between the books of the company and his own accounts. If the company needed something, he'd write a personal check. If salaries needed to be paid, Ernest paid them out of pocket. As a way of doing business, yes, it was a little bit...

WILCOX

Illegal?

DERRAH

I was going to say "old-fashioned."

WILCOX

This is no longer Mr. Marland's personal duchy.

(standing)

A substantial portion of the funds used for building his house can be traced back to company accounts.

(closing his briefcase)

The Marland house is now an asset of the Standard Oil company. We are filing for a court order for him to vacate by the first of the year. Thank you, Mr. Derrah. That will be all.

EXT. PONCA CITY - DAY

Lydie walks down the street toward the Marland Oil offices. She stops at a building, and stands staring at it.

A WIDER shot reveals she's in front of the PONCA CITY MEDICAL CLINIC. There is a board across the door and a sign that reads CLOSING NOTICE. HOLD on Lydie.

BOSKIRK (V.O.)
One of the demands is that you
leave Ponca City.

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - DAY

BOSKIRK
They feel your presence would be a
distraction to the new board. And
they're challenging just about
every one of your assets.

ERNEST
But not the personal accounts.

BOSKIRK
On paper, the personal accounts
aren't distinguished from the
business accounts.

It takes a moment for this to sink in. Then, hope:

ERNEST
They can't touch the stocks. The
stocks are in Lydie's name. We've
got the stocks.

BENNETT
... which, since the Crash, aren't
worth the paper they're printed on.

Beat. Ernest steels himself.

ERNEST
The house.

Bennett nods once, can't even look at Ernest.

BENNETT
(quiet, shaking his head)
That was the first thing they went
after.

This is a bomb exploding and Ernest sinks down into the
crater it left behind.

INT. THE PALACE, GREAT ROOM - EVENING

Lydie is pacing the room, smoking a cigarette.

LYDIE
The only way is to start a
revolution.
(MORE)

LYDIE (cont'd)

If the town rises up against it,
Rockefeller won't want the bad
press. He's got enough anti-trust
trouble as it is...

BENNETT

It's too late. They've gotten to
people all around town already.

LYDIE

Why would people act against their
own interests?

Bennett holds up a Ponca City News headline: RISE OF THE
TYCOON. Under the headline is the FAMILY PHOTO of ERNEST,
VIRGINIA, and the 6 YEAR-OLD LYDIE that we saw taken in 1906.
It's next to a WEDDING PHOTO of Ernest and Lydie.

BENNETT

They've convinced people that you
two are the Macbeths, that they've
all been duped. You're not morally
fit to be pillars of the community
and Standard is doing the people of
Ponca City a favor by taking over.

LYDIE

Who, for instance? Who have they
convinced?

BENNETT

Who haven't they? The YMCA. Walt at
the American Legion. Tucker and
Snow in the mayor's office. The
press...

He slaps and tosses the newspaper.

BENNETT

For Christ's sake, Engell has been
preaching from the pulpit that
you're the devil, that Standard is
saving the city from going up in
flames like Gomorrah. They have
their ace -- as long as you and
Ernest are together.

LYDIE

What are you suggesting?

BENNETT

Sometimes the greatest act of love
you can do for someone is to leave
them.

Lydie is thrown for a moment. She looks away and extinguishes
what's left of her cigarette.

LYDIE
 I'll go have a talk with Engell
 tomorrow.
 (lighting another
 cigarette)
 The devil's going to church.

EXT. CHURCH, PONCA CITY - MORNING

Lydie, dressed formally in a hat, hurries to the door of the church. The service has already started.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The celebrant, ENGELL, stands and goes to the podium. From this height, he can see the congregation.

ENGELL
 The reading today is from the Book
 of--

Lydie discreetly enters and takes a seat in a pew.

Engell focuses on Lydie in the congregation. He thinks.

Now, he turns the Bible page from where he was going to read and goes to a new one.

ENGELL
 From the Book of Genesis. Chapter
 19. "Thus it came to pass: when God
 destroyed the Cities of the Plain,
 Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar. He
 settled in the hill country, where
 he lived with his two daughters in
 a cave."

On Lydie.

ENGELL (O.S.)
 "The older one said to the younger:
 "Our father is getting old, and
 there is not a man on earth to
 unite with us. Come, let us ply our
 father with wine and then lie with
 him, that we may have offspring by
 our father."

Whispering, turning of heads. Even children seem to be buzzing.

ENGELL
 "So that night the older one went
 in and lay with her father; but he
 was not aware of her.
 (MORE)

ENGELL (cont'd)

Next day the older one said to the younger: 'Last night it was I who lay with my father.' "

By now, Lydie can feel a hundred sets of eyes on her.

She looks to the side of her for a sympathetic gaze. Suddenly, the WOMAN next to her looks down at her lap.

Then all the churchgoers around Lydie seem suddenly fascinated by their hands or laps. None will meet her eyes.

She stands. She and Engell are the only people in the room standing. They stare at each other.

Lydie turns and leaves the church, slowly, with dignity, her shoes echoing in the large room. We start to hear the sound of a car engine.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Ernest and Lydie are sitting in their chauffered car. Looking out opposite windows. The car is passing the PONCA CITY RAIL STATION.

ERNEST'S P.O.V.: a PAINTER, 30s, is at work on one of the tanker cars. He has a bucket of BLUE PAINT. He is painting over the red Marland Oils logo on a tanker, replacing it with the blue logo for STANDARD OIL.

The painter has already finished work on a few tanker cars: there are blue cars to his left, red to his right.

ERNEST
(to Driver)
Stop the car.

Lydie looks at Ernest. Driver, puzzled.

ERNEST
STOP THE CAR.

EXT. ROAD ADJACENT TRAINYARD - DAY

Ernest gets out of the car. He stomps like Goliath toward the PAINTER, who is working on a step-ladder. Painter's back is turned to the road so he doesn't see Ernest approach.

LYDIE
(in the distance)
Ernest?

Ernest YANKS the Painter off the step-ladder, throwing him to the ground. His bucket spills on the ground, blue paint everywhere. On the Painter, on Ernest.

ERNEST
Who instructed you to do this?! I
didn't instruct you to do this!

Painter, on the ground, bruised, moaning. By now Lydie has caught up.

LYDIE
ERNEST!

ERNEST
WHO TOLD YOU TO DO THIS?

Ernest, half-blue like a Scot in war-paint, kicks the painter.

PAINTER
(disoriented, crouching)
The company office...

LYDIE
(restraining him)
Ernest!

ERNEST
I'M the office, you asshole! I'M
the company!

Before Ernest can kick the Painter again, Lydie pulls him back toward the car. Painter stands, catching his breath. He watches this madman, who is still straining back toward him, all daggers.

ERNEST
(as he's pulled back)
I'M THE COMPANY! You hear me? I'M
THE COMPANY!! I'M THE COMPANY!

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - EVENING

Lydie comes outside wearing a shawl. Scans the gardens.

She spots Ernest sitting at the base of the statue of her.

AT THE STATUE: Ernest, parts of his skin crusted with blue paint, is drinking, nearly drunk. A bottle of whiskey open.

Lydie sits on the ground next to him.

ERNEST
Y'know, my father -- your
grandfather, your father-in-law --
never lived to see me make a
fortune. But he never lived to see
me lose it.

Another drink. Lydie discreetly puts the bottle beyond his reach. Puts her arm around him.

ERNEST

Old Man Marland said I should have settled down in Pittsburgh. Said my problem was, I was always looking at the *terra incognita* part of a map. *Here be monsters.* Wanting the impossible, looking for the thing over the horizon. "Read the Book of Proverbs, boy. 'Only the eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth.'" Sonofabitch was right.

INT. MARLAND OIL OFFICE, BENNETT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Lydie walks into the office. Bennett looks up.

LYDIE

If I left, could you fight them?

BENNETT

We'd have a chance.

INT. THE PALACE, LYDIE'S DRESSING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Lydie packs a suitcase. In front of her dressing mirror is her WEDDING PICTURE. She looks at it and puts it into her suitcase.

INT. THE PALACE, BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Lydie opens the door of the bedroom where Ernest sleeps. Stands in the doorway looking at him. Gently closes the door.

INT. THE PALACE, FOYER - EARLY MORNING

Lydie, carrying a suitcase, passes Clay.

LYDIE

Give this to Mr. Marland this evening.

She hands him a note in an envelope. Puts her hand on his shoulder.

LYDIE

This evening.

Clay nods and watches her walk out. He looks at the envelope. Thinks. Then he goes up the stairs.

EXT. CAR - MORNING

Lydie puts her suitcase in the trunk, gets into a car, starts the engine.

INT. THE PALACE, BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Clay, holding the envelope, enters the room where Ernest sleeps.

CLAY
Sir.

Ernest opens his eyes. Clay hands him the note from Lydie.

INT. CAR - MORNING

HOLD ON Lydie, through a windshield running with rain, as she drives over the Plains. Trying to hold her composure, but she's crying.

She looks in the rear-view mirror. A CAR is fast approaching behind her. She steps on the gas.

INT. ROLLS ROYCE - MORNING

Ernest -- half-dressed -- speeding dangerously ahead toward Lydie's car -- breathing fast -- he can't get a full breath -- gaining on her --

INT./EXT. THE CARS - MORNING

Ernest, coming up behind Lydie, hits the horn. His Rolls pulls into the wrong lane beside Lydie's car. She looks at him -- startled -- shakes her head -- keeps driving. He holds his hand on the horn. But she keeps going.

Now Ernest decides something. He SWERVES his Rolls and HITS Lydie's car, forcing her from the road.

Her car comes to a halt in a field, its hood smoking --

EXT. THE PLAINS - MORNING

Lydie gets out of her car and starts to run -- Ernest following --

ERNEST
LYDIE --!

She's running fast -- doesn't know where -- into the fields, the rain -- just away -- he's following -- gaining on her -- she looks behind -- screams out as he TACKLES her to the ground and they're in the mud.

LYDIE
I'M TRYING -- TO SAVE YOU --

ERNEST
NO--!

He's holding on to her leg while she struggles to break away -- she's pulling and clawing -- his face in the mud, pressing against her bare leg --

He lunges and holds on to her waist while she struggles to get loose. Clinging to her so tight that it looks like neither will emerge from the embrace alive.

LYDIE
You're going to lose EVERYTHING --

ERNEST
(ferocious)
YOU ARE EVERYTHING!

She stops struggling and looks at him. The raindrops on his face are mingling with tears. He can't get a breath, spits mud out of his mouth. It's the first time in Lydie's life she has seen him cry.

ERNEST
You've always been everything.
You've always been everything.

HOLD on them, on the ground, in the rain.

INT. THE PALACE, HALLWAY - DAY

Wilcox walks down the hall with a group of men in suits.

Their footsteps echo on the tiles. They walk as if they own the place, which, in fact, they do.

Lydie, her hair in a kerchief, is carrying a box of her things down the hall. Moving out is in progress.

She comes around a corner and locks eyes with Wilcox. He looks at her and she stares straight back at him.

Then she continues the way she was going.

Wilcox stands alone, listening to her footsteps recede.

EXT. THE PALACE, LAWN - DAY

LYDIE
Joseph.

Lydie is saying goodbye to the servants. They stand in a line. One by one she shakes their hands, looks into their eyes, and says their names.

LYDIE
Ada.

LYDIE
Michael.

Now she's at the end of the line, where Clay stands.

LYDIE
Clay.

She looks at him for a long time.

She takes his hand, then thinks again and embraces him.

LYDIE
You will go very far in the world.

We pull out to a wide shot of Lydie embracing Clay at the end of the line of servants on the lawn.

FADE TO BLACK.

Now, over black: bright trumpet music and the crow of a rooster.

The words: NEWS AT HOME in large font fill the screen.

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER
Meanwhile, back in the heartland,
the suffering continues!

We're watching a black-and-white RKO-Pathé newsreel. The Announcer's voice is bright and exclamatory.

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER
The dust storms first spotted in
South Dakota have continued to
spread over the Great Plains,
leaving their trail of misery
behind them!

Documentary footage of a great black cloud on the horizon. A farm made barren. A car buried in three feet of dust. A farmer and his family standing, looking at the wasteland that was their field.

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER
Crops wither north and south! Black
snow falls in Chicago! As elections
loom, an Oklahoma farmer asks, "Who
will help and how long can this go
on?"

The RKO trumpets sound again.

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER
This has been RKO's News on Parade!
For March 1934. Until next time...

The Pathé cock crows again. Screen fades to black in a ...

INT. MOVIE THEATER, OKLAHOMA CITY - DAY

Lydie, dressed inconspicuously in a hat, sits alone watching.

The screen now fades into the RKO "transmitter" logo -- a radio tower on top of a globe that looks like the tower of an oil derrick. Then, music and the main title of George Cukor's "Little Women."

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY COTTAGE - LATER THAT DAY

Outside, it is the dead of winter. Snow on the ground. Lydie walks toward a small cottage outside Oklahoma City carrying grocery bags. This is her new home.

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY COTTAGE - DAY

Lydie opens the door.

LYDIE
Ernest?

No response. She puts down her bags and looks into the living room.

Ernest sits in a chair, looking at the wall, lost in thought.

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY COTTAGE, KITCHEN - EVENING

LYDIE
(touching a radiator)
I think I can feel it now.

Lydie, wearing a coat indoors, blows out a match and sits at the dinner table with Ernest.

LYDIE
 You haven't told me about lunch
 with Bennett.

ERNEST
 (looking down, cutting his
 food)
 He didn't show.
 (beat)
 Twenty years of working for me, he
 was never a minute late. Now he's
 always got a last-minute conflict.

Silence for a long moment.

LYDIE
 I've been thinking about something.
 (a beat)
 I've been thinking you should run
 for governor.

More silence.

LYDIE
 The elections are coming, you need
 a job. Governor is a job.

Now he finally looks up from his food.

ERNEST
 Don't.

LYDIE
 We're down, but so is all of
 Oklahoma-- ERNEST
 Just don't.

LYDIE
 This is why you came here. To
 start something new. You
 could inspire people, you ERNEST
 could-- FOR CHRIST'S SAKE --

He throws down his fork, startling her.

ERNEST
 OPEN YOUR EYES, LYDIE. Stop acting
 like a goddamned child. It's my
 fault I raised you in the land of
 sugar-plum fairies, but now it's
 over! I've failed you, and you need
 to live in the WORLD. It's a wolf
 world full of wolves and I was
 stupid to think something else.
 Look around you. THIS IS WHAT THERE
 IS.

He knocks his plate off the table.

ERNEST
This is all there is.

He gets up, knocking his chair over, and leaves the room. Lydie hears the front door slam.

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Lydie sits in a chair, in the dark.

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY COTTAGE - NIGHT

It is snowing. Lydie leaves the house in her coat. The car is there. She scans the lawn. No Ernest.

She walks around the side of the house, sees a shape sitting on an old snow-covered bench. It is Ernest. Shivering. Covered in snow.

Lydie hurries to him. She takes off her coat and places it on him like a blanket.

She sits next to him, holds him against her breast. She sits rocking him in her arms.

LYDIE
(whispers)
Come back inside. Come back. Come back. Come back.

The two of them in the snow, Lydie cradling Ernest, like a mother and child. She's rocking him back to life, until he's no longer numb.

ERNEST (O.S.)
(echo-ey, through a microphone)
I'm standing in front of you today having lost my job...

INT. OKLAHOMA DEMOCRATIC PARTY STATE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Lydie watches Ernest walk into an office within an office.

ERNEST (O.S.)
My money. My house. I've lost nearly everything. Except my will to continue.

Lydie watches the scene through a large window to the interior office.

It plays out in pantomime. Ernest shakes hands with a few PARTY OFFICIALS. Sits at a table with them. Starts to talk.

ERNEST (O.S.)
I've been disowned by my former
colleagues, who think I should feel
ashamed of how low I've been
brought in the last two years.

CUT TO:

A large BANNER that says MARLAND FOR GOVERNOR. We are at a...

EXT. MARLAND FOR GOVERNOR RALLY - DAY

He's at a podium on a stage.

The CROWD consists mostly of farmers and laborers. The
victims of the Dust Bowl. Tom Joad is probably here.

There is a breaking quality in Ernest's voice now. His tone
is no longer the assured tone of a mogul but is more nuanced,
vulnerable. More human.

ERNEST
But I'm standing here to tell you I
feel just the opposite. I've never
felt prouder to be an Oklahoman
than I do today, here with you.

There is literally dust blowing throughout the scene. People
hold signs like "\$50 Old Age Pensions" and "Those Who Till
the Land Should Own It."

ERNEST
Because now that I've suffered some
of what the people of this state
are suffering every day, I can
finally look them in the eye. I can
look you in the eye.

EXT. SOONER SOCIETY DINNER, GOVERNOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

M.C.
Ladies and gentlemen, our host and
keynote speaker, the governor of
the great state of Oklahoma -- Mr.
Ernest Marland.

Rousing applause.

Find Ernest -- the tenth governor of Oklahoma, elected in
November 1934 -- sitting at a table with Lydie. They are four
years older. Their formal clothes are not ostentatious, as
they were in the high decadent period. The colors are more
muted and the excessiveness of the Jazz Age is gone.

Ernest stands, walks toward the podium. Lydie watches him.

(The following speech, though four years later in time, plays like a continuation of the campaign speech).

ERNEST (O.S.)
(pre-lap)
I've changed a lot in the last few years. Lots of things have changed. Even the land has changed.

CUT TO:

He's been speaking for a few minutes. At a microphone.

ERNEST
There is no longer a frontier left in America. We've filled in all the spaces on the map and we live in the Garden after the Fall. We woke up from our pioneer dream to find that there was no perfect world to be found here.

(beat)
So now I say the time for talk is done. Now is the time for *action* and *work*, and all that counts is Now. Someone much wiser than I am taught me that.

ON Lydie.

ERNEST
I do still believe we can make things better in America, at least a little bit. We'll start in Oklahoma. We'll go to Washington, maybe someday to the White House or to the moon. But we've got to keep working, we have no other choice. There is no Promised Land and there is no shining city past the horizon.

(then, off-book; directed at Lydie)
We are the shining city. We are the frontiers.

LATER

People are dancing in the room. An orchestral version of the song "Sometimes I'm Happy."

Ernest leaves a GROUP of supporters near the stage and is apprehended by a young, businesslike AIDE.

AIDE
Sir? Senator Thomas is waiting to do the photos.

But Ernest is looking elsewhere. His POV: Lydie is standing alone.

ERNEST
(eyes fixed on Lydie)
The Senator can wait. Right now, I
need to dance with my wife.

Ernest leaves the Aide and walks across the floor. He taps Lydie on the shoulder. She turns. Smiles. He offers his hand.

She takes it and they start to dance. She puts her head on his shoulder.

We slowly move out to a wide shot. It has been 15 years now since we saw them dance at the Fourth of July party at the Grand Avenue Mansion. While they're dancing, each is not aware of anyone or anything but the other.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION, DRAWING ROOM - MORNING

Ernest and Lydie are still wearing their clothes from the dance, asleep on the couch from the night before. Ernest opens his eyes. Gently maneuvers from her embrace.

He gives her another pillow. Takes a moment to look at her. In the morning light, she's beautiful.

He goes into the hall.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION, HALLWAY - DAY

In silhouette. Ernest suddenly stops. Leans over. Tries to balance himself on the wall. His legs give out. He falls.

He is dead.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION, DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lydie opens her eyes when she hears the thud on the floor.

EXT. GRAVEYARD, PONCA CITY - DAY

Ernest's funeral. Various politicians, Democratic Party officials, former business associates; Bennett; Boskirk; Mrs. Marsden; some friends and former friends.

A Minister reads the mandatory there-is-a-season passage.

Lydie, wearing black, stands looking at the casket. When she looks up, her eyes meet those of an INDIAN MAN with straight gray hair. It is WILLIE CRIES, now in his 60s, dressed in a black suit. Lydie looks back at the casket.

EXT. GRAVEYARD, PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

After the funeral. Guests socialize.

Lydie has lingered at the grave. Two WOMEN look at her.

WOMAN 1
She hasn't said a word. Just
stopped talking.

WOMAN 2
Buried her husband and her father
on the same day.

Now BENNETT approaches Lydie. He reaches out his hand to take Lydie's, but she doesn't offer hers back.

She looks him in the eye and walks away, alone.

INT. PONCA CITY HOTEL - NIGHT

Lydie lies in bed, looking at the place where Ernest should be.

LATER

Now the bed is empty. We move slowly through the room to FIND LYDIE, sitting on the floor next to a table. She is rocking very slightly back and forth. Looking down, with a kind of fascination, at her arms.

There are the remains of the cuts from when she was five.

They are still very faintly visible, pink lines at odd angles. Her fingers move over them, as if they're hieroglyphs to be deciphered.

Then she stops. She's made a decision.

EXT. THE PLAINS - PRE-DAWN

The fog just before the sun has risen. Headlights.

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - PRE-DAWN

A car drives over grass through the now-neglected formal gardens of the Palace.

The car stops near the STATUE OF LYDIE, its headlights trained on the white marble figure. The white statue looks like an apparition, a ghost, in the glare of the headlights.

Weeds and grass are grown up around the statue.

The car door opens and LYDIE gets out, leaving the headlights on. She walks to the statue.

Now we realize she's carrying something in her hand. It's a tire iron.

She SMASHES the statue of herself.

She's hitting it again and again, until the face is broken in a dozen places and it is all but destroyed.

INT. HIGHWAY 24 MOTEL, INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI - NIGHT

Brown curtains and an auto-garage calendar on the wall.

A 50-ish MOTEL WOMAN is glancing through an issue of Look Magazine ("House Beautiful With Mrs. Jameson"). A fan blowing her hair.

Motel Woman looks up when she hears a car outside and she's lit momentarily by headlights through the window. The car parks. Sleigh-bells on the door ring when it opens.

A woman dressed in black clothes with uncombed hair enters.

MOTEL WOMAN
Just yourself?

Lydie nods.

MOTEL WOMAN
Three dollars.

Lydie takes the money out of her pocketbook, places it on Look Magazine.

MOTEL WOMAN
Sign your name here for me.

Motel Woman slides the guest book across the desk.

Lydie takes the pen-on-a-string in her hand and writes: MISS JEAN ROBERTS.

The Motel Woman slides Lydie a key.

MOTEL WOMAN
Warm tonight.

Lydie nods. She turns and disappears out the door.

THEN, A SLOW
FADE TO BLACK.

WHERE WE HOLD FOR A MOMENT IN THE DARK.

Then, the sound of breathing. Then loud knocking.

INT. SUPPLY CLOSET - NIGHT

A REPLAY of a scene we saw earlier. The sound of knocking stops.

Then: a note, scrawled on a piece of Marriott paper, slips under the door. The woman we knew as the Maid looks down at it.

It says: **IS YOUR NAME LYDIE?**

ON Lydie. She looks down at the note, lowers herself to the floor.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Man from the elevator waits on the other side of the door.

A moment. Nothing. Then, the paper, turned over, is slipped back under the door. There is something written on the reverse in pencil.

It reads, in writing that looks like a child's:

NOT ANY MORE

On the MAN. Who hesitates, then:

MAN
(very gently)
Lydie, it's Clay.

He hears the door of the supply closet unlock, and the door creaks open.

His POV: Sitting on the floor is Lydie. Age 76, the same age as the century. She looks down at her feet for a long moment, then finally, up at the Man.

LYDIE
Clay.

INT. BELTWAY DINER - DAY

Lydie and Clay are sitting at a booth in a greasy-spoon diner. He's showing her a photo.

CLAY
That's them. Twins. Married,
divorced, married again.
(MORE)

CLAY (cont'd)

After the Palace, I worked for an insurance company, then an advertising firm. Then IBM, right back in Ponca City.

A WAITRESS arrives with cups of coffee for them both.

CLAY

(now, because he can no longer skirt the issue)

Northcutt stayed at the hotel a month ago. He thought he saw you.

Lydie looks down into her coffee.

CLAY

There've been so many sightings over the years, but by the time I could follow them up, you'd disappeared again.

Clay reaches into his briefcase and slides some papers across the table to Lydie.

It's a magazine. The Saturday Evening Post. A large picture of Lydie at the governor's inauguration, more than thirty years before. The headline reads: GOVERNOR'S WIDOW VANISHES: WHERE IS LYDIE MARLAND? (**Saturday Evening Post*, November 22, 1958).

Another article: HAVE YOU SEEN LYDIE MARLAND? (**Washington Post*, October 23, 1955).

A Tulsa newspaper, 1974. A blurry photo, with a circle around a figure in the background. "FACE TO FACE WITH A GHOST": IS THIS WOMAN MRS. MARLAND?

CLAY

The FBI stopped looking twenty years ago. They think you died.

LYDIE

They're right.

EXT. BELTWAY DINER, PARKING LOT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Moving down from the neon glow of the diner sign to the purple Cutlasses and angular Cadillacs of 1976.

LYDIE (O.S.)

The truth isn't romantic. The truth is that we were naive.

We're now on Lydie and Clay as they walk.

LYDIE

We thought, if this kind of happiness is attainable for us, then anything is attainable for anyone. But it was an imaginary world we lived in. It was never a possible world.

They've now arrived at his rental car.

LYDIE

The worst sin is to misremember.

CLAY

(after a moment)

They're going to tear down the Palace.

ON Lydie.

CLAY

Some developers want to buy the property. They want to build 200 semi-detached houses, something like that.

LYDIE

That has nothing to do with me.

CLAY

Come back to Ponca City. Convince them not to knock down your house.

He touches her on the shoulder. She looks away.

CLAY

It's time now. Come home.

Lydie bristles at the word. While she looks away, the red neon light illuminates her face. Then, back to him.

LYDIE

(unsentimentally)

If I look back, I will turn to salt and I will die.

Now she turns and goes away, carrying a plastic supermarket bag, toward the dark sidewalk and the bus stop.

CLAY

Mrs. Marland --

She stops and turns.

CLAY

I never believed all the fuss was because you were in love with your father. I think it was because you were in love with your husband. To some people that's a very frightening thing.

Lydie, caught off-guard by this; she thinks, turns, and continues toward the bus stop.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM, MARRIOTT - DAY

Lydie is back at work at the hotel. Cleaning a bathtub. The shower head is on a long, snake-like extension. She uses it to wash away the bleach in the bathtub.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, she starts CRYING.

She hasn't cried like this since before Ernest died, or maybe even since she was sent to Ponca City. It's a whole lifetime worth of emotion coming out all at once. Weeping like a child.

Sitting on the floor next to the bathtub, she takes the shower-head and points it at her face. Water goes everywhere.

A wider shot of Lydie, in her soaked hotel uniform, sitting with her eyes closed, letting the warm water wash over her.

EXT. PAYPHONE OUTSIDE THE MARRIOTT - DAY

LYDIE

Clay?

CUT TO:

An AERIAL VIEW. America from above. The Great Plains.

INT. TWA 767 - DAY

It is the POV of Lydie. The last time she was on a plane, it was a biplane and Ernest was flying.

Now the landscape of the Plains is one of interstates, industrial parks, and football fields.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please put your seats in the full upright position for landing...

EXT. THE PALACE - DUSK

ANGLE on: A wheel runs over some weeds on an overgrown road, and stops. A foot steps out of a door.

A TAXI has pulled up in a driveway, and Lydie is paying the Driver.

The taxi pulls away and she looks up.

Her POV: The Palace, which is now in disrepair. She hasn't seen it in 40 years. It's falling apart.

There is a chain-link fence around the property, which local kids have cut a hole through. LYDIE GOES THROUGH IT.

Broken windows. An abandoned, burnt out car in front. Boarded up doors. Graffiti. One of the boarded up doors has a human-sized space in it. LYDIE ENTERS.

INT. THE RUINS OF THE PALACE - DUSK

More graffiti, beer cans, condom wrappers. Some wooden crates with furniture inside. Some of the original furniture of the house, colonized by generations of spiders. An old couch that's been brought in by local kids. A couple of hypodermics.

And it's still the grandest place on the Great Plains.

Even age hasn't diminished the soaring scale and the cathedral buttresses. The frescoed ceilings and the marble vaults, the light inside.

Now Lydie steps into the main foyer. A pile of debris that looks like a barricade from a street riot.

Pieces of antique furniture, curtains covered in 3 inches of dust, garden vases, architectural flourishes that have fallen down over the years, and a white fragment poking through the pile. It is the head of the statue of Lydie.

Lydie takes it in her hands and looks down at it. It's like leaning into a reflecting pool and seeing a ghost of herself.

INT. PONCA CITY GOLF CLUB - DAY

CREW GUY (O.S.)
STRIKING!

An empty chair in a room with a mural of men on horses in the background.

NEWS 7 REPORTER
(to a Cameraman)
Getting the background, yeah?
(she makes an imaginary
box around her head)
Is that safe for the boom?

ANGLE ON

BLACK AND WHITE scene of a Marland Oil gas station opening in Kansas (we saw this scene earlier. Now we're seeing it from the POV of a newsreel camera).

A NEWS 7 PRODUCER, kneeling at a monitor attached to a mobile Hi-8 editing station plugged into the wall, is editing the archive footage: Ernest kisses a 25 year-old Lydie on the cheek. Then the footage rewinds. The Producer clips off a few frames. Then Ernest kisses Lydie on the cheek again. Then rewind, then again.

We move up from the producer. LYDIE is standing behind him, watching Ernest kiss her again and again.

CUT TO:

LYDIE coming in and out of focus. The news camera is finding focus on her. In her deteriorated state, sitting in front of a camera is a kind of heroism.

NEWS 7 REPORTER (O.S.)
The Marland Mansion was the scene
of a storied past throughout the
late 1920s and 30s...

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

The News 7 Reporter speaks into a microphone in front of the disintegrating Palace.

NEWS 7 REPORTER
.... the family home of a man and
woman once worth well over 100
million dollars. Some local
residents still remember the
elaborate picnics and pool parties
the Marlands would host for the
people of the city.

CUT TO: The gas station kiss footage. Black and white photos that depict scenes we've seen in the film. The formal gardens. Townspeople in the lake. Lydie and Ernest standing in the ballroom.

NEWS 7 REPORTER (V.O.)
Mr. Marland later became governor
of the state, causing controversy
as the former oil mogul
aggressively took on what he called
the abuses of big business.

A CLOSE-UP black and white photo of Lydie at age 27,
laughing.

THE NEWS REPORT
CUTS TO:

The older Lydie in the Golf Club room we saw earlier.

NEWS 7 REPORTER (O.S.)
Mrs. Marland, why is the Palace on
the Prairie worth saving?

LYDIE
Because--

We move closer to her as she thinks for a long moment. Then
she starts to speak, slowly, as if trying to figure something
out for herself, not for the camera

LYDIE
Because my husband built that house
in a particular place at a
particular time...

INT. DINER - AFTERNOON

LYDIE (ON T.V.)
... when Oklahoma was still an
idea. It was a place off the map
where anything was possible.

We are watching the report on a television above the small
boxes of breakfast cereals on the counter.

PATRONS -- truck drivers, retirees -- sit at the counter and
watch. A WAITRESS has stopped with plates in hand, looking
up.

INT. SHOPPING MALL -- CONTINUOUS

A few SHOPPERS with Sears and K-Mart bags watch a television
at a department store.

LYDIE (ON T.V.)
That idea is what built this city --
the idea that something better
could happen here. That's what he
left us. That's our inheritance.

INT. MECHANIC GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

A MECHANIC and his Assistants are watching on a black and white tv sitting on a folding chair in their garage.

LYDIE (ON T.V.)
When I went back to that house, I
breathed again the air when we
could dream.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A WHITE-HAIRED MAN, 50s, surrounded by a couple of grandkids playing with action figures, watches the report.

LYDIE (ON T.V.)
And I think that's a thing-- that's
a thing worth saving.

NEWS 7 REPORTER (ON T.V.)
From Ponca City, I'm Connie Yu,
Channel 7, Eyewitness News.

The White-Haired Man sits on the couch and thinks.

INT. PONCA CITY HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - EVENING

A Ponca City Wildcats basketball team photo.

A poster advertising: SPRING MUSICAL: OKLAHOMA! With a cartoon picture of a cowboy and a pioneer woman.

People are assembling in the auditorium.

MILLS (O.S.)
Look, nostalgia for the Marland
house is lovely.

INT. PONCA CITY HIGH SCHOOL, AUDITORIUM - EVENING

On the stage: Five members of the Ponca City Council, including the Council CHAIRMAN. Horn-rim glasses, thick 70s ties. And SCOTT MILLS, real estate developer, also sitting at a long table on the stage. Each with a microphone.

MILLS
But the fact is, it's
sentimentality the city can't
afford. In the middle of a
recession, we are offering to take
the elephant off your hands,
provide tax revenues, and create
over 100 construction jobs. Sir?

In the back of the auditorium, a WOMAN IN A HAT quietly enters, sits. It is LYDIE.

CITY COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Mr. Mills.

(another member whispers
something to him)

Under the circumstances, as no one has presented a viable alternative plan, I think we can put the matter to vote.

The White-Haired Man we saw in his living room raises his hand. Stands.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

I beg your pardon, sir. There is an alternative plan.

Heads turn. A rumble in the crowd.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

Some of us got together and worked out that if we vote for a one and a half percent sales tax until the Palace is paid for, then we could raise the 1.4 million in about two years.

White-Haired Man is holding a document.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

There's a petition here. A thousand names.

City Council look at each other. A surprise. The Chairman gestures for the document to be passed up to him.

As it's passed up to the Council Chairman:

MILLS

(speaking into his
microphone)

If I may, Mr. Chairman. I think we can agree that the people of this city do not want to pay any more sales tax than they already do. Some preservationists may have circulated a petition, but I'm confident that the working people of Ponca City aren't willing to volunteer their money for such a purpose.

A hand raises. It's a woman in a denim jacket whom we may recognize as the Waitress we saw earlier.

WAITRESS

I will.

She stands up. The room is silent, and stares at her.

The Man next to her, in a leather jacket, also stands.

Now, an Old Man stands. Then a couple of High School Teachers.

A Girl with Piercings and her Boyfriend.

A Mom and her Neighbors. Clay and his wife.

Three more people stand. Then ten more. Then a dozen, twenty.

It's a popular uprising. Row by row, the town is standing up and staring ahead at the stage and the Council members. The council members whisper to each other or look on with their mouths open.

Now, the entire high school auditorium is on its feet.

Except one. Then, the last person to stand -- albeit frailly -- is Lydie.

The Developer, petulant and defeated, sighs and shakes his head. The City Council Chairman and members look at each other.

The room has spoken.

CUT TO:

A few minutes later. The meeting is breaking up.

The City Council Chairman leans over to another Council Member.

CITY COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

(under his breath)

Hell just froze over and the devil's eatin' a Sno-Cone. We just passed a voluntary sales-tax.

COUNCIL MEMBER

I need a beer, fast.

CUT TO:

Lydie sits in her chair, silently. Now, the White-Haired Man, the man with the petition, approaches her. She looks into his eyes, nods, and offers her hand to shake.

LYDIE

I don't believe we've met.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN
I beg your pardon, ma'am. I think
we have.

He takes something from behind his back. At first, Lydie can't make out what it is, but he holds it out toward her: it's her FEATURELESS DOLL.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN
I've been meaning to return this.

Now she looks up at the White-Haired Man. It's the REDHEADED BOY from almost fifty years ago. He's now in his fifties and is surrounded by his THREE GRANDCHILDREN, two of whom have red hair.

Lydie takes the Featureless Doll in her hand and holds it tight, like she did on the train when she was five.

Now, people from all over the room start to approach the place where she's sitting, surrounding Lydie.

An overhead view of the small, frail woman, surrounded by the people of her town.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

ANGLE on: A bright view of a stone breezeway, illuminated by sun.

Then, three majestic Roman arches under a blue sky.

Super: 1984 A wider shot. The Palace is now restored to its former glory.

INT. THE PALACE, GREAT ROOM - DAY

A Tour Guide (college student, summer job) presides over a crowd of visitors. Typical mix of tourists: a dad with a tour guidebook; a bored girl in a Duran Duran shirt; some weekenders with cameras.

TOUR GUIDE
The ceiling above us was painted by
a world-renowned Italian muralist
and reflects the history of
Oklahoma from pre-Columbian times
to the 1920s.

INT. THE PALACE, STAIRWELL - DAY

TOUR GUIDE
Now if you look down to your
left...

Now we're in a different room. Heads turn, and the camera moves. It's the STATUE OF LYDIE. It's intact again. Gleaming white.

TOUR GUIDE (O.S.)
The statue of Lydie Marland was restored last year after it was found shattered in pieces on the grounds of the estate. It originally stood in the formal gardens, which are today the parking lot through which you entered. Legend has it that Mrs. Marland destroyed the statue herself, though the more likely story is that it was damaged in transit over the years.

(moving toward the door)
Now if you'll follow me outside, we'll have a look at the terrace.

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

The Tour Guide leads the group toward the terrace, through the gardens.

As the Tour Guide talks about the gardens, a Girl on the tour, 6, wanders off between some bushes, to a bench at the edge of a parking lot, where an OLD WOMAN (80s) is sitting.

The old woman, of course, is Lydie.

The Girl is not precious or cute. She's reserved and serious.

GIRL
Hi.

LYDIE
Hi.

The Girl is eating a Twizzler from a bag. They sit like two men, looking straight ahead, up at the house. After a moment, the Girl volunteers

GIRL
(matter-of-fact)
A princess used to live here.

LYDIE
Is that right?

The Girl nods. Holds out a Twizzler to Lydie.

LYDIE
(taking it)
Thank you.

Then something catches Lydie's eye. She stares at the bushes, crouches down to the Girl's level.

LYDIE
Look.

She points. A few feet from them, having emerged from the bushes, is a RED FOX WITH A SILVER TAIL. The red fox stares at Lydie and the Girl, they at it.

After a moment, the Red Fox is joined by two fox CUBS, who hide underneath their mother.

VOICE (O.S.)
Jennifer? Jennifer!

The Cubs run away and, after another moment, the Red Fox follows them. The Girl smiles at Lydie, Lydie at her.

GIRL
Bye.

LYDIE
Bye.

The Girl runs off. Lydie stays sitting for a moment. Then she stands up and walks away, slowly, toward a small house on the property.

We pull out to a wide shot of the parking lot and garden, so that Lydie is a small figure, receding from our view. Text appears on the grass:

Ernest Marland is credited with being decades ahead of his time in his ideas about corporate responsibility, and in the health care, benefits, and opportunities offered to his employees.

The picture starts to fade.

Lydie Marland lived in a small house on the grounds of The Palace until she died in 1987.

She was buried next to her husband.

The Palace on the Prairie is today the permanent property of the people of Ponca City, Oklahoma.

The picture fades, not to black but to white.

THE END.