

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

by
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Based on the life of Lydie Roberts 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

*As we begin our Bicentennial,
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 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!

CUT TO:

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 A COWBOY HAT who is dangling from the top of the derrick tower, blackened with grease, attending to some mechanical problem.

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

Bennett points at Lydie, and Cowboy Hat 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

Cowboy Hat splashes water on his face.

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

Cowboy Hat dries his face with a rag.

COWBOY HAT

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 Cowboy Hat enters, holding a lantern in one hand and a single pear flower in the other.

Now that we get a better look at him, Cowboy Hat is 30; ruggedly handsome; covered in dust.

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.

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

COWBOY HAT

It was a rude welcome you got and
I'm sorry. I'm Ernie Marland. I'm
your uncle.

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

ERNEST

I don't know how to talk to
children so I'm just gonna talk how
I talk.

(then, quietly)

What we're lookin' 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 me 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 look
after you like you were 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. Thank you, Doctor.

Doctor hesitates, opens his mouth to speak. But Ernest is holding the entrance flap of the tent open. The Doctor shrugs, leaves. Ernest looks at the sleeping Lydie, then follows the Doctor out.

When they have left, Lydie opens her eyes.

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 cowshit, 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. Now, that's not a hunch, that's science.

(to the Chief, miming a 45-degree angle)

Rocks. Pffffwwwww!

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, who says something in Ponca.

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

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, huh?

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!

The crew is working through the night.

There are kerosene lamps illuminating each of the oil
derricks.

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.

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

Ernest and Lydie are in cots near each other, sleeping under the stars.

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

ERNEST

Stay here.

He takes his RIFLE from underneath his cot and goes to investigate.

EXT. THE OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

The screams are screams of joy.

RIGGER 2

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.

When Ernest arrives, faces are already painted black by the spray. Fire and primal howls. A pagan rite.

Ernest puts down his rifle and closes his eyes.

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, against orders, 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. Cars have pulled up and DISTINGUISHED OLD MEN are congratulating him.

Ernest looks to the side. His POV: Lydie sits with Audobon's Birds, the Plains behind her.

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 (O.S.)
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.

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

Clever, 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

(shaking his head)

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.
(MORE)

WILCOX (cont'd)

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)
(MORE)

LYDIE (cont'd)
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 millions. 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)

If you mix it with this, it's a
kind of breakfast drink.

ERNEST

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

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

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. HILL - DUSK

The Bentley is parked at the bottom of the hill. Ernest and Lydie, their mourning clothes dirty from sitting on the ground, look west toward the sun on the horizon.

ERNEST
She did love you.

LYDIE
I know.

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.

(MORE)

ERNEST (cont'd)
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.

The board is quiet. Suddenly, Ernest stands up.

ERNEST
Stand up.

The Board members look at each other.

ERNEST
Go on, 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 see
good dirt, we move in for the kill,
we do it *fast*.

CUT TO:

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.

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.

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 MAIN STREET - 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.

EXT. PONCA CITY MAIN STREET - DAY

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

WILCOX (O.S.)

Excuse 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

What's the name of that, then? That
bird that's singing.

Birdsong nearby.

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 today, 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, 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.

Silence.

ERNEST

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. WYNN 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, 60s, and his wife
ARLENE; JESSE, 40s, and his wife LILLIAN; POTTER, 60s; 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.

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)
(MORE)

POTTER (cont'd)

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.

Lydie, sitting staring at her glass.

ERNEST

(choosing words carefully)

What I owe everyone is to be prosperous. When business is prosperous, people work, people eat. That's the way to lift people up, not Red October and blood in the snow ...

SHAW

Oh, that's just the robber barons' old stand-by! A-rising-tide-lifts-all-boats...

JESSE

Which means damned little if your boat is leaking and surrounded by sharks.

Laughter.

POTTER

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

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

ARLENE

Miss Marland? The smoking room is for the gentlemen.

Lydie locks eyes with Ernest as Arlene 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 swimming hard, doing laps. The pool is lit by moonlight 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, thinking.

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. 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. GROVE - EVENING

Lydie sits, her arms around her knees, at the foot of one of some trees. 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.

In a moment, it's a kind of sexual frenzy.

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. He doesn't wake up.

She gathers her clothes from the floor, looks at him sleeping.

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)
Don't look now. 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? Why on earth?

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. Before Clay can exit--

ERNEST

Clay.

Clay, at the door, turns.

ERNEST

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 not raise any objections.

A beat.

CLAY

I can't think of any reason, sir.

Ernest smiles slightly and nods. Clay bows and leaves.

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 wanted to give you time to be
alone. To think. To give you the
chance to leave, if that's what you
want.

INT. GRAND AVENUE MANSION - LATER

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

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.

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.

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

Pre-lap 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 today?

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

BENNETT
(quietly)
People know now. It's dangerous.

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. He 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 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.

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

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.

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 who will live in it?

He grins.

LYDIE
We already have a house.

ERNEST
We have a house where you were my
daughter. This is the house where
you'll be my wife.

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 suppose 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.

EXT. THE PALACE - DAY

A CROWD DRESSED FOR A WEDDING, leaving their cars, entering majestic stone gates. They are seeing the grounds of the now-completed house 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. It is already being called the Palace on the Prairie.

It's a grand mansion that is somewhere between Spanish-style hacienda and Roman villa. Every inch either custom-built or imported from a Florentine palace or Venetian villa or some grand place.

JUDGE (O.S.)

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

ANGLE on lake with islands, and water stocked with fish and birds.

ANGLE on the painted wooden ceiling of the Great Room. 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
It's not as if they're 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
(putting it together)
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.

ERNEST
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 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)
How's this one?

ERNEST
Kiss me.
(she does)
Again.
(MORE)

ERNEST (cont'd)
(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)
Oh, but 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.

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.

LYDIE

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

Page 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

(quietly)

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
Oh, it's too dark to see the
gardens properly now. But 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, wasn't I?

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. It 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

If you knew where to find me, I
don't understand why you didn't
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.

ON Lydie.

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. But if you need
anything at all, 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.

(pause)

I shouldn't have.

(a beat)

Before, she couldn't afford enough
to drink herself to death.

Now, we hear the sound of wood hitting wood, hard.

EXT. THE PLAINS - AFTERNOON

It's a polo mallet hitting a ball. Lydie rides Cyrus in the
polo fields. She's practicing hitting balls. It's just her.

Pre-lap the sound of a neigh.

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)

I wonder if 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 rodeo bull.
I'll take him.

(stroking Cyrus; to him)

You need to go to the doctor? Huh?

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 that horses are
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" ?

PENDER

[Exactly.]

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 Redhaded 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. And 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 TOM DERRAH, 40s, the Chief Financial Officer of Marland
Oil.

DERRAH

We do what employers are supposed to do. We pay our employees. We're not their parents, 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.

An uncomfortable moment. Ernest, who has been silently taking all this in, turns calmly to Derrah.

ERNEST

It seems to me, Tom, that the most efficient way to do this, is to 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. 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 1928 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 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.

She nods.

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)
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 and 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
As you know, the power dynamic in
any town is a-- delicate balance.
He feels threatened by the way you
and Ernest have been talking to
some of the local honchos.

ON Lydie. She doesn't respond.

BENNETT
Just promise you'll try and win him
over. All right?
(lifting his own glass to
toast with her)
Make friends.

INT. BENNETT'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - EVENING

The fifteen guests sit at a long dinner table. The dessert course.

ERNEST

Well, 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.

On Engell. Shaw, pouring Ernest more wine.

ERNEST

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

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. 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

See, 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

She's not what I expected.

GUEST 2

What were you expecting?

He shrugs, shakes his head.

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.

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)

Stop here please. 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.

CUT TO:

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 at
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'?

Lydie nods.

FIELD WORKER 1

We sure appreciate what you're doin', ma'am, treating us like people, you of all people. Thing about all this 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, ma'am, and take away the payments on my house, I'd be more'n happy to work normal hours and go to school. But I'm afraid the way things stand, it just ain't rigged in our favor.

INT. MARLAND OIL BOARD ROOM - DAY

Sitting around the table. The Board, including LYDIE.

BENNETT

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

ERNEST

Good. What else?

LYDIE

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

BOSKIRK

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

ERNEST

People have their dignity. You can't feel proud of a home you've acquired through someone else's charity.

A moment. Ernest stands, thinking. Then--

ERNEST

You know, the real reason the men 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?

All look at Lydie, and Lydie looks at Ernest, who raises his eyebrows.

INT. SECURITY STATE BANK OF PONCA CITY - DAY

EMPLOYEES are assembled in the small bank lobby.

ERNEST

Good morning, gentlemen. 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)

Come to think of it, make it five.
It 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.

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
But we have to be finished in time.
People have signed up. Classes
start in four days.

ARCHITECT

We're using every available worker within 100 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

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.

INT. THE PALACE - NIGHT

Lydie is asleep in her painting clothes. Ernest puts a
blanket over her and turns out the light.

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! Your projects have
monopolized your attention long
enough. Today I'm monopolizing you.

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

Do you hate me that you're not a
mother?

She takes a long moment. Then, almost imperceptibly, she shakes her head and takes the flower in her hand.

LYDIE

Hypoxis hirsuta. Star grass.

A wider shot. The sun's setting.

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)

"We must seize the chance in this
country for a more enlightened form
of capitalism.

(MORE)

SUIT 1 (cont'd)

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. Find something. Discredit him.

Now Wilcox speaks up.

WILCOX

Does it help, sir, that he's married to his daughter?

INT. THE PALACE, GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Two weeks before Christmas, 1932.

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.

CUT TO:

They are decorating a very large Christmas tree. Each manning a ladder on a different side of the tree.

ERNEST

Morgan wants to broker a deal to take the financial pressure off us. So I won't have to run around the country any more to secure loans.

LYDIE

I don't understand why you even need to secure loans. We own our own bank, for God's sake.

ERNEST

The new Texas options are in the tens of millions. Even Marland Oil needs to be bankrolled that.

(re: an ornament made by a child. It says LYDIE.)

Look.

She smiles.

ERNEST

Morgan's drawn up an agreement that will get us cash and let us keep control.

LYDIE

And what's the downside?

ERNEST

I haven't found one yet. Standard would have a stake in the company, but Morgan's found a mom-and-pop company to take the other chunk. The Clover Oil Company.

Lydie looks quizzical.

ERNEST

That's their real name, I swear. Founded by Mr. Jed Clover. They're Episcopalians from Gunnersburg, Ohio, with old family money. Prepared to buy a 22 percent share.
(going down to a stack of cards in a box)
They even sent a Christmas Card... Gracious family photo enclosed.

He hands the card across the tree to her ladder.

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

"The Clovers wish you and yours a blessed Christmas Season." My God, the daughters look dour.

ERNEST

And so would you be if you lived in
Gunnersburg, Ohio.

ERNEST

The Clovers keep Rockefeller at
bay. Investment capital without
bankers. No more running from coast
to coast. More time here with you.
Where's the downside to that?

The dour Clover daughters stare ahead in the photo.

INT. CHURCH RECTORY - DAY

An Old Woman leads Engell into the living room where a man in
a suit is sitting. Engell looks at the man.

ENGELL

Can I help you?

The man stands, extends his hand.

WILCOX

Good morning, Reverend. My name is
Wilcox. Ben Wilcox.

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.

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 being 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 simple 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

The decorated Christmas tree in the background.

Lydie is taking cards from the box of Christmas cards we saw
earlier.

Removing them from their envelopes and arranging the cards on
a table.

She gets to: "The Clovers wish you and yours a blessed
Christmas season" with the photo of the Clover family. Lydie
smiles. She looks at the envelope, with a hand-written return
address of Gunnersburg, Ohio.

But Lydie looks to the right of the return address. The
postmark says : PARK AVENUE STATION. NEW YORK, NY 10022.

ON Lydie.

CUT TO:

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, NY 10022.

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

No, 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 doesn't exist. He's a front. He *is* Standard Oil.

ERNEST

But that's fraud.

LYDIE

Not if they did the paperwork to incorporate as Clover Oil.

Now Ernest is in complete shock. He has to sit down.

ERNEST

The stock we sold to Rockefeller plus the stock to the Clovers --

LYDIE

The non-existent Clovers.

ERNEST

-- amounts to 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.

BENNETT

What can we do?

ERNEST

Stay cordial. Hope for the best.

(beat)

Maybe they'll sit back and collect
their checks and won't interfere.

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)

Ben, my friend. Ernest will be
happy to see you back in the Outlet
again.

WILCOX

Mr. Marland won't be attending
today.

Wilcox sits in Ernest's seat, begins to remove documents from
a briefcase.

WILCOX

(pre-lap)

The first item for discussion on
your list will be the leadership
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

But 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

Now, 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

Expenses 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. THE PALACE, GREAT ROOM - EVENING

Lydie is pacing the room, smoking a cigarette.

LYDIE
The only way is to start a revolution. 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, Lydie. 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 of this?

BENNETT

Everyone. The YMCA. Walt at the American Legion. Tucker and Snow in the mayor's office. The press. Obviously.

He slaps and tosses the newspaper.

BENNETT

For God's sake, Reverend Engell has been preaching that you're the devil, that Standard is saving the city from going up in flames like Gomorrah.

Lydie 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. "

(MORE)

ENGELL (cont'd)

Thus it came to pass: when God destroyed the Cities of the Plain, Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters went up from Zoar and 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 they plied their father with wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; but he was not aware of her lying down or her getting up. 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.

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.

INT. ERNEST'S CAR - DAY

Driving from Oklahoma City to Ponca City. Bennett hands Ernest a thick stack of papers.

BENNETT

These are the terms of the suits.
They're challenging just about
every one of your assets.

ERNEST

But not the personal accounts.

BENNETT

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. He looks out the window. The car is passing the PONCA CITY RAILYARDS.

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.

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.

BENNETT
 (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 Bennett has caught up.

BENNETT
 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...

BENNETT
 (restraining him)
 Ernest!

ERNEST
 I'M the office, you asshole! I'M
 the company! I'M THE COMPANY!!

Before Ernest can kick the Painter again, Bennett drags 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! I'M THE COMPANY!!
 I'M THE COMPANY! I'M THE COMPANY!!

EXT. THE PALACE, GARDENS - NIGHT

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
 You know, my father -- your
 grandfather, your father-in-law --
 never lived to see me make a
 fortune. But [on the other hand] 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. He 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. THE PALACE, LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Handing Ernest a document to sign.

BOSKIRK
 Part of the agreement is that you
 leave Ponca City. They feel your
 presence would be a distraction to
 the new board.

Ernest is silent. Lydie jumps in.

LYDIE
(brightly; trying to buoy
him up)
We'll go to Oklahoma City. I've
always wanted to try living in
Oklahoma City.

She takes his hand, but he's very, very low.

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.

He braces for rage, but what he gets is something more like pity.

LYDIE
I defended you once. I was wrong.

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

ERNEST

(touching a radiator)

I think I can feel it now.

He blows out a match and sits at the dinner table with Lydie, who is wearing a coat.

LYDIE

You didn't tell 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
You could inspire people, you
could.--

ERNEST
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!

He throws down his fork, startling her. Suddenly, he's
volcanic.

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 tosses his plate at the wall and it shatters.

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 in the snow. It is Ernest. On the ground, shivering, covered in snow.

Lydie hurries to him. She takes off her coat and places it on him like a blanket.

She sits in the snow next to him and lifts him off the ground, against her breast. She sits rocking him in her arms.

LYDIE
(whispers)
Come back inside. Come back. Come
back. Come back.

We pull out to a wide shot of 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. Hold there.

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 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.

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

It's bad luck, burying your husband and your father on the same day.

CUT TO:

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. 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, I suppose.

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.

A moment.

CLAY

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!

Lydie is sitting in a chair, in a room with a mural of men on horses in the background. Bright lights shine in her eyes, and she squints.

Another part of the room:

NEWS 7 REPORTER
(to a Cameraman)
How wide are you? Getting the
background, yeah?
(she makes an imaginary
box around her head)
Is that safe for the boom?

Back to Lydie. Clay goes to Lydie in her chair.

CLAY
You're all right?

Lydie nods. The camera focuses 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: 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 so-called 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)

Well Don, 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.

LYDIE

I don't know what to say to thank you.

She 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 off 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 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.