

THE JEWEL OF GENOA

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SACRAMENTO RETIREMENT CENTER - DAY

Early-morning sunlight bathes the front elevation of the center.

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

"2001"

CLOSE-UP - SIGN

"MARANATHA SENIOR RESIDENCE"
"Independent and Assisted Living"
"'Living Closer to God'"

EXT. MARANATHA SENIOR RESIDENCE - DAY

The hallways awaken with activity. STAFF interact with a cross-section of RESIDENTS, from those nodding in WHEELCHAIRS to the more actively alive.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE-UP

of an old SCRAPBOOK lying atop a BUREAU. An old woman's HANDS open the COVER and leaf slowly through the PAGES.

SERIES OF SHOTS - OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

A) A SIGN, circa 1930, reading:

Welcome to
MINDEN, NEVADA
Douglas County Seat
Pop. 1,840

B) A primitive Western SIGN, circa 1934, arching over an unpaved RANCH DRIVEWAY, reading:

DIAMOND M

C) Two handsome COUPLES, posed in front of a 1932 MODEL A FORD ROADSTER, RUMBLE SEAT open. One strapping young MAN is wearing a silver STETSON, the other, smaller MAN, a straw BOATER. The young WOMEN smile broadly, as if sharing a joke. Behind them is a neat, whitewashed STOREFRONT; over their heads is a SIGN reading:

SILVER ROWEL SALOON
Food · Drink · Entertainment
Abner & Hattie Gardner, Props.

- D) A stiffly serious, young RANCHER and his late-teens BRIDE, displaying a wedding studio LOGO dated "September 5, 1936."
- E) The same couple, older, with a smiling six-year-old DAUGHTER.
- F) The same couple, older, with the daughter, now a saucy 16, and a timid-looking 10-year-old son, all posing in SWIMSUITS in an arid LAKE setting.

BACK TO SCENE

The hands close the scrapbook, carry it to SUITCASE on a BED, and pack it carefully away.

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY

Standing before his MIRROR, BARNEY RASMUSSEN, 75, cinches a turquoise bolo tie into his Western shirt collar. He carefully dons and adjusts a cowboy hat that would have made Roy Rogers jealous.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAILWAYS BUS - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Forty years younger, Barney sits in the driver's SEAT of a long-haul passenger BUS. He adjusts his driver's CAP to a jaunty angle and appears satisfied. He opens the DOOR and begins greeting his period PASSENGERS gaily. He makes one and all laugh, and comfortable.

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

HECTOR ALVAREZ, 77, buttons his dated but still-natty JACKET, steps to his BUREAU and puts on his WRISTWATCH. He looks at an old PORTRAIT of himself in his Marine dress uniform, circa 1943.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDING CRAFT (LST) - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Artillery and mortar ROUNDS splashing all around him, a tense Lance Corporal Hector Alvarez crouches in a LANDING CRAFT and clutches his M-1. The LST's GATE DROPS and he follows his platoon MATES into the WAVES, scrambling for the BEACH.

CUT TO:

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Hector replaces the photo and goes to the CORNER of the ROOM and takes the handle of a small DOLLY holding an OXYGEN TANK. A MASK and TUBING are attached. He leaves, wheeling the dolly behind him.

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY

Dressed to go out, BEATRICE KNUDSEN, 80, finishes smoothing the duvet on her twin bed.

CUT TO:

INT. U.S.O. BALLROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A head-turner even in an olive-drab UNIFORM, a saucy Beatrice picks up dance CARDS from DRINK and BUTT-laden TABLES, dodging G.I. pinches. She mounts the BANDSTAND, caresses the MICROPHONE, and begins crooning.

CUT TO:

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Beatrice crosses the room to BERTHA SUE HANKS, 81. She straightens the BOW on her roommate's BLOUSE and touches her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Stunning in a slinky GOWN, Bertha Sue leans in as a MAKEUP ARTIST touches her up on a movie SET decorated with "Buy Bonds" PARAPHERNALIA. The DIRECTOR approaches.

DIRECTOR

We're ready, Bertha Sue. We truly appreciate this.

BERTHA SUE

Least I can do, with a war on.

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

ELLIE BUSH, 83, sits alone in a dark ROOM overstuffed with religious ARTIFACTS. She rises and straightens her prim, boring DRESS.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY (FLASHBACK)

"Civil Defense" ARMBAND in place and NOTEPAD in hand, an identical but much younger Ellie peers through her front room BLINDS to the STREET below. Her NEIGHBORS are furtively loading FOODSTUFFS into a CAR.

ELLIE
(acidly)
Another rationing violation, eh?
Well, we'll just see about that!

CUT TO:

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Ellie exchanges a severe, self-approving look with her REFLECTION, takes up her BIBLE and HANDBAG, and bustles out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MARANATHA BEDROOM - DAY

Hale and ramrod-straight despite her 83 years, PEARL OPAL VENEMAN MUTTER, 83, stands in her half of the ROOM and finishes dressing. In a pale pastel PANTSUIT, she turns from the CLOSET to the BUREAU. She retrieves her sun HAT, GLOVES, and PURSE and makes for the DOOR. She hesitates.

PEARL
(to herself)
Oops! Almost forgot!

Pearl crosses to her freshly made BED, reaches under the PILLOW and retrieves a balled-up NAPKIN. She opens it and removes a tiny, peach-colored, oval TABLET.

PEARL (V.O.)
Huh. Xonoft. Get on it, like
Fern, you don't give a shit. Get
off it too quick, you can't stop.

Pearl shrugs.

PEARL
(to herself)
Oh, well - it'll come in handy
today.

Pearl adds the pill to several others in an ALTOIDS tin in her purse, smiling at its "Curiously Strong!" slogan. She walks around the other, vacant BED and pauses to stare at it.

CUT TO:

INT. SAME BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

"12 Years Earlier"

Pearl enters the room, followed by HATTIE GARDNER, 73. She is diminutive and rambunctious. They're in high spirits. A PORTER trails, wrestling Hattie's LUGGAGE.

PEARL

(laughing)

Well, dear, that was some send-off for your Abner, wasn't it?

HATTIE

(laughing)

Gracious, Pearl. Did you see the Reverend go weak in the knees when I put up that picture of Abner in his derby hat and favorite sleeve garters?

PEARL

In death as in life, I always say. Ab spent more time prayin' in that back card room of yours than he ever did in church.

Hattie eases herself onto her new BED, with some difficulty.

PEARL (CONT'D)

By the way, who's going to run the Silver Rowel now?

HATTIE

Oh, there's a nice couple worked off and on for us for a dozen years willin' to lease. Give me time in my "retirement" to decide who gets the place.

Pearl sits down on her own BED.

PEARL

Got anybody in mind, since Johnny moved back East?

HATTIE

Stevie Hutchinson, maybe, if he hasn't settled on somethin' by then, and Johnny stays away.

(to the porter)

(MORE)

HATTIE (CONT'D)

You can just set those down in the closet. Mind that heavy one, please.

The porter obeys, but the heavy CASE slips a little. Inside, GLASS CLINKS noisily when it hits the floor.

Pearl and Hattie share a flustered look. The porter looks suspiciously at the bag, then the girls. Pearl leaps up and crowds the porter toward the DOOR.

PEARL

That'll be all, dear. Thank you!

The porter shrugs and departs. Pearl sits beside Hattie and hugs her with feeling.

PEARL (CONT'D)

I'm so happy you're here. I've been lost the seven years since Earl died and Delroy uprooted me to this place. Your letters and calls all that's kept me goin', really.

HATTIE

Me too, honey.

Hattie takes in her new SURROUNDINGS.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

Well. Ab and I were more grasshoppers than ants, I guess. All we had was the bar, restaurant, and the flat upstairs. It's awful good of your boy to put me up like this.

PEARL

(archly)

Least Delroy could do. I made it a condition of my future good behavior.

HATTIE

Anyway, here I am. Don't know what I'll do without tables to wipe down and drunks to sing to, on weekends.

Pearl slips her hands around Hattie's.

PEARL

Don't worry. There's a piano in the day room. We're desperate for somethin' besides hymns.

(MORE)

PEARL (CONT'D)

(slyly)

Besides, we'll find ways to occupy ourselves - always have.

Pearl rises and helps Hattie up.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Now, let me introduce you to "dinner"- the shut-in's version of airplane food.

They depart for the DINING ROOM.

INT. SAME BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pearl prepares for bed, while Hattie unpacks her CASES.

HATTIE

You were right as rain, Pearl. That was a long way from Nevada grain-fed beef. What was that called, again?

PEARL

"Salisbury Steak" - so they say.

HATTIE

So you say. Snouts and lips, I say. Calls for a nightcap.

Hattie pulls a fifth of WHISKEY from the heavy case.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

The usual?

Pearl opens her PURSE and pulls out two small CANS of lemon-line SODA purloined from the dining room. She lifts them toward Hattie.

PEARL

"Seven and Seven."

Hattie retrieves their two GLASSES from the BATHROOM, sets them on her BUREAU, and pours two generous DRINKS.

HATTIE

Bar's open!

PEARL

Who! Go easy, girl! That half-case you smuggled in has to last a good long while.

Hattie picks up the drinks, carries one to Pearl and sits on her BED, facing Pearl.

HATTIE

No worry, there. I've already set up a regular delivery schedule.

PEARL

What? How'd you manage that?

HATTIE

(between sips)

Bein' in the saloon trade has its perks. You remember Terry Crook, the Seagram's distributor?

PEARL

After my time, I think.

HATTIE

I talked the deed to his house off the poker table and back into his pocket one Saturday night, a while back.

Pearl slaps her thigh.

PEARL

You did enough of that in your time!

HATTIE

I don't know which I'll miss more - the characters or the counseling...

(beat)

Anyway, Terry's my new "nephew" and he'll be here twice a month, bearing gifts.

Pearl grabs her purse and digs.

PEARL

Now that we have the equipment, we can have a proper ceremony!

She produces a balled-up dinner NAPKIN and corrals the Mutter family BIBLE and Hattie.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Bring your drink, Hon, and let's "process" to the crapper.

Pearl steps in mock reverence into the BATHROOM; Hattie plays along and dodders behind.

They place their drinks on the toilet's TANK. Pearl unwraps the napkin and removes a small, peach-colored PILL from it, which she puts in the center of the Bible, held flat in one hand. She smooths the napkin loosely over it and takes the arrangement in both hands, outstretched over the BOWL.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Reverend Gardner, prepare to flush!

At the tank, Hattie poises over the HANDLE.

PEARL (CONT'D)
"To thine depths, O Lord, we
consign your faithful if unrequited
servant..."

Pearl tips, the pill drops, and Hattie flushes. They render solemn, simultaneous salutes and retrieve their glasses.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Here's to total consciousness!

HATTIE
Hear, hear!

They clink, drink, and spill back into the BEDROOM, in stitches.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
That was classic, how you hid that
thing in your mouth so long, nobody
the wiser!

PEARL
No worse than a dip o' "snoose."
What kind of cowhand would I be if
I couldn't cuss, chew, and spit,
while holdin' a piggin' string in
my mouth?

They sit on their beds, still enjoying themselves.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Earl always said, if there was one
thing of mine he had to save in a
fire, it'd be my mouth.

Pearl gives Hattie a look of delicious satisfaction.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Said he enjoyed every one of its
many talents.

Hattie's mouth drops open.

HATTIE
 Pearl Opal Veneman Mutter!

PEARL
 Look at this! Pearl shocks Hattie,
 for a change! Revenge is mine!

Their laughter trails off to smiles, then a sip or two.

HATTIE
 How'd you get on that stuff,
 anyway?

Pearl darkens.

PEARL
 You know me - "Stand Up and Speak
 Up, then Shut Up." Earl's passin'
 bein' so sudden, I was a case.
 Delroy hired a pill-peddler to keep
 me quiet.

HATTIE
 How long did you actually take
 them?

PEARL
 Long enough to get through the
 grievin'. Poor substitute for love
 and comfort but, when you're stuck
 with strangers...

They reflect, a little. Pearl shakes it off and raises her
 glass again.

PEARL (CONT'D)
 That's all behind us, now. Here's
 to good times, old and new.

HATTIE
 Right back at you, Honey.

Girlish giggles ensue.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAME BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

Two Weeks Ago

Hattie, now 85, lies in a ROBE on her BED, an air CAST on her
 leg. Pearl sits anxiously at her side.

HATTIE

Aw, it ain't so bad, Honey. Four days of hospital tests and all they found was a sprain.

PEARL

Sure - they kept you in just long enough to soak up a little extra Medicare and deprive me of a roommate!

HATTIE

Don't you fret - I'll be up on that walker directly, and right across the way.

PEARL

Oh, Hattie! You're goin' to hate "assisted living." Nothin' but rules, and the deaf and demented over there.

HATTIE

(haltingly)

We'll still see each other, sometimes.

PEARL

And breakfast at seven AM? You haven't dragged out of bed before ten since baby Johnny could find his own milk!

An ORDERLY enters, transfers Hattie to a GURNEY, and wheels her out. She waves, weakly. Pearl raises her arms in futile protest, drops them, then sits, alone and dejected. A few moments pass; her head comes up again.

PEARL (CONT'D)

This just isn't right, and I'm not takin' it lyin' down!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAME ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Pearl leaves the empty bed and moves behind the half-closed DOOR, looking in the full-length MIRROR.

PEARL'S P.O.V. - THE GIRL I USED TO BE

She sees herself as a younger WOMAN: Strong, brown, with auburn locks, bold, clear eyes, and a laughing mouth.

Her sturdy frame fills a faded denim SHIRT, LEVI's, and rough-out BOOTS. She has sinewy forearms and gnarled hands with the veins, knots, and calluses standard on the wife of a working cattle feeder.

PEARL (V.O.)
Where did she go?

BACK TO SCENE

She addresses her reflection.

PEARL
Well, I'm going t' find her again,
and the lookin' starts now!

The DOOR parts slightly and another, dark-haired WOMAN with brown skin appears - MARISOL CONTRERES, 44, the nurse-assistant.

MARISOL
Señora Mutter, are you ready? You
must hurry or you will miss your
bus!

Pearl braces Marisol at the upper arms.

PEARL
Marisol, you've been real good to
me - made life in this place
bearable. Almost. I'm goin' to
miss you the most.

MARISOL
(puzzled)
But, Señora; you are only going
overnight to the South Shore, as
always. Yes?

PEARL
Well...

Pearl gets a mischievous smile and a nudge from her attendant.

MARISOL
Maybe even to gamble a little, yes?

PEARL
Whoop-tee-do. If "Miss Goody Two
Shoes" takes her eyes off us for
five minutes. Anyway, goodbye,
Marisol.

Pearl brushes by Marisol, avoiding her eyes.

MARISOL'S P.O.V. - THE LAST TIME

Pearl's resolute FIGURE recedes down the dim HALLWAY toward the FOYER's bright SUNLIGHT.

PEARL (V.O.)
Just a few more hours, and
everything will be fine.

EXT. MARANATHA PARKING LOT - DAY

ANNA MAE McDONALD, 36, Maranatha's pinch-faced Director of Recreational Services and Spiritual Development, stands beside the STEPS of a converted, Blue Bird MINI-SCHOOLBUS. She is plain, with just a hint of possibility. She taps a PENCIL resolutely on her CLIPBOARD. Twenty-odd RESIDENTS, including Pearl and Hattie, queue up.

ANNA MAE
(shouting)
Attention, "Sprightly Seniors!"
Listen, please, so I can review the
slate of exciting activities we've
planned this trip for all of you!

Pearl looks down at Hattie, hanging on her elbow and shielded by confederates as they move toward the steps.

ANNA MAE (CONT'D)
We'll start at the First Church of
the Evangelist, as usual, for a
spirited afternoon of Holy Land
slides...

PEARL
(whispering, to Hattie)
We're going to the playpen of the
Sierra Nevada, over a Friday night,
for church! Is this a great
Goddamned country, or what?

Hattie lets a snort escape, then quickly covers her mouth.

ANNA MAE
Then, a yummy early buffet at the
Royal Plate --

BARNEY (O.S.)
Aw, fer Chrissakes, Anna Mae!

Barney Rasmussen shakes his head.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

It's the same dern trip every time.
Give us a little credit, willya?
All the droolers are stayin' home,
anyway!

ANNA MAE

There'll be no cursing on this bus,
Barney Rasmussen! Remember: "To
say is to pray; to curse is worse."
Now, if I may continue...

Anna Mae prattles on. In the crowd, Pearl squeezes Hattie's arm.

PEARL

Now, Hattie, you just stay quiet
'til we get you past Anna Mae.
Okay?

Hattie nods. Pearl looks across at Beatrice.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Bea, if you would just help me get
Hattie up the steps, please - right
after Hector goes into his little
act.

Beatrice nods and catches Hattie's other elbow. Pearl taps Hector on the shoulder.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Hector, you ready?

Hector turns and smiles like a secret agent. He draws up his oxygen DOLLY and plays out most of the slack in the LINE into large loops. As he draws abreast of Anna Mae he trips into her, magnificently.

HECTOR

Good morning, Anna Maaa-
aaaaaaaaarrrrrgggghhhh!

Hector grabs for Anna Mae's upper arms after thrusting the LOOPS over her forearms. She reacts by stepping backward and jerking her arms violently upward, which pulls Hector, the line, and the dolly to her - tightly. She struggles, shrieks, and launches her clipboard.

In the hubbub, Pearl and Beatrice pack Hattie up the bus steps to:

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

A fussing Beatrice blocks the AISLE and creates a bottleneck at the door while Pearl moves Hattie to the last ROW.

PEARL

Duck down, dear, while I find
Lindell.

Hattie wedges herself between the SEATS. Pearl unlatches and lowers the top half of the adjacent WINDOW. Around the end of the building comes LINDELL MAPLES, 55, an orderly as imposing and deep as Isaac Hayes. He covers his human warmth with a thin veneer of diffidence. He muscled their CASES adroitly through the window.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Thank you, Lindell. Hattie and I --

LINDELL

Uh-Uh! I got a Spalding leather
basketball signed by Chris Webber
and a half-case of Seagram's.
That's all I need to know!

Lindell cocks an eyebrow.

LINDELL (CONT'D)

Where'd you get the basketball,
anyway, Pearl?

PEARL

Gift from my son, Delroy. Just the
thing for an eighty-three-year-old
cowgirl, don't you agree?

Lindell attempts a small wave good-bye, scarcely able to contain himself, and heads back toward the BUILDING.

Pearl stashes the cases beneath their seat.

By now, pent-up demand to get seated forces Beatrice to move to the rear. Barney and Hector herd a half-dozen bystanding PASSENGERS, mostly male, that they've conscripted into the last three rows of seats, forming a defensive perimeter.

EXT. MARANATHA PARKING LOT - DAY

Lindell walks behind the bus, pauses at the EMERGENCY EXIT DOOR and flips at an old, rusted PADLOCK HASP.

LINDELL

Somebody ought to fix that latch
before the damned door falls off!

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Pearl leans over to Hattie, poked up behind the seat like a groundhog.

PEARL
You ready, Hon?

Hattie opens her shoulder BAG. There, beneath the PREPARATION H and the FIG NEWTONS, Pearl makes out a nickel-plated, pearl-handled, .32-caliber semi-automatic PISTOL with a nine-shot magazine, and a box of cartridges.

HATTIE
(grinning)
Ready to fornicate, fight, or flee!

PEARL
Let's just stick with the "flee"
part, for now.

Pearl gets up and marches to the front of the bus as it leaves the residence and sits down next to Anna Mae.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Anna Mae, how's about a little
variety, this trip?

ANNA MAE
What do you mean?

PEARL
Well, every time we stop at Denny's
in Placerville for coffee and - uh -
rest, then push on.

ANNA MAE
Yes?

PEARL
What say we go straight to Pollock
Pines and stop at the Heidelberg
Inn for a proper lunch?

FACES brighten at the suggestion; some issue timid murmurs of approval.

ANNA MAE
Now, Pearl. You know we have a
schedule. Reverend Alston always
expects us around four.

PEARL

It's still just the one stop -
about the same amount of time,
really.

ANNA MAE

I don't know. That's a real, "sit-
down" place. Might be more
expensive...

Ellie, self-appointed assistant chaperone, speaks up:

ELLIE

Certainly sounds expensive to me!

Pearl ignores Ellie.

PEARL

I'll treat. I've put a little
extra by for this trip. Anna Mae,
I know you like a good, home-made
pastry with your coffee.

Barney, Beatrice, and Hector whine on cue.

BEATRICE

I think that's a wonderful idea!

BARNEY

Yeah - come on, Anna Mae!

HECTOR

It would make a nice break.

ANNA MAE

Well, I don't suppose there's any
harm - just this once.

ELLIE

Personally, I think we should put
it to a vote, because -

A forest of HANDS springs up and a chorus of VOICES cut Ellie
off:

VOICES

The Heidelberg!

ELLIE

(rising halfway)
But, we always stop in Placerville!

BARNEY

Aw, Ellie. You can change your
goldern diaper anytime!

Ellie goes beet-red and sits back down.

EXT. U.S. ROUTE 50 EAST - DAY

The ancient, shortish BUS, cheaply repainted to barely
conceal the NAME of the school district that unloaded it,
wheezes under an overpass SIGN:

Rancho Cordova	7 mi.
Placerville	39 mi.
S. Lake Tahoe	99 mi.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Recovered, Ellie is on her feet in her "teacher's pet" role,
trying to lead the travelers in spirituals. They respond
half-heartedly. They improve slightly when any one of them
makes eye contact with Anna Mae, so individually they try to
avoid it.

Anna Mae alternates beaming with approval at Ellie and
glaring at those muttering or showing any other rebellious
signs. She shows a habit of cocking her head at odd angles,
like a White leghorn searching for grubs.

EXT. U.S. ROUTE 50 EAST - DAY

The bus climbs a grade and rounds a CURVE, passing freeway
SIGNS that read "Pollock Pines", then "Strawberry".

Around the curve, the bus sighs and turns right off the
winding HIGHWAY into the PARKING LOT of the HEIDELBERG INN.

EXT. RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Anna Mae alights from the BUS first, torn between the break
in routine and the prospect of freshly-baked pastry. Her
pace shows the pastry is winning.

Ellie fails to form her peers into ranks, as usual. Without
Anna Mae's backup, she is nearly trampled by her fellow
passengers.

Pearl clammers down and breaks out ahead of the pack to stay
as close to Anna Mae as she can.

INT. GERMAN RESTAURANT - DAY

Twenty-two hungry SENIORS pour in and overrun the officious, pseudo-Teutonic MAITRE D', breaking into familiar cliques and seizing six TABLES of FOUR.

Pearl cuts Anna Mae out of the herd and steers her to the seventh TABLE. Ellie heads for the third CHAIR, but Pearl glares her away. Ellie retreats to the last TABLE with an open SEAT. The lone diner there is ELMER DINWIDDY, 78, a mousy, pious little man - in essence, Ellie Bush with a penis, but much less machisma.

Ellie seats herself without invitation or ceremony. Elmer gladdens as much as his inhibitions permit.

ELMER

What's going on?

ELLIE

I think Pearl Mutter is up to something. We'd better keep an eye on her.

They crane in synch, like two nervous, minor shore birds.

PULL BACK to see Pearl, frozen by a thought.

PEARL (V.O.)

Oh, shit! I forgot - it's Friday and Anna Mae is born-again Catholic!

Their WAITER brings MENUS, WATER, and BREAD.

WAITER

You ladies need anything else before I take your order?

PEARL (V.O.)

How about a short miracle?
(to Anna Mae)
Ever eaten here before, dear?

ANNA MAE

No, Pearl - can't say as I have.

PEARL (V.O.)

Thank you, Jesus!

PEARL

(to the waiter)
Can you give us a few minutes, please, dear?

Pearl looks the waiter away and interrupts Anna Mae's menu study.

ANNA MAE

Now, I'm going to have to have fish, because -

PEARL

I remembered. I recommend the Szegediner Goulasch with Spaetzle.

Anna Mae's eyes narrow.

ANNA MAE

What is it?

PEARL

Swordfish stew. Trust me.

ANNA MAE

Maybe I'll just ask the waiter...

PEARL

No need, really. Our folks - Earl's and mine - were German, you know.

Pearl jumps up and tugs at Anna Mae's CHAIR, startling her.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Why don't you freshen up? I'll order for both of us.

ANNA MAE

Well, it has been a while. Coffee to drink for me. And ask him to leave a dessert menu.

Pearl waits until Anna Mae leaves earshot, snags the waiter and orders for herself and her chaperone, including dessert.

Seated halfway across the room with Beatrice and Bertha Sue, Barney and Hector are halfway through pints of porter, and growing boisterous.

Pearl storms over. She hesitates before the virtual stranger, but abandons caution.

PEARL

(hissing)

You boys better knock it down a peg. Don't forget - we've got a job ahead of us!

Barney and Hector are penitent. Bea helps with a disapproving look. Bertha Sue keeps her own counsel. Beyond them, Ellie and Elmer watch and strain to hear.

Pearl regains her seat and her nonchalance seconds before Anna Mae reappears. She is barely seated when the waiter returns with their steaming PLATES.

WAITER

And here we are, ladies. Two
generous helpings of exquisite por
--

Pearl coughs violently. Behind her napkin, she finds the waiter's eyes and entreats him.

WAITER (CONT'D)

Er, Goulash, with German noodles.
Are you well, Mein Frau?

PEARL

Much better, thanks.

WAITER

Prima! Sehr Gut! Then... Enjoy!

The waiter wheels with a flourish and a wink at Pearl. Anna Mae takes a tentative forkful.

ANNA MAE

Oh, my gracious. This is rich!
Not as flaky as most fish...

PEARL

Swordfish is like that. Game fish,
you know. Hardy.

While Anna Mae stabs hungrily at everything, Pearl picks at her PLATE and eyes the ENTRÉE, SIDE DISH, and BEVERAGE in front of Anna Mae as they disappear.

PEARL (V.O.)

She'll spot it in the goulash.
Noodle gravy's too thin. Coffee?
Nope; aftertaste. One more chance.
Don't panic.

Anna Mae finishes every bite and picks up the dessert MENU.

ANNA MAE

So, what goes good after fish stew?

PEARL

(quickly)

Big hunk of strudel, I'd say. In fact, it's on the way. While you were in the Ladies', Anna Mae, I remembered that Mira Bridges asked me about the "Eggs 'n' Scripture" breakfast tomorrow. Maybe you could go fill her in while the strudel heats up?

ANNA MAE

Why, of course, Pearl. Be right back. Don't eat any of mine, now!

PEARL

Don't you worry!

The waiter brings the STRUDEL. Pearl retrieves three PILLS from the tin in her purse and pushes them into the hot pastry.

PEARL (CONT'D)

(in a low voice)

All right, you little suckers. Melt!

Over her shoulder, Elmer comes into focus - alone, and watching Pearl intently. Ellie returns from "helping" Anna Mae, having seen her get up. She sees that Elmer has Pearl under surveillance.

ELLIE

Anything happen while I was gone?

ELMER

I'm not certain...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Pearl strolls out with a Styrofoam BOX. When the DOOR closes, she breaks into an octogenarian sprint across the parking lot.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Pearl ankles down the AISLE, just a little out of breath, and sits by Hattie, who's lying on the rear SEAT.

PEARL

I'm sorry to leave you here, dear,
but I couldn't risk Anna Mae
finding out that you weren't on her
list. You know Anna Mae and her
Goddamned head-count!

HATTIE

(sits up, warily)
Is the coast clear?

PEARL

For a minute, anyway. Left Anna
Mae to her Strudel. Told her I had
a headache.

Hattie sits up, watching the restaurant's DOOR.

HATTIE

Are you still worried that Ellie
Bush might snitch on me?

PEARL

I was, but I don't think she's even
noticed you're in "assisted." She
and Elmer had their heads together
in there, though.

HATTIE

That can't be good.

PEARL

Aw - A busybody like her is so
taken up tryin' to catch the
neighbors at somethin' that she
doesn't see the old man goin' over
the back fence.

Hattie giggles.

HATTIE

Assuming she had one.

PEARL

Now, that Elmer; I'm not so sure...

HATTIE

So, did you get those pills into
Anna Mae?

PEARL

In the pastry. Even a blue-nose like her has a weakness, and her sweet tooth is it. Ate every damned bite, I suspect.

HATTIE

How many?

PEARL

Bites?

HATTIE

Pills!

PEARL

Three.

HATTIE

You think that's enough?

PEARL

Hell, Hattie. We just want her off her feed - not dead!

Pearl hands the "go" box to Hattie.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Now go on, Hon, and eat your lunch. The rest of 'em will be out soon. I'm sorry I couldn't get you a drink. They wouldn't let me take any beer outside.

Hattie takes a bottle of water out of her bag.

HATTIE

That's all right, Pearl. I got my "chaser" bottle right here.

Hattie opens the box and stares for a long moment at the thick, shiny Knackwurst between two new potatoes.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

You know, dear, I still miss Abner. A lot.

EXT. RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

The sated DINERS saunter out of the restaurant. Speeds and degrees of difficulty vary. Barney and Hector border-collie their press-ganged troops to the front.

BARNEY

Last one in has erectile
dysfunction!

SAD-EYED MAN

After Viagra, who cares?

HARRIED FEMALE

I do!

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

The PASSENGERS remount. Pearl quickly helps Hattie hide again. Their co-conspirators and draftees take up their positions in the last three rows again.

Ellie resumes her station near Anna Mae. Elmer troops down the aisle and stops, looking hard at each of the conspirators, then Pearl. They all feign innocence. He turns and sits in the ROW closest to them, on the other side from Hattie and Pearl. His new SEAT-MATE is annoyed, and the conspirators trade looks of concern.

As the bus drones on through the SIERRA NEVADA, Pearl monitors Anna Mae's deteriorating diction. A languorous, swiveling nod, impervious to the bus's lurches, replaces her cranial tic.

Some under the influence of liquid German courage sneaked at lunch, some full and drowsy, and the rest just glad for the break, all but two of the other passengers drowse, overlooking her state of decline.

Ellie begins to take her feet and open her mouth.

SAD-EYED MALE

Don't you have something to do?

Defeated again, she sits and resumes her own Anna Mae watch.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. U.S. ROUTE 50 EAST - DAY

The BUS chugs through LITTLE NORWAY and around the ECHO SUMMIT HAIRPIN, revealing the breathtaking panorama of the sculpted TAHOE BASIN.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Pearl carefully hauls Hattie up to where she can see down into the VALLEY. They whisper.

PEARL

This is it, Hattie: the great divide.

HATTIE

Look there, Pearl. Good old Nevada - our world!

PEARL

Right. Where folks are more caught up in life than in themselves.

HATTIE

Yep. Where self-sufficiency is knowin' that you owe most of what you are to others - and getting' comfortable with it.

PEARL

Not like California, where bein' "independent" amounts to cuttin' yourself off from others.

HATTIE

And windin' up alone with the most toys is most folks' idea of "success."

PEARL

(sighs)

Problem is, after a life of duckin' risk and sneakin' around conflict, they'll have to come to terms with the strangers they've shared space and air with.

Pearl breaks off and stares away.

PEARL (V.O.)

Like my son, Delroy, for example...

HATTIE

Pearl? You okay?

EXT. BUS - THROUGH THE REAR WINDOW

The REAR WINDOW frames their heads as the bus winds down the hill, shrinking into the magnificent scenery.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAKE TAHOE BLVD. - DAY

The BUS turns right from EMERALD BAY ROAD onto LAKE TAHOE BOULEVARD. From the Sodom and Gomorrah of casinos looking south, we see it moving north.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

By now, Anna Mae babbles through a throat full of virtual molasses and can barely sit up. MR. ROSCA, the Filipino driver, is clearly alarmed but powerless. Ellie, Elmer, and a couple other DISCIPLES are on nervous alert, but the rest entertain themselves with possible temptations.

Pearl gets to her feet.

PEARL

"Carpe Diem," Hattie. C'mon, and bring your bag.

Hattie crawls around her and makes her way forward, seizing the POLE behind the DRIVER'S SEAT. Pearl follows.

Elmer sees them go by and his lips part. Furiously, he tries to signal Ellie, but it's too late - they're in the way.

Pearl braces a slack-jawed Anna Mae against the bus's WALL and watches intently as they enter CASINO ROW.

Pearl stands again, next to Hattie, who's behind Mr. Rosca.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Mr. Rosca, please pull over at the spotlight in front of Harrah's.

(turning around)

Now, folks, there's been a slight change in plans. We're takin' a little detour over to Minden, where Hattie and I get off. If everythin' works out right, you'll be back to the "First Church of the Warehoused and Waiting to Die" in good time.

Pearl gestures toward Barney.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Mister Rasmussen, would you escort Miss McDonald into the casino and leave her where a Good Samaritan might eventually take pity, please?

Barney whoops and leaps up.

BARNEY

It would be my pleasure!

He throws Anna Mae's arm around his neck. She's somewhere between comfort and coma. He whisks her down the STEPS, across the STREET, and into the CASINO.

Elmer slithers slowly to the REAR of the bus, carefully turns the latch HANDLE, and pushes at the EXIT DOOR. The rusty padlock and hasp crumble. Elmer slips out. We see the door close, the handle slowly return to its place and, through the side window, Elmer mincing toward the ENTRANCE where Barney disappeared with Anna Mae.

Mr. Rosca rises and begins to speak. Hattie fishes in her BAG, finds her WEAPON, and points it at his neck.

HATTIE

We mean business!

Mr. Rosca sinks back into his seat.

Pearl is bemused.

PEARL (V.O.)

Good old Hattie - Even when her flair for the dramatic outruns her good sense.

Now Ellie is up.

ELLIE

Pearl Mutter and Hattie Gardner, you are both going to burn in Hell forever!

Pearl glowers.

PEARL

Ellie Bush, if you don't sit down and keep a lid on it, I swear to Christ you'll have to trade that aluminum cane for a white one!

Ellie falls back.

Barney bounds up the STEPS, fanning himself with his HAT.

BARNEY

Mission accomplished, Pearl!

PEARL

Good work, Barney. Mr. Rosca, if you'll put it in gear, we'll be making a right turn about --

MR. ROSCA

No.

Pearl and Hattie look at each other. Mr. Rosca pleads with his eyes and his hands.

MR. ROSCA (CONT'D)

I m-mean, I can't. I don't have a "Class A" license. If I get caught, I lose my job!

HATTIE

Uh, oh, Pearl. Looks like we've got a kink here.

Pearl studies the driver and mulls over her options.

PEARL (V.O.)

Here's a man who beat Demon Rum the old-fashioned way - bypassed the "Twelve Steps" for the "Three-D" method. "Drunk; Dried out; Devout." He surely deserves a break.

PEARL

Barney, didn't you used to drive a bus?

BARNEY

Yes, Ma'am. Trailways - thirty-two years.

PEARL

Think you can handle this antique Blue Bird?

BARNEY

Just like riding a bike!

Pearl turns back to Mr. Rosca.

PEARL

If you'll take a seat over here next to me, Mr. Rosca, please. Hattie, come sit behind us. Barney, you'll want to go north about a mile --

BARNEY

Know it like the back of my hand!

Barney slides eagerly into the driver's SEAT.

Mr. Rosca is more relieved than frightened as he takes Pearl's side, even though his peripheral vision picks up the occasional FLASH of nickel behind his left ear.

PEARL

Hattie, is that safety on? You know - in case of a bump. Or Parkinson's. Or something.

EXT. NEVADA HIGHWAY 207 - DAY

The Maranatha BUS labors east, up the HILL toward DAGGET PASS and the KINGSBURY GRADE beyond.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Pearl briefs Barney.

PEARL

Here's the plan: Turn north on Foothill Road from Two-Oh-Seven, take Muller Lane east over to Three Ninety-five. Turn south, drop us in Minden, then head right back to the church.

Barney nods and salutes.

BARNEY

Aye, aye, Cap - I mean, Ma'am!

HATTIE

What do we do once we get there, Pearl?

PEARL

It's a short hop out to the ranch. I figure I can bulldoze Charlie Nye, our tenant, into putting us up. Then we can puzzle out how to deal with Delroy.

Beatrice, Barney, and Hector are a young, fit bridge crew aboard a hurtling starship, awaiting the order to battle stations. Bertha Sue looks interested.

Ellie plucks up her courage enough to read Old Testament PASSAGES aloud, pausing to emphasize those that feature the fiery retributions of a just and vengeful God. Her two remaining, true-believer allies whisper prayers.

The rest hope for - they aren't certain what. The uncertainty reinvigorates them.

Pearl looks back through the WINDOW of the emergency exit and picks up the glinting of the LAKE, just beyond the Nevada Beach CAMPGROUNDS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MINDEN STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

July 4, 1936

BACK TO SCENE

Pearl Veneman, barely 18, meets a 21-year-old Hattie Churchill Gardner under the sign over Minden's flagship SALOON, the SILVER ROWEL.

HATTIE

The old gal looks pretty good,
doesn't she?

PEARL

Sure does. How long you been open
now, since Abner spruced her up?

HATTIE

Over a year - since just after
Johnny was born.

PEARL

Where is Johnny?

HATTIE

Mama's got him for the night. One
less excuse to come home early!

ABNER GARDNER, 25, strolls around from the back - compact, ebullient, and looking more the dandy than the innkeeper this day. He lugs picnic SUPPLIES. EARL LUDWIG MUTTER, 25, cowboyed up as befits the foreman of and heir to the "Diamond M," trails him with more GEAR. On his head he sports a brand-new silver STETSON. They stack their cargo on the passenger-side FENDER of his MODEL A ROADSTER, and lash it down.

Hattie drags Pearl toward them.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Ab and I ride up front, you and Earl in the rumble seat. The noise will keep you from saying anything stupid before you're used to each other.

Pearl slapped at Hattie's shoulder.

PEARL

Hattie Gardner, if you aren't the biggest --

HATTIE

I know you two. Ain't nothin' ever goin' to happen unless you get pushed into it.

Earl shyly approaches the pair from behind.

EARL

'Afternoon, Miss Veneman.

PEARL

Goodness, Earl Mutter! You gave me a start!

ABNER

Everybody ready?

HATTIE

Ready as they'll ever be!

Earl checks his feet, blushing. Abner grins and slaps him on the back.

The young men head for the car. Hattie yanks Pearl aside and whispers in her ear.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

You can't be pure forever, Pearl. Give it a chance. A little Hell is worth a big slice of Heaven - believe me.

Pearl betrays a mixture of apprehension and anticipation.

EXT. ABNER'S MODEL A - DAY

The group drives west. Abner and Hattie converse animatedly. Pearl and Earl try.

EARL
 (shouting)
 You plannin' on goin' on in school?

PEARL
 What?

EARL
 School! After you graduate!

PEARL
 (straining)
 What?

EARL
 (frustrated)
 I said --

PEARL
 What?!

Earl gives up and searches for something casual to do with his hands.

Hattie answers Pearl's glare with a smile.

EXT. NEVADA BEACH, LAKE TAHOE - DAY

The afternoon is spectacular. The SUN and the LAKE battle to a draw in their shimmering contest, against the luminousness of the SHALLOWS and EVERGREENS.

OTHERS are there, but the four focus on each other. They change into SWIMSUITS under an old BLANKET and run, swim, wrestle, and lounge. They fall into the roles of creatures familiar to them. Abner and Earl preen, snort, and athletically circle the females, seated together. They alternate actively teasing their beaus and feigning indifference, by pretending to read - feeding the boys' need to show off.

PEARL (V.O.)
 Oh, I was a champion flirter;
 Hattie saw to that. Up 'til then,
 though, the most I'd seen on a boy
 was a shirt off. And that, from a
 way off.

Earl's alabaster chest, trunk and legs, against his tanned face, neck, and forearms, fascinate Pearl. She hides her curiosity about the parts and the whole of his ranch-hardened body from the men, but not from her pleased confidante and supervisor. Hattie catches Pearl looking at Earl occasionally and her embarrassed pleasure earns a smile.

In their roughhousing, Pearl naturally touches Earl's chest, armpits, and the backs of his legs.

PEARL (V.O.)

It was the strangest thing. That wiry-lookin' hair between his nipples, under his arms, and sproutin' out of his suit was silky-soft. And the skin on his upper thighs was nothin' like his strong, rough hands...

Pearl surprises herself during their rituals. Her swimsuit rakes her nipples and tugs against her pubic mound, sending sharp currents of pleasure through her.

Out comes their twilight DINNER. They eat hungrily, chasing FRIED CHICKEN with LEMONADE. GIN and COFFEE follow the PIE. Alcohol and libido accelerate their talk and laughter. Pearl looks into Earl's shy eyes, as clear and boundless as Nevada pastureland.

EXT. NEVADA BEACH - NIGHT

TWILIGHT yields to DARK. Abner and Earl make a show of building a FIRE while the girls watch. The couples huddle under separate BLANKETS. Up the beach, Abner and Hattie watch intently as the other couple talks quietly.

Hattie elbows Abner.

ABNER

Ow! What?!

HATTIE

C'mon, Ab. I've got her this far; time for Nature to take over. Let's give 'em a little privacy.

Abner nuzzles her a little.

ABNER

We could keep a little for ourselves, too, huh?

Hattie rumbles with laughter and grabs his backside. They rise noiselessly and disappear toward the CAR.

EXT. NEVADA BEACH - NIGHT

FIRELIGHT flickering off his face, Earl speaks earnestly into the LAKE about his plans. Nestled on his shoulder, Pearl watches his strong profile.

EARL

Way I see it, it's best to cut the
herd, take a loss, and put most of
the graze into hay until beef
prices come up some --

The staccato crackle and red glare of FIREWORKS erupt from both of the distant ends of the lake. Earl jerks his head back and forth in surprise.

Pearl laughs and impulsively pulls herself up to him. His leathery scents inflame her. He flushes and kisses her, hard. They press and gasp and slide into and around each other.

PEARL (V.O.)

Right then, the mystery unraveled.
It was natural, warm, and right to
me.

CLOSE-UP - PEARL'S FACE

As Earl penetrates her, she winces, hesitates; then pleasure spreads over her face, and she becomes more aggressive.

PEARL (V.O.)

And Hattie was right. A little
pain gave way to a deep pleasure
I'd never felt before.

Their undulating pace increases. Inside their heated passion, Pearl detaches for a moment and marvels at the coolness of their drenched, united flesh.

PEARL (V.O.)

It struck me. Unlike mindless,
momentary, animal procreation, this
was different. Special. Earl and
I were gods, in an ancient and
protected ritual.

Earl strains into ejaculation and a clinging and moaning Pearl follows. Distant explosions of high rockets bracket them.

PEARL (V.O.)

How about that? First time -
fireworks!

They lie together, SWADDLED, faces inches apart.

EARL
 (haltingly)
 Opal. My "Jewel of Genoa." I-I
 love you. I want - Will you --?

Pearl pushes her finger to his lips.

PEARL
 Yes, Earl, dearest. I will.

She encircles his body and buries his head in her breasts. She feels hot droplets on them as he tries manfully but fails to contain his relief and joy. She covers his head with kisses and mixes her tears with his.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEVADA BEACH - NIGHT

From the LAKE, we see Earl and Pearl walk up the BEACH, wound in the BLANKET and chatting quietly. They veer toward the distant HEADLIGHTS of Abner's CAR. As they approach, above the lights are Abner, dozing behind the WHEEL, and Hattie, beaming.

PEARL (V.O.)
 For me, from that moment until my
 Earl died, nothing was guaranteed,
 everything was up for grabs, and
 anything seemed possible.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY (PRESENT)

Barney hears SIRENS through his open WINDOW.

BARNEY
 Uh-oh. Pearl!

The travelers can see the intersection where MULLER ROAD runs into U.S. ROUTE 395.

PEARL
 Pull over behind that stand of
 trees, will you, please, Barney?

EXT. U.S. ROUTE 395 - DAY

Pearl alights, sneaks to the edge of the TREES and squints. The Dopplered WAIL of two Douglas County Sheriff's CRUISERS peaks as they flash past a sign at the intersection:

Minden -->.

PEARL
 (to herself)
 H'm. Anna Mae must be makin' more
 sense by now than I figured.
 Should have used four.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - DAY

Pearl re-boards.

PEARL
 Barney, double back and take
 Foothill north. Mr. Rosca, you
 have one of those cellulite phones.
 May I borrow it a minute, please?

Barney makes a U-turn and guides the BUS east. We watch
 Pearl sit and make her call. They turn right on FOOTHILL;
 Pearl snaps the phone shut and sees a SIGN through the
 windshield:

GENOA, NV
 Pop. 245
 Welcome

Pearl stands at the front RAIL and watches intently up the
 street.

PEARL (CONT'D)
 There, Barney - Agnew Street! Turn
 left, please. And... Stop!

EXT. GENOA HOUSE - DAY

Pearl lets herself down and, hands on hips, takes it in.
 Large, two-story house; yellow clapboard, white trim.
 Magnificent, three-sided porch that would lengthen and
 magnify any summer night.

BOBBY (O.S.)
 Pearl! Pearl Opal Mutter!

BOBBY SANGIACOMO, 60 and lean, bursts through the screen
 door, vaults down the steps, hoists Pearl and twirls her
 aloft, joyously.

PEARL
 (gaily)
 Easy, youngster. The only knife I
 ever flirted with was in the Silver
 Rowel, and I'd like to keep it that
 way!

He sets her down, his face shining down on hers.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Is that really you, Bobby
Sangiaco?

BOBBY
Yes, Ma'am!
(mock frown)
But, please; it's "Bob." I'm a
businessman now.

He sweeps his arm grandly toward the yard SIGN.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
That is - when I'm not coaching and
recruiting for U.N.R.

PEARL
(reading)
"Genoa Home Inn Bed and Breakfast."
(continues)
God knows it was home to me and
half the town when your
grandparents lived here.

BOBBY
Just like your place was to me,
that summer I hired on to buck
bales. A good start on manhood.

Pearl is grave.

PEARL
That was a harder year than I
bargained for. You were more than
a help to us, Bobby; you were a
good friend to Delroy - when he
needed one.

BOBBY
How is Delroy?

PEARL
(beat)
We don't talk much.

Pearl sweeps aside the uneasiness.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Is the hardware store still
thriving?

BOBBY
Naw, Dad closed it and retired ten
years ago.
(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Between Wal-Mart and Carson
growing, he took a real beating.

PEARL

How are Robert and Linda?

BOBBY

Dad died seven years ago and Mom,
right after that.

PEARL

Oh, Bobby, I'm so sorry!

(angry)

That's another thing - can't keep
up, bein' so far away!

BOBBY

No, Pearl, I'm sorry. Mister
Mutter buried nineteen years ago
and me on the road. I didn't ever
get to say good-bye to either of
you.

PEARL

That's life, these days.
Everyone's on their way somewhere
else. Oh, what the Hell, Bobby -
no need, now. I'm back.

BOBBY

So you told me, and you need a
ride?

PEARL

Please. If it isn't any trouble.

BOBBY

Not a bit. Where we off to?

Bobby looks up at the branch full of owls in the bus.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

And, is it just you, or am I gonna
have to make several trips?

PEARL

(laughs)

Don't know right yet. Startin'
out, it was just Hattie Gardner and
me, straight to Minden. What do
you have in the way of wheels?

BOBBY

The Inn has a nine-passenger van,
mostly for fetching guests from
Reno or Carson and squiring them
around to the local, uh, sights.
That do?

PEARL

Sounds fine.

Bobby heads for the partially-hidden GARAGE.

BOBBY

Back in a few, Pearl.

Pearl folds her arms and paces. Hattie gets down and watches her.

PEARL (V.O.)

Let's see. Barney and Hector are
into this pretty deep, and we're
gonna need leverage in case
anything else jumps up...

She senses someone behind her.

BERTHA SUE (O.S.)

I'll make a better hostage.

Pearl whips around and looks down into Bertha Sue's steady green eyes.

PEARL

Why, Bertha Sue Hanks! The new
girl who doesn't say five words a
month at the home!

(merrily)

Well. What are your
qualifications?

BERTHA SUE

Ain't as big a pain in the butt as
Ellie Bush, for starters.

PEARL (V.O.)

Other than being a mind-reader, I
mean.

BERTHA SUE

I'm - used to be - an actress;
pretty good one, too. My youngest
is a lawyer back in Sacramento,
with political ambitions.

(MORE)

BERTHA SUE (CONT'D)

Complete horse's patoot. He'd do anything to protect his political future.

PEARL

(mock seriousness)

What's in it for you?

BERTHA SUE

Publicity'd do me good. Might get some character work; look at Gloria Stewart! Besides, if my grandkids think I'm famous, maybe they'll tear themselves away from their video games more often.

PEARL

Well, I guess you're hired!

Pearl, Hattie, and Bertha Sue turn to reboard.

INT. MARANATHA BUS - CONTINUOUS

PEARL

Good news, Ellie. We're back on track. You'll be in Jesus' arms by sundown. Hattie, get our things. Anybody else want to remain fugitives?

Barney and Hector get up, looking like school kids afraid of being picked last for kickball.

PEARL (CONT'D)

That's what I thought. Come on, boys.

(to Mr. Rosca)

You can find your way back, can't you? I wouldn't worry too much. They won't be expecting you - from this direction, anyway.

Hattie, Barney, Hector, and Bertha Sue disembark.

Pearl surveys the remainder; her brow furrows.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Wait a minute. Where's Elmer?

Pearl sees satisfaction flash across Ellie's face. Pearl gets it, and gets off.

EXT. GENOA HOME - DAY

The boys wave stupidly like tots left off at day camp. Pearl sees a hint of a smile from Mr. Rosca as he closes the DOOR and turns the ENGINE over.

As the BUS creeps away, more than a few disappointed faces peer out at the five. Ellie glares out and gets up.

INT. MARANTHA BUS - DAY

Ellie smiles triumphantly and claps her hands.

ELLIE

Now that we're free of Satan's
grip, everyone, how about "Shall We
Gather at the River?"

ELLIE'S P.O.V.

The Sad-Eyed Man leads a unified chorus of voices from 15 angry faces:

VOICES

Screw you, Ellie Bush!

EXT. GENOA HOME - DAY

The refugees huddle.

PEARL

Wasn't Anna Mae that gave us up.
Elmer Dinwiddy must've sneaked off
when Barney took her into Harrah's.

BARNEY

Aw, Dagnabbit!

HATTIE

Well, what next? We can't go
straight on back to Minden now.

PEARL

I know, I know. Let me think.

Barney brightens.

BARNEY

How about Mexico?

The other four glare at him.

BARNEY (CONT'D)
 (sheepish)
 Okay - maybe not.

Bobby pulls up in the B & B's VAN and winds down the WINDOW.

BOBBY
 All set, Pearl?

Hattie and Pearl conclude a private conference.

PEARL
 Just one more favor, Bobby. May I
 use your phone?

BOBBY
 You bet. Right inside the door, in
 the hallway.

Pearl hustles up the steps and through the door.

INT. GENOA HOME - DAY

Pearl dials the hallway PHONE.

PEARL
 Hello, information? Carson City or
 Mound House. I need the number of
 the Rabbit Ranch, please.

INT GENOA HOME VAN - DAY

Bobby heads north out of GENOA, up JACK'S VALLEY ROAD, and steers left onto U.S. ROUTE 395, going north. Before long, a Nevada State Police CAR screams by, going south. He and Pearl trade worried looks.

PEARL
 Guess they still think we're headed
 to Minden.

BOBBY
 Guess so!

EXT. CARSON CITY - DAY

The VAN continues north into the CITY, past the STATE CAPITOL, and turns right onto EAST WILLIAMS, then six miles on RTE. 50 to RED ROCK ROAD. It follows a series of signs, passing one that reads:

HOT & NASTY SEX
 300 Yds. AHEAD

INT. GENOA HOME VAN - CONTINUOUS

A cluster of low, manufactured BUILDINGS - easily mistaken for a close-order trailer park, but for the tawdry SIGNS and the white stretch LIMOUSINE out front - grows larger through the windshield. Fronting it is a high chain-link FENCE with a heavy, motorized, welded-steel security GATE operated from just inside the ENTRANCE.

HATTIE:

Land! Looks like they're building
an atomic bomb in there!

BOBBY

Entertainment is serious business
in this state. Indulging the
appetites of others for profit
requires close supervision.

HAMMER, a bodyguard - Mr. T, but tattooed, 20 years younger, and drafted directly from the W.W.F - appears, peers into the van at Pearl and motions to his colleague LI'L JIMMY, 35, a Caucasian copy, to buzz them in. Pearl is awestruck at the sight.

PEARL

Oh, my. Six o' them and Earl and I
wouldn't have needed ropes and
horses.

A bloatish apparition throws open her door, on the verge of a hearty greeting. It's CASWELL P. "PETE" COLLIER, every inch the retired, out-of-shape cowhand turned entrepreneur. He seizes her arms and yanks her out onto the DRIVEWAY.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

PETE

Miz Mutter? Goddamn!

PEARL

(uncertain)

Is that you, Pete Collier?

PETE

You bet it is, Ma'am; best calf-
roper this side o' Lovelock. Wull.
Used t'be, anyhow.

Pete cants his fleshy, slick-haired head and tries to find his Italian SHOES under his outcrop of paunch.

PETE (CONT'D)

Still eat like a hand, but the
hardest thing I ride these days is
a desk chair.

Pete shields his mouth from the other's ears.

PETE (CONT'D)

Officially, I'm "Cashwell P. FoXXX"
- three capital Exes. C.E.O. of
"Happy Hare Enterprises, Inc."
Show business - film, publishing,
and... pleasure.

PEARL

You own all this? No offense,
Pete, but the way I remember it,
everything but your saddle wound up
on the card table most Saturday
nights.

PETE

Aw, I'm doin' better now, Miz
Mutter, but I ain't the owner.
That would be our Chairman of the
Board.

PEARL

Who's he?

PETE

(shrugs)
Dunno, rightly. Some dude in New
Jersey.

Pearl holds her counsel about Pete's appearance and his new
profession, and touches him gently.

PEARL

Thanks for your loyalty and your
shelter, Pete. I truly appreciate
it.

PETE

Least I could do for the best and
prettiest ranch cook in five
counties.

Now off-loaded, they all see Bobby wave and drive off.

Pete and Hammer grab the girls' LUGGAGE and guide the TROUPE
toward the front DOOR, held open by Li'l Jimmy.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

The group enters the BROTHEL. Pete shoos several scantily-clad ENTREPRENEURS, already in position in response to the gate buzzer, toward their ROOMS.

PETE

Take a break, girls.

Pearl is preoccupied, but Hattie is homecoming queen. Bertha Sue, on Hammer's arm, is already in character, all method anxiety.

BERTHA SUE

I'm being held against my will, you know.

Hammer acknowledges with a nod.

HAMMER

It's a hard world sometime, Ma'am.

The boys try to absorb it all, wide-eyed. Barney is simply transfixed. Hector studies the glamour PHOTOS intently.

Pete drops his share of the BAGS, momentarily.

PETE

(to Pearl)

It's nearly five, so I'm expecting our Friday-night regulars pretty soon.

Pete points down a side HALLWAY.

PETE (CONT'D)

There's a new suite just delivered for our fall expansion that has three bedrooms and its own bath. It ain't been decorated for business yet, but the essentials are in there.

Pete picks up the grip and leads them toward the hallway.

INT RABBIT RANCH HALLWAY - DAY

Pete shepherds them through into the next BUILDING. He stops near a DOORWAY.

PETE

Sorry, ladies. I guess two of you will have to double up, unless the gentlemen are willing to make up the dinette.

Barney and Hector verge on chivalry, but Pearl trumps them.

PEARL

Hattie and I'll be fine together, thank you. Bertha Sue will need her own room, being under "house arrest" and all, so you boys can take the third.

PETE

You're the boss. Cook'll whip up whatever you want when you're hungry.

PEARL

Well, we don't figure to stay long, so we'll take meals with the others. Hattie, I guess we can put away our things.

HECTOR (O.S.)

Is "Marine Corps Marla" working tonight?

Everyone turns to Hector. He taps an ENVELOPE through his shirt POCKET.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Eagle flew today, folks. I was goin' to sneak out and risk a little on the slots after Anna Mae was asleep.

(smiles)

New situation, new plan. My nephew may have to work harder to make tuition this semester.

Pete looks concerned.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Don't worry, Mr. Cashwell. Look.

Hector pushes up a sleeve, revealing a faded, "Birdie-on-the-Ball"/Semper Fi TATTOO.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Japs couldn't kill me on
 Guadalcanal or Iwo Jima. I doubt
 Marla'll be able to.

PETE
 (laughs)
 Don't you want to inspect the goods
 first? Every customer's entitled,
 you know.

HECTOR
 One Gyrene always trusts another to
 get the job done.

Hattie nudges Pearl.

HATTIE
 Sure you're up to it, Hector?

HECTOR
 I'm seventy-seven, Hattie. Never
 learn any younger.

Pete ushers Hector back toward the parlor.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 (over his shoulder)
 Besides - just because I can't ride
 the elephant doesn't mean I won't
 enjoy the circus!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RABBIT RANCH BEDROOM - DAY

Pearl comes out of the suite's BATHROOM, wiping her face and
 neck, into the SITTING AREA. All but Hector are there.

PEARL
 Bertha Sue, you're welcome to any
 "necessaries" you might find in our
 things.

HATTIE
 Including my hooch, if you get
 thirsty.

BERTHA SUE
 Thank you, Hattie.

Pearl menaces Bertha Sue with her WASHCLOTH.

PEARL
Remember, Bertha Sue: No funny
stuff!

BERTHA SUE
I've already tried all the bars on
the windows. No luck.

PEARL
Barney, I think I have an extra
razor if you need it.

BARNEY
No, thanks. I never shave on
vacation!

Barney switches on the TELEVISION.

BARNEY (CONT'D)
Oh, boy - premium cable! Wonder if
they have "Pay-per-View?"
(pauses, grins)
Get it? "Pay-per-View?"

PEARL
Find some news, Barney.

Barney begins flipping.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Wait. There! Turn it up!

TV SCREEN

A local ANCHOR reads a lead-in; over her left shoulder is a
graphic of a school bus with a question mark superimposed.

ANCHOR
(filtered)
Today, a pair of gun-wielding
seniors allegedly drugged their
chaperone and hijacked their home's
bus on Casino Row in South Tahoe.
Here's Skip Peters, live, with
more.

BACK TO SCENE

The four are annoyed by the smirk in her voice.

TV SCREEN

SKIP PETERS, 39, appears in a casino LOBBY, shoring up a goggle-eyed Anna Mae. Elmer sways and fidgets neurotically in the background.

BACK TO SCENE

BARNEY

Look! There's that little weasel,
Elmer!

PEARL & HATTIE

Shush, Barney!

TV SCREEN:

SKIP

(filtered)

Thanks, Alison. We're here at
Harrah's with Anna Mae McDonald,
recreational and spiritual director
for Anathema --

ANNA MAE

(slurs, filtered)

Mary-nap-a-tha.

SKIP

(filtered)

That's Mare-A --

ANNA MAE

(slurs, filtered)

Mary-Ann-the-Puh.

SKIP

(filtered)

Uh, Marry-an-Patha--

ANNA MAE

(irritated, filtered)

Mar-uh-nath-th-th-th-th-ah, Goddamn
it!

Anna Mae paws at her mouth in delayed surprise. Off-screen, we hear Hattie's musical giggles.

SKIP

(filtered)

Whatever. So, is it true that you
were drugged, held at gunpoint, and
kidnapped by these women?

ANNA MAE
 (pause - filtered)
 Gunpoint?

SKIP
 (filtered)
 Our source tells us that the two
 suspects are former Nevada
 residents. Can you confirm that?

ANNA MAE
 (beat - filtered)
 Kidnapped?

SKIP
 (filtered)
 There's speculation that the
 suspects may have had help from
 coconspirators in gaining control
 of the bus. True?

ANNA MAE
 (beat - filtered)
 Drugged?

Getting nowhere fast, Skip turns to the CAMERA. Anna Mae
 continues to grasp at him.

SKIP
 There you have it - straight from
 the horse's mouth.

Anna Mae surprises Skip with a snort, whinny, and stupid
 grin.

SKIP (CONT'D)
 (filtered)
 Uh, back to you, Alison...

ANNA MAE
 (dopey, seductive)
 You married?

ANCHOR
 (filtered)
 Uh - thanks, Skip. Authorities
 believe the suspects are heading to
 the Minden area. Anyone seeing a
 faded blue bus with the words
 "Mara"- uh - that's "Maranatha
 Senior Residence" on it are
 requested to call...

BACK TO SCENE

Pearl leans forward, still looking at the screen.

PEARL

Good. Looks like Mr. Rosca got them back over to the church undetected. That'll give me tonight to think, while all Hell breaks loose.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SOUTH TAHOE CHURCH - NIGHT

The Maranatha BUS wheezes to a stop in the shadow of the FIRST CHURCH OF THE EVANGELIST. Pastor REV. NOAH ALSTON, 61, emerges, scowling. Ellie Bush swoops from the DOORS, hard into him.

ELLIE

Reverend! Something terrible has happened. We've got to --

REV. ALSTON

I know. Elmer Dinwiddy called from Harrah's. He asked for you. I'll drive us over.

INT. SOUTH TAHOE CASINO - NIGHT

In his collar and relaxed BLAZER, Rev. Alston moves uncertainly down a HALLWAY with a vengeful-looking Ellie clutching at his sleeve. They pick their way through the usual array of excesses toward a welter of LIGHT, NOISE, and CONFUSION. They pass and overhear a pair of CROUPIERS on break.

CROUPIER #1

Who the Hell is that anyway?

CROUPIER #2

Got me. Security found her in the lobby, talking to her purse. The little guy was hopping around her like an organ grinder's monkey. TV crew showed up a little while ago.

ELLIE

(pointing)

There! There they are!

A small knot of REPORTERS with NOTEPADS and MICROPHONES surrounds Anna Mae, still dazed but improving.

She is confused and wary, but not entirely uncomfortable. Throughout, she keeps a weather eye on her new friend, Skip. A distraught but irrelevant Elmer spies his rescuers and runs over.

ELMER

Here you are! Thank God! This is just awful!

Rev. Alston focuses warily on the media.

REPORTER #1

Miss McDonald! How dangerous do you think these women really are?

ANNA MAE

Dangerous? But they're my sheep, my little flock...

REPORTER #2

Did you fear for your personal safety at any time?

ANNA MAE

(irritated)

Not really - until about five minutes ago ...

Rev. Alston hesitates, reconsiders and backtracks for the EXIT. Ellie and Elmer are aghast.

ELLIE

Aren't you going to go get her?

ELMER

Aren't you going to go get her?

REV. ALSTON

I'm not so sure that's such a good idea, right now. I'll tell the desk where to drop her, when she's ready. Let's go call the police and the home.

Ellie and Elmer follow, protesting.

EXT GENOA HOME INN - NIGHT

Two young Douglas County Sheriff's DEPUTIES question a bath-robed Bobby by PORCH-LIGHT.

BOBBY

That's it, Deputy. I was going to call it in right away, but I was so stunned... Must've been some kind of post-traumatic thing.

DEPUTY #1
 (writing)
 So, tell me again. When, exactly,
 did she produce the weapon?

BOBBY
 Right after we got reacquainted.
 Came here because she knew me, I
 guess. Forced me to drive the five
 of 'em north.

DEPUTY #2
 An old lady?

BOBBY
 Hey - I've seen her fire a
 Winchester off a horse!

DEPUTY #1
 And the other three, the hostages.
 What was their state of mind?

BOBBY
 Hard to tell, Deputy. They're all
 really old, you know?

DEPUTY #1
 And you took 'em where?

BOBBY
 One of those, uh, clubs east of
 Carson. Rabbit Ranch, I think.
 Don't get up there often.

DEPUTY #1
 (to partner)
 Charlie, get on the wire to the
 state patrol in Carson. Tell 'em
 Minden was a decoy and there's a
 situation at the Rabbit Ranch.
 Armed and dangerous.

Charlie goes to call it in. DEPUTY #1 shakes hands with
 Bobby, then turns to leave.

DEPUTY #1 (CONT'D)
 Thanks, Mr. Sangiacomo.
 (pauses)
 Lucky thing, nobody got hurt.

BOBBY
 Indeed.

Bobby watches them depart, lights flashing. He speaks up at the night sky.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
How was that, Pearl?

INT. STATE POLICE HEADQUARTERS OFFICE - NIGHT

CAPT. STEVE HUTCHINSON, 43, regional Watch Commander, hangs up the PHONE and sips at a MUG of coffee. He rises from the DESK CORNER in the READY ROOM and turns to his desk Sergeant, TIM, 35.

STEVE
Tim, raise those units north and south of Minden and relocate them to the Rabbit Ranch.

TIM:
Rabbit Ranch, Sir?

STEVE
Douglas County says that's where our fugitives and their hostages are.

TIM
Will do, Cap'n.

Tim starts for the dispatcher. An afterthought from Steve.

STEVE
Oh, and Tim - better call Floyd at home and tell him to raise a negotiation and response team, ASAP. I'll bet two counties and Carson are over there already.

Steve runs his hand through his hair.

STEVE (CONT'D)
All that scanner traffic, most of the Fourth Estate should be camped out there by morning.

TIM
Want me to get the P.I.O. up to speed?

STEVE
Nah. I can handle this one, when the time comes. I'll call Miz Mutter's son out in California, directly.

Tim looks curious.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 He's a big-time lawyer - and
 wrapped a little tight, I hear. No
 reason for the National Guard to
 fall out of bed, too.

Tim leaves Steve alone. He can't help a chuckle.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 "Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane
 bust out." Welcome home, ladies!

He shakes his head and retreats to his OFFICE.

INT. MILL VALLEY BEDROOM - NIGHT

A COUPLE lies in BED. She's dead asleep; his reading LAMP is on and he's propped up slightly by PILLOWS. He's just dozed off, his HALF-GLASSES still on this face. DELROY MUTTER, 60, starts and mouths obscenities as he uncradles the shrieking bedside PHONE. His wife, BITSY, 49, moans and rolls over.

DELROY
 Thad, if this is another lame
 excuse for not getting the jury
 study out here by nine --

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE HUTCHINSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

On the PHONE, Steve Hutchinson clears his throat.

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Mister Mutter?

Delroy rises to an elbow as legal PAPERS cascade off the bed onto the FLOOR.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 Who is this?

INTERCUT STEVE/DELROY

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Captain Steve Hutchinson, Nevada
 State Police, Sir.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 What --?

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Sorry to wake you, Mr. Mutter. I'm
 calling from Carson City. We've
 got a situation over here
 involving... your mother.

Delroy throws his legs onto the floor. Bitsy stirs again.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 My Mother?!

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Seems -ah - she's taken a leave of
 absence from her primary residence.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 What happened? How did she wind up
 in Carson City?

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Uh, she "borrowed" the bus.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 What?!

STEVE
 (on phone)
 Yessir. Seems she and Hattie
 Gardner got a little homesick.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 Jesus Christ! I really don't need
 this now; I've got a trial starting
 Monday.
 (beat)
 Can't Maranatha just pick her up,
 or something?

STEVE
 (on phone)
 I haven't been in touch with the
 home yet, Sir.
 (MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)
 I thought that, since she's your
 Mother, you'd like the opportunity
 to --

DELROY
 (on phone)
 Just - just have her call me first
 thing in the morning!

INT. MILL VALLEY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Delroy BANGS down the handset.

INT. STEVE HUTCHINSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Steve pulls the PHONE away and looks into it.

STEVE
 ... And thank you, Sir, for your
 touching concern!

INT. MILL VALLEY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Delroy jumps up, paces, and mutters his misfortunes. He
 storms through the open glass door:

EXT. MILL VALLEY DECK - NIGHT

Delroy finds the RAIL. He sees a FIGURE below him near the
 POOL and follows it onto the DIVING BOARD.

Below is STACY OPAL MUTTER, 19, her back bathed in MOONLIGHT.
 We track around and move slowly upward along her slender,
 BLACK-TANK-SUITED body. Her features are silhouetted in
 front of a bright patio FLOODLIGHT above her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TOPAZ LAKE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

Topaz Lake, Nevada

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

July 4, 1953

BACK TO SCENE

Pulling back from the bright mid-day SUN, we see OPAL MUTTER,
 16, from the same angle below, first in face then in slender
 body. She also wears a black but more contemporary TANK
 SUIT.

She prepares to dive from a high ROCK, pausing to torment her brother, Delroy, and his summer companion, Bobby Sangiacomo, both 10.

OPAL

The eagle prepares to leave her
high perch, hungry to attack the
little chickens below...

She looks down into her brother's upturned, dread-filled face. Bobby watches, more curious than afraid.

DELROY

Opal, you'd better come down from
there - or I'll tell Ma!

Opal balls her fists by her sides.

OPAL

Oh, honest to John, Delroy! You're
such a baby! When are you gonna
learn to live a little?

DELROY'S P.O.V. - IN SLOW MOTION

Opal spreads her arms and takes off gracefully, soaring in a slow-motion arc. Halfway into the WATER, a sickening SNAP. Her legs collapse in a tangle. Her body slowly floats up. Her neck broken, her head twists oddly toward the boys, a blank look of trauma on her face.

Slow motion continues. Bobby's face comes into Delroy's paralyzed view.

BOBBY

(slow, echoed)

D-E-L-R-O-Y? H-e-l-p m-e!

Getting no response, Bobby splashes to the body and struggles it to the GRAVEL near Delroy's feet. He looks into Delroy's face again, then runs off.

We turn and linger on Delroy's gaping, frozen face. The SUN over his shoulder is suddenly blocked by a dark, hatted SILHOUETTE.

Delroy sees the shadow, turns. His mouth is open but no words come. He watches as his father, Earl, brushes past, hesitates in horror, and carefully picks Opal up.

Earl turns and looms again, Opal's lifeless body draping his arms and his silver Stetson bunched in his hand. He gives Delroy a long look that reveals nothing, then departs.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MILL VALLEY POOL - NIGHT (PRESENT)

DELROY'S P.O.V. - HIS DAUGHTER

Stacy climbs from the POOL, looks up, and sees DelRoy. She grabs a TOWEL and sprints under the deck.

EXT MILL VALLEY DECK - NIGHT

Delroy spins away from the RAIL, seething, to face Bitsy.

DELROY

What is she doing here?

BITSY

She worked a double shift, Delroy.
She wanted to come by and cool off.
I didn't see any harm --

Delroy storms by, pointing.

DELROY

I want her out of here! You know
that!

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY (DAWN)

Morning finds four SQUAD CARS parked near the GATE. Hammer brings coffee to the gendarmes; they chat amiably. A few station S.U.V.s and TV VANS are joined by the first SATELLITE TRUCK. Tension notches up with each arrival. The cops labor to keep the ROAD clear.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Pete peers through the blinds, then steps back.

PETE

Shit. Here we go.

He breaks toward the HALLWAY

INT. RABBIT RANCH HALLWAY - DAY

Pete pulls up at a bedroom door and knocks.

PETE
 Judge? You awake? We're acquirin'
 a pretty solid media presence here.

Muffled scuffling inside. The door opens. A distinguished-looking, middle-aged JURIST appears, SHIRT open, PANTS over his arm, and panic in his face.

PETE (CONT'D)
 (pointing)
 Back door's that-a-way. Limo's
 waitin'.

PETE'S P.O.V.: The Judge hurries away, revealing his bare buttocks.

BACK TO SCENE

A TIE and pair of boxer SHORTS fly out through the DOOR, onto Pete's feet.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Thank you, Mia.

Pete moves down two doors and knocks.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Senator? Sun's up.

The DOOR opens. A leather-hooded HEAD and long-nailed FINGERS around a WHIP appear. It's RIKKI, a specialist.

RIKKI
 He's tied up right now - for
 another twenty minutes.

PETE
 (shakes his head)
 Okey-doke, Rikki. Tell him he's
 here for the duration.

RIKKI
 Can I charge him again? He's a
 shitty tipper.

PETE
 Suit yourself. Just keep him in
 there.

INT. RABBIT RANCH DINING ROOM - DAY

Pearl, Hattie, Barney, and Bertha Sue are finishing
 BREAKFAST.

PEARL

These eggs are good. Wonder why they taste so much better here?

HATTIE

Maybe it's the real cholesterol?

PEARL

No... it's something else.

Hattie starts to answer when Bertha Sue speaks, without looking up.

BERTHA SUE

No scripture on the side.

PEARL

That's it!

Hector joins them with a full PLATE.

HECTOR

(singing)

From the HALLS of Montezoo-oo-ma,
to the shores of Trip-oh-lee...

HATTIE

Well, if it ain't the Latin Lover!

Hector sings and hums ebulliently, smiling at them as he sits and begins wolfing his FOOD. They regard him deliberately.

BARNEY

So, Hector. How'd it go? Did you make it ashore?

HECTOR

(wipes mouth)

My boy, not only did I hit the beach, I took the high ground and - with a little expert help - raised the flag!

Hectors waits. Barney's impressed. Finally, they all burst out laughing.

Pete enters.

PETE

Pearl, I hope we can wrap this up before I lose the whole weekend. My East Coast associates take a dim view of unexpected cash-flow problems.

PEARL

Think it through, Pete. I do believe the extra attention might pay off, come September.

PETE

Hadn't looked at it that way. Yeah - charge it off to "marketing"...

EXT. CARSON CITY GAS STATION - DAY

A maroon STATION WAGON emblazoned:

KORN-TV-7
"Reno's News First"

careens across U.S. ROUTE 395 into the station, causing SCREECHING TIRES and a near-pileup.

The driver, DICK PRINCE, 51, badly-TOUPEED and ferret-like tele-journalist, jumps out, jerking on his BLAZER. Inside, RALPH, his camera/sound crew, curses and turns to restack toppled EQUIPMENT.

Dick steams to the CASHIER'S SHACK. In its WINDOW is the ubiquitous Western POSTER, on which one buzzard, perched in a tree over a waning, prostrate prospector, says to the other:

"Wait, Hell! I'm gonna kill me somethin'!"

It remains center frame. The slightly swarthy CASHIER leans on a hand, reading.

DICK

Rabbit Ranch!

CASHIER

'S'cuse me?

DICK

Rabbit Ranch! How do I get to the Rabbit Ranch?

CASHIER

I hope you're going there to relax...

DICK

Listen, Abdul --

CASHIER

Name's Fred, pal.

DICK

I'm a broadcast journalist and
there's a breaking story out there!

CASHIER

Oh. Late to the dance, are you?
Take Three Ninety-five south and
turn left on East Williams. Five,
six miles. Watch the --

Dick hurries back to the car and PEELS OUT. Ralph's newly-stowed equipment tumbles the other direction. The cashier watches the car lurch into TRAFFIC again, leaving panic stops, curses, and digital salutes in its wake.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

Signs. And a grateful Nevada goes
with you.

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY

Print and broadcast MEDIA take up every inch of ground unclaimed by cops and sagebrush. They occupy their time with loud, ceremonious bouts over territory and pecking order.

A CRUISER with the small antennas and subdued emergency lights that signify authority arrives. Capt. Steve Hutchinson emerges. He huddles with a Carson COP and Douglas and Lyon County DEPUTIES. He gets a hand signal from the SWAT commander in a large, windowless VAN.

Seeing Steve, the press GANG rushes and engulfs him with questions.

REPORTER

Commander, what is the state of the
hostages? Are they alive?

STEVE

Whoa, boys and girls. It's
"Captain." I've not yet spoken to
the alleged perpetrators; I'm
hopeful of doing that now. I'll
have a statement when I know
something.

Pete joins Hammer at the gate and hails Capt. Hutchinson.

PETE

(shouts)
Captain, I believe our fugitives
want to pow-wow.

Steve breaks a trail through CAMERAS and MICROPHONES to reach the gate. A news HELICOPTER wheels in low to record this action, kicking up DUST and complaints.

STEVE
Who the Hell is that?

HAMMER
First Amendment Air Force.

Dick and Ralph roll up hard, scattering their peers at the back fringe. He and Ralph leap out and up, craning their necks.

REPORTER #1
Look, everybody. "Road-kill"
finally decided to grace us.

INTERN
Why's he called that?

REPORTER #2
(points at head)
Bad rug. And how he leaves his
interview subjects.

Steve spots them and smiles.

STEVE
(shouts)
Hey, Dick! Lose your invitation to
the party?

Hammer signals and Li'l Jimmy buzzes Steve in. Steve follows Pete inside.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Steve removes his HAT and SUNGLASSES and waits for his eyes to adjust. Pearl, Hattie, Bertha Sue, Barney, and Hector are seated. Pete stands by.

HATTIE
My land! Is that YOU, Stevie
Hutchinson?

Hattie bolts haltingly to him. Steve looks happily embarrassed.

STEVE
I guess it is, Miz Gardner.

Hattie hugs his waist, then pushes back to look him over.

HATTIE

My stars and garters, look at all that hardware. No longer pushing a cruiser full-time, huh?

STEVE

No, Ma'am. I've been promoted way past my usefulness.

HATTIE

(coyly)
Still single?

STEVE

Sorry. Lana Gaynor ran me down and saddled me with twins - Abner and Hattie.

Hattie beams.

HATTIE

Where on Earth did you come up with those names?

He rests his arm on her shoulder.

STEVE

After this crazy old saloonkeeper and his wife, who helped me with my homework and sent me home with beer and smokes, so the old man wouldn't hit me as hard.

His voice thickens and softens as he fixes his gaze on her.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Who finally convinced me I wasn't a waste of space, and gave me the guts at sixteen to pack up my sisters and move to my aunt's in Reno. Who came to my high school graduation.

Hattie waves her hand.

HATTIE

Now, Stevie...

STEVE

Who made a couple calls to college friends and pointed me toward a degree in criminal justice.

He brushes his eyes dry and scans the room. Hattie introduces everyone.

STEVE (CONT'D)

So, Miz Mutter. I hear you're masterminding this conspiracy.

PEARL

Well, Stevie - uh, Captain - Hattie and I were just lookin' to get on back home, and things got a little complicated.

STEVE

"Complicated?" Assault and battery, kidnapping, and interstate flight, is all. Spoke to Delroy early this morning; his drawers were in a serious knot. Wants you to call.

PEARL

Huh! Just like Delroy to put it on somebody else. He's why we're here, anyway.

STEVE

Ma'am?

PEARL

Earl wasn't hardly cold before I found myself sittin' on a bed in a strange place, staring at a white-bread print o' the Lord.

Steve fools with his hat.

STEVE

Could've chalked it all up to a family squabble, Miz Mutter, but you inconvenienced your escort and dragged three other people along.

Hector and Barney grin like retrievers. Bertha Sue looks at Pearl, pleading for direction. Steve shakes his head.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Feds can make a lot of hay out of cases like this. Another forty-eight hours and they'll probably be real interested.

Pearl thinks.

PEARL
What should I do, Captain?

STEVE
Tell you what. You give up a
"hostage" or two --

Barney clenches his dentures and juts out his jaw.

BARNEY
I ain't no "hostage," and I ain't
givin' up!

Hector is studious. Pearl nods at Bertha Sue.

HECTOR
I'll go. My people are a little
sensitive about putting it on the
street, and --
(sly smile)
My work here is done.

BERTHA SUE
(to Hector)
You'll need someone with you who
can handle the press.

Steve looks back at Barney.

STEVE
Mister Rasmussen, you got any close
family living?

BARNEY
Nossir.

STEVE
Okay. That's a good start.
(to Pearl)
How about you try to work something
out with Delroy? I'll make up
something to feed those wolves
outside and get these two home.
That'll keep everybody busy for a
while. What do you think?

PEARL
(mooning)
Do I have to call him?

STEVE
Everybody says whoever opens
negotiations, has the upper hand.
(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)
 (winks)
 Except the French.

Good-byes are said and Steve escorts Bertha Sue and Hector out.

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY

Steve runs interference for Hector and Bertha Sue through the maelstrom of surging CAMERAS and shouting MANNIKINS.

STEVE
 (official voice)
 I've just spoken with the chief suspect, Missus Pearl Mutter, who's preparing a list of demands for reforms in nursing homes. As a gesture of good faith, she has released these two hostages into my custody. The negotiation team will be in contact, in due course.

REPORTER
 How many hostages remain?

STEVE
 Undetermined, at this time.

He waves off a torrent of questions.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 I have nothing more substantive to report at this time. Deputy -

He grabs a DEPUTY's lapel and reads his NAMEPLATE.

STEVE (CONT'D.) (CONT'D)
 Goodman will brief you further and apprise you of any changes.

The HORDE turns on the mortified deputy. Hector slips into the back seat of the cruiser unmolested. Bertha Sue recaptures their attention with her fanning, gesturing, and remonstrating.

BERTHA SUE
 Good morning. My name is Bertha Sue Hanks; that's H-A-N-K-S.

REPORTER
 Were you a hostage?

BERTHA SUE
 Of course.

REPORTER
What was it like?

BERTHA SUE
Why, nip and tuck, dear. Nip and
tuck...

She continues chattering, in her element.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Pearl marvels through the blinds at Bertha Sue's performance until it's over and the cruiser pulls away.

PEARL
What I wouldn't give to be in the
room when Bertha Sue's boy sees
this.

Hattie steps up and touches Pearl's hand. Pearl sees that she's exhausted.

HATTIE
I'm goin' to go lie down for a
while, Pearl.

PEARL
You go ahead, dear. I have to make
a call.

EXT. MILL VALLEY DECK - DAY

Delroy is seated in an Adirondack CHAIR, again surrounded by legal PAPERS. The cordless PHONE RINGS.

DELROY
(on phone)
Yes?
(pauses, then weary)
Yes, operator, I'll accept the
charges.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

PEARL
(on phone)
Hello? Delroy?

INTERCUT DELROY/PEARL

DELROY
(on phone)
Mother, what the Hell's wrong with
you?

(MORE)

DELROY (CONT'D)

I'm missing a pretrial strategy conference at the office because of this!

PEARL

(on phone)

Why, I'm fine, son. And you? What happened to those manners your Daddy and I taught you, anyway?

DELROY

(on phone - aside)

Here we go.

(continues)

What is it this time - not enough red meat in the Maranatha diet?

PEARL

(on phone)

Don't patronize me, Delroy. It's what it's always been. Since you put me in that place, I've lost every bit of the only life I knew, except Hattie.

DELROY

(on phone)

I thought we agreed you needed a structured environment.

PEARL

(on phone)

We?! Half my life was torn away, and I was grief-stricken. I had a structured environment.

Delroy pinches his temples.

DELROY

(on phone)

Okay. For the sake of argument, Bitsy and I thought that Maranatha was the best thing at the time.

PEARL

(on phone)

What - dropping me in with a bunch of Holy Rollers who spend this life jostlin' for a good seat in the next one?

(snorts)

And, a lot that dried-up ingenue knows about anything.

(MORE)

PEARL (CONT'D)

The only time she ever gets dirty is applying a mud pack. She's just - you're both just ashamed of me. Too country.

DELROY

(on phone)

We just thought you might benefit from a more personal relationship with God.

PEARL

(on phone)

Hah! I've taken winter hay to high-desert cattle. Show me anybody in a wet blizzard at forty below who doesn't turn to prayer!

Pearl reddens and quickens.

PEARL (CONT'D)

And that's fine talk comin' from you, down in the front row at the Church of the Almighty Dollar!

Delroy rises, angry.

DELROY

(on phone)

I've earned every penny I've ever made. I never asked you and Dad for anything!

PEARL

(on phone)

You never wanted for anything, either, Delroy. Had your college all paid for, too. Earl and I saw to that. That dramatic "declaration of independence" on your eighteenth birthday was your idea.

DELROY

(on phone)

You know Dad didn't want me around. He couldn't stand the sight of me after --

PEARL

(on phone - beat, softer)

Son, you've got to get past that. Couldn't have been helped.

(MORE)

PEARL (CONT'D)

Earl lost a big piece of his heart
that he never got back. I'd
probably have gone the same
direction, if it'd been you.

Delroy swallows and chokes up.

DELROY

(on phone)

Ma, I don't want to talk about this
any more right now...

PEARL

(on phone)

Hear me out. He never blamed you
for a single minute. He just
wasn't ever one who found words to
match his feelin's.

DELROY

(on phone)

Ma, please --

Pearl inhales and presses on.

PEARL

(on phone)

Truth be told, your shuttin' him
out afterwards hurt him more than
even Opal's dyin'.

Tears overtake Delroy, lining his face. After a time he
composes himself.

DELROY

(on phone)

What do you want to do about this?

PEARL

(on phone)

I want my life back. I want to sit
on the porch with my friends and
look out on what Earl and I made.
I want to fall asleep in the bed
where he held me close for forty-
six years.

DELROY

(on phone)

You can't live in the past, Ma.

PEARL

(on phone)

Torn away from it, Delroy, I'm no longer me - I have no present, nor future. Don't you see? Just because you can't go back there doesn't mean it's wrong for me.

DELROY

(on phone)

What if something happens to you?

PEARL

(on phone)

Son, I don't mean to hurt you, but you haven't seen me more than twice a year in the last twenty.

A heavy silence. Delroy waits in desperation for some kind of reprieve. Pearl furthers her case.

PEARL (CONT'D)

I'm eighty-three. What aches and pains I have, my pills take care of. There's nothin' that'd happen to me that you could do anything about anyway, bein' two hours away.

DELROY

(on phone)

But, what will you do?

PEARL

(on phone)

I'll live! Then, I'll lie down and die in that same bed, where you and Opal were born. Seems fittin', doesn't it?

DELROY

(on phone)

How will you manage?

PEARL

(on phone)

Charley's holdin' out okay, though I might need to take a hard look at some of the late hires. The house is plenty big enough, and it's on my half of the place.

DELROY

(on phone)

But, Ma - the whole valley is going the other way. Ascuaga is selling off three of his four ranches right now!

PEARL

(on phone)

Delroy, as long as people grow or eat beef there'll be a place for the "Diamond M." Why are you in such a damned rush to subdivide? You're already wealthy, and the region's only goin' to grow.

DELROY

(on phone)

Wouldn't you rather have your share of the purchase money now, Ma?

PEARL

(on phone)

And do what, Delroy? Take it back to where I can't do anything but give it away? For someone trained in logic, you're not making much sense.

Delroy slams his fist on the RAIL.

DELROY

(on phone)

Goddamn it! I have a responsibility to take care of you!

Pearl stifles her anger, sighs, and lowers her voice.

PEARL

(on phone)

Son, you haven't heard a word I've said, have you?

Delroy studies his feet and sighs.

DELROY

(on phone)

All right, Mother, you win. We're not getting anywhere this way. I'll move things around and drive up --

PEARL
 (on phone - crisply)
 You can point that German four-
 wheeler this way if you want to. I
 won't see you.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 What?!

PEARL
 (on phone)
 Hattie and I are going home from
 here. And as long as I'm alive and
 clear-headed, there's nothing legal
 you can do to stop me.

Delroy collapses into the chair.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 Is there anyone you'd listen to?

Another silence.

PEARL
 (on phone)
 You could send my granddaughter up.

DELROY
 (on phone)
 Staci?!
 (laughs bitterly)
 My nineteen-year-old screw-up?!

PEARL
 (on phone)
 Yes. Goodbye, Delroy.

Pearl hangs up gingerly, then stares motionless at the phone.

PEARL (V.O.)
 Forty years of runnin', marryin'
 up, and chasin' money - and he's
 still blind.

Pearl turns in her CHAIR and sees a stricken Barney.

BARNEY
 Pearl... It's - It's Hattie.

They bolt from the parlor.

INT. RABBIT RANCH HALLWAY - DAY

We follow as Pearl and Barney careen toward the open bedroom DOOR. Pearl stops, finger to lips. Barney is flummoxed. An aged voice still clear enough to convey its strength and purity sings "SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW." It's Hattie's.

PEARL
(whispering)
There wasn't a drunk in Douglas
County didn't go to his knees when
she sang that song.

INT. RABBIT RANCH BEDROOM - DAY

Pearl and Barney tumble in. Hattie is ghostly pale and red-eyed. The frilly, tasteless PILLOW under her head reads:

Foxy Lady

PEARL
(panicked)
Hattie --!

Hattie raises her frail hand as determined as a marshal halting a parade.

HATTIE
Now, before anybody else goes to
pieces, the bar is open. Pearl,
fetch that Seagram's out of my bag.
Barney, rustle us up some glasses
and 7-Up or Sprite. Either will do
- long as it's not diet!

Barney bustles out. Still in shock, Pearl brings the BOTTLE and sits beside Hattie.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
I'm not goin' to say, "No tears,"
Pearl. A decent cry does a girl a
world o' good every now and again.
Nobody knows that better than me,
the Silver State's Sarah Bernhardt.

Pearl strokes Hattie's hair.

PEARL
But, I didn't expect --

HATTIE
Oh, fie. I'm two years older than
you - and a lot less wick to burn,
to boot!

(MORE)

HATTIE (CONT'D)

Abner and I didn't do heavy work,
like you and Earl. Bad light and
air, too. And, Land, girl - you
know how I liked to stay up and
holler, most nights!

PEARL

(sniffling)

Oh, Hattie, dearest. We're so
close, now. You've got to go home
with me. Can't you stay, just
another day or two?

Hattie presses Pearl's hands to her breast and fights her own
tears with wan optimism.

HATTIE

You know I've always said that the
Good Book has it backwards. "The
spirit is willin', but the flesh is
firm!"

PEARL

I don't want you to go.

Pearl sobs and lies beside Hattie, who cradles her head
against her shoulder.

HATTIE

My old, sweet friend. You never
know - those Jesus freaks we ran
away from might be on to something.
Whatever waits, waits for us both -
win, lose, or draw. I'll save you
a seat right in front of the best-
lookin' dealer, and I won't double-
down 'til you're beside me again.
I promise...

Hattie rolls her eyes up.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

Sing with me, Pearl: "Some-where
..."

Pearl squeaks out a word or two.

Hattie's eyes close; her voice trails off and stills. Pearl
pushes herself up, looking upward.

PEARL

Please, God: Just one more verse
together...

Pearl slowly removes her GLASSES. Barney re-enters. She takes the tumblers from him and pours two stiff "SEVEN-AND-SEVENS."

PEARL (CONT'D)

(toasts)

Here's to Hortense Atticus
Churchill Gardner, the best damned
friend any mortal soul could hope
for. May Gabriel hurry on that
harp, so she can start right in,
singin' for Abner again.

BARNEY

To Hattie.

They sip in silence; at last, Pearl puts down her drink.

PEARL

Barney, can you leave us alone for
a minute or two, please, dear?

Barney exits. Pearl grieves a little longer, then finds a small FILE in Hattie's bag and pulls out a stark, tri-fold document.

CLOSE-UP - HATTIE'S BURIAL POLICY

GEER-WAITE DOUGLAS COUNTY MORTUARY
Minden, Nevada
DEED OF INTERMENT

BACK TO SCENE

Pearl carries it out of the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Pearl finishes a PHONE call. Pete enters and comforts Pearl.

PETE

I just heard, Pearl. I'm real
sorry.

PEARL

Thank you, Pete.

PETE

Is there anything I can do?

Pearl thinks, twisting a HANDKERCHIEF.

PEARL

I just need to say somethin' to someone about Hattie. Feels unfinished, to me. Folks need to know her better, that it wasn't her fault...

PETE

You want me to ask one o' them TV fellas to come in?

Pearl weighs the suggestion.

PEARL

That might do...

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY

It's late morning and the waiting game is on. EQUIPMENT is stowed, replaced by DECKS of CARDS, digital GAMES, and other diversions. BLAZERS are off, TIES are loosened, and coiffures are under cover. Everybody but Dick Prince, who remains fully dressed and paces near the GATE. He's trailed by Ralph, who labors under his ELECTRONICS.

RALPH

(whining)

C'mon, Dick. Can't we take a break?

DICK

(angrily)

Look at this face! How many more years do you think it has to find a major market?

Pete ambles to the gate and signals L'il Jimmy. The BUZZER GOES OFF and the gate CREAKS to life.

PETE

Miz Mutter's friend, Miz Hattie Gardner, has passed away. She wants to talk about it.

Legs uncross and vehicle DOORS crack, but not before Prince worms through the opening gate, Ralph in tow.

DICK

We're it! We're it! KORN has the broadest penetration in the Reno-Sparks area. Check Arbitron if you don't believe me!

Pete nods; Hammer holds flailing COMPETITORS at bay up front and Li'l Jimmy closes the barrier against a surge of clamoring BODIES.

PETE

Sorry. One crew only.

The WAVE recedes and shouts tail off to whines when Hammer opens his VEST and taps a shoulder HOLSTER.

HAMMER

There's the quick, y'all - and
there's the dead.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Pearl rousts herself from her thoughts and rises as Pete comes in, followed by Dick, Ralph, and Li'l Jimmy. Ralph begins setting up.

DICK

(abruptly)

Miz Mutter, I'm Dick Prince, KORN-
TV-7 News, Reno.

PEARL

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Prince.
I'd like to tell folks about Hattie
--

DICK

Fine, fine. We're not equipped to
do a live feed, so we'll tape and
take it back for edit and replay,
okay?

PEARL

Uh, all right. What I want to say
is --

Dick glares at Ralph; he hurriedly checks his LIGHTING and pulls a bewildered Pearl into position.

DICK

Now, Pearl, if you'll just stand
right there. When Ralph turns the
light on I'll ask you some
questions. Don't be nervous.
Ready?

Pearl halfway nods.

DICK (CONT'D)
 (animated, into camera)
 Rolling, Ralph? Three, two, one.
 Thanks, Rob and Cheryl. This is
 Dick Prince, with an exclusive
 interview with Pearl O. Mutter,
 former Minden-area resident and go-
 go Grandma, whose alleged daring,
 daylight escape from a Sacramento
 old-folks home has her facing
 possible federal kidnapping
 charges.

He turns to Pearl, now a deer in the headlights.

DICK (CONT'D)
 Tell our viewers, Pearl, is it true
 that you drugged an employee to
 make your getaway?

PEARL
 Well, yes; I --

DICK
 And isn't it true that until just
 this morning you held three other
 residents against their will?

PEARL
 No! Now that's just not --

DICK
 And the death of your best friend
 from Minden, Hattie Gardner, may
 have been caused by all this
 excitement?

PEARL
 (angrily)
 Now just you stop--

CLOSE-UP: Dick pastes a crooked grin on his face and thrusts
 his MICROPHONE forward.

DICK
 How does that make you feel?

BACK TO SCENE

Pearl's sandaled right foot half-disappears into the trouser
 material covering Dick's groin.

CLOSE-UP - DICK'S FACE

Unsuspected pain and horror remold Dick's face.

DICK (CONT'D)
HuhhhhhhhNnnnnnn!

BACK TO SCENE

Dick crumples to the floor, TOUPEE unhinged and flapping.
Pearl stands over him. Ralph is still rolling.

PEARL
Beat a rapist that way in Thirty-eight. Funny. I don't remember feelin' quite as violated at the time.

Pearl examines her foot.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Had a boot on then, though. Hope I don't lose a nail over this.

Pearl looks at Ralph, who's powered down and is beside himself.

PEARL (CONT'D)
You're not plannin' on doin' anything with this, are you?

RALPH
I'll erase the tape just as soon as everyone at the station sees it, Ma'am. I swear.

PEARL
Well, all right, then.

Li'l Jimmy impassively drags Dick, gasping and sputtering, out the front DOOR. Ralph follows, shielding his gleeful face with his CAMERA.

PEARL (CONT'D)
(to Pete)
No wonder nobody trusts 'em any more.

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY

Staci Mutter pulls her battered TOYOTA as close to the GATE as she can manage. Clad in a midriff top, bell-bottoms, and Doc Martens, she emerges, snaps on a SNUGLI, and packs a squirming BUNDLE into it.

Slinging another BAG onto her shoulder, she blows her streaked bangs off her forehead and strides for the gate. She attracts no attention as the ladies and gentlemen of the press assume she's an employee.

STACI'S P.O.V. - THE RABBIT RANCH

The brothel DOOR flies open and Li'l Jimmy emerges, dragging Dick Prince toward the GATE. He cycles to his feet as he's handed off to Hammer, who pulls him through and pats the TOUPEE down on his head. Laughter erupts. Dick glowers at Ralph, who answers with a blank look. Dick stalks toward their CAR. Ralph shrugs, again to laughter, and follows.

BACK TO SCENE

Staci engages Hammer discreetly as the PACK remains fixed on Dick.

STACI

Hi. I'm Staci Mutter. My Dad said that my grandmother wanted to talk to me?

Hammer waves at Li'l Jimmy, who steps back inside to admit them. Word spreads and the slumbering media giant awakes noisily. REPORTERS begin to crowd around her. Hammer does his best to hold them off.

Behind them, Dick finds his voice and confronts DEPUTY GOODMAN.

DICK

Deputy, that woman in there assaulted me! I demand that you arrest her!

DEPUTY GOODMAN

(distracted)

Oh, put a sock in it, will you, Daniel Boone?

Dick's humiliation turns to rage.

We hear a ROAR as a wild-eyed Dick starts the station's WAGON, slams it into gear and accelerates, spewing DUST and GRAVEL, toward the gate.

Ralph dives clear and rolls, protecting the CAMERA.

The throng turns. Dick's peers see him and part like the Red Sea.

Hammer reacts instinctively. He pushes Staci through the opening gate onto the ground, signals for it to be closed, and reaches for his WEAPON. He turns, assumes a firing position, and trains the barrel on the windshield.

Dick's anger turns to panic. He hits the brakes, covers his head, and throws himself to the floor.

The wagon slows, but not enough. Hammer tries to throw himself clear. He cries out in pain as the wagon pins his trail leg against the now-closed gate. He sags over the HOOD.

DEPUTIES rush forward, drag Dick out of the wagon and into custody, and move the vehicle backward. Hammer crumples against the gate.

Staci pushes herself up, trying to stifle the CRIES from her bundle. She recoils in horror at Hammer's bloody, mangled leg.

HAMMER

Ask the Bossman to dial Nine-One-One, hear?

His eyelids flutter. Pete and Li'l Jimmy fly out the DOOR; another BODYGUARD waits in the doorway. Pete grabs the bars of the still-closed gate and fixes on the downed sentry, who's trying vainly to resume his post.

PETE

(shouts)
Don't move, Hammer!
(to man in doorway)
Open it!

Pete and Li'l Jimmy snake through the opening gate.

PETE (CONT'D)

Hammer - stay with us! You in a lot of pain?

HAMMER

I'll tell you when you move me inside.

PETE

(to Li'l Jimmy)
Let's get him in - real careful-like!

They lift Hammer as gently as his mass allows. He groans and winces as they slide him through the gate.

The third bodyguard hits the buzzer and the barrier crawls, HUMMING, until it CLANGS shut.

Pearl dodges them in the doorway and hustles outside. She sees a dazed Staci, still on the ground, trying to comfort a SCREAMING INFANT.

PEARL

Oh, my sweet Lord. Staci!

STACI

Gran?

Pearl helps Staci regain her feet. As one, the MOB realizes who the old woman is. Pandemonium erupts as they SWARM the gate, thrusting EQUIPMENT at her and filling the air with shouted questions.

In total silence, we sweep slowly around a dazed Pearl, shielding her granddaughter, as she is paralyzed momentarily by a sea of clamoring faces, flailing limbs, and WHIRRING and FLASHING cameras.

She recovers and helps Staci and the baby through the DOOR.

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

Hammer is on the sofa, bracing himself against the pain. Pete is on the PHONE.

PETE

Hello? I need an ambulance at the Rabbit Ranch, One Rabbit Road. Yes... Crushed leg. Pronto!

Pearl and Staci stumble in and fall onto a sofa across the room.

PEARL

Staci! Dear God, child - are you all right?

STACI

Yeah, I'm okay, I think...

Staci resumes comforting her baby. Pearl crosses to Hammer, her face clouded with worry.

PEARL

Oh, Mr. Hammer. I'm so, so sorry!

HAMMER

It's all right, Miz Pearl - I got plenty of sick leave.

(MORE)

HAMMER (CONT'D)
 Li'l Jimmy'll take care of you 'til
 I'm back. Right, Bossman?

PETE
 (uncertain)
 You damn straight.

Pearl spreads, then drops her arms.

PEARL
 Lord help me. This is all my
 fault.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RABBIT RANCH PARLOR - DAY

PARAMEDICS wheel the stretchered Hammer through the door,
 with Pete close behind. Li'l Jimmy follows to take up his
 post.

Pearl sits close by Staci, who removes the SNUGLI from the
 now-still BUNDLE. Pearl self-consciously helps them get
 comfortable beside her.

PEARL
 So, who's this, here, whom I almost
 got killed?

STACI
 Oh, Gran! we're okay!
 (beaming)
 This is your first great-grandbaby,
 Joshua Earl.

Staci peels back the tiny HOOD.

PEARL
 You passed your Grampa's eyes
 along, I see. Who's his Daddy?

STACI
 Not important right now - believe
 me.

PEARL
 Oh, my.

Pearl cuts Staci some slack by changing the subject.

PEARL (CONT'D)
 I see that you're not one o' those
 "Gothics" any more, girl.

STACI

(grins)

No, Gran. It's not acceptable to waitress and "temp" in Marin County looking like a figment of Anne Rice's imagination.

PEARL

Anne who?

STACI

She's - never mind.

PEARL

You're what, now? Nineteen?

STACI

Yep. Be twenty in a couple weeks.

PEARL

Did you ever get out of high school - one way or the other?

STACI

Finally. I went back nights for a G.E.D. after I got out of "juvie."

Josh COOS at her; she smiles.

STACI (CONT'D)

That's where I met Josh's father. He's kind of a loser - still working some shit out. Oh. Sorry.

PEARL

I'm sure he'll come along, in time. Most important thing right now is that Josh's Mama loves him - and his Gramma, too. May I hold him a minute?

Staci hands Josh over and throws an arm over Pearl's shoulders.

STACI

I wish other people heard me like you do, Gran. You've always been the one I could talk to. I hate it that you're so far away.

Pearl dangles her index finger and strokes Josh's tiny lower lip, delighting him.

PEARL
So. What happened, this time?

STACI
(clouds over)
I thought things might improve
after I did my stretch for dealing
weed. Working days and taking
classes nights was my idea.

Staci rolls her eyes.

STACI (CONT'D)
Daddy wanted me to intern at the
firm, towards something permanent.
I just couldn't stand the idea of
being ignored all day, and all
night!

Staci stands and moves to the window, staring.

PEARL
Didn't work out, huh?

STACI
It was tolerable 'til he found out
I was pregnant. I refused to give
up the father, so he kicked me out
and cut me off after Josh was born.
"Tough love," he called it. Said
he was sick of the arguing, paying
for therapy --

Pearl sniffs but catches her tongue.

PEARL (V.O.)
Only therapy I ever needed at your
age was a long, hot bath at
Walley's.

STACI
And the shame, his first grandchild
born illegitimate.

Pearl looks up after her.

PEARL
It's a pity your father gets so
full of himself. His sister wasn't
born out of wedlock, but she wasn't
exactly made in it, either.

Staci turns, her mouth open.

STACI

Gran?!

PEARL

That's right. Your late aunt Opal was born April Fourteenth, Nineteen Thirty-seven. Earl and I married on September Fifth, Nineteen Thirty-six. Opal came to us on the Fourth of July. Delroy never did the math, I guess.

Staci walks back over and sits down by Pearl.

STACI

So you and Grampa had to --?

PEARL

Not "had to," child: "did." I wasn't afraid; he'd already proposed. If my folks or his were ashamed, they had the grace and the good sense not to say so. I was lucky, and so was your aunt.

STACI

I know so little about her - just a few pictures. Dad never even mentions her. What was she like?

Pearl touches Staci's chin.

PEARL

Pretty, headstrong, a handful. Like you. You favor her, in a lot of ways. Maybe that gets between Delroy and you.

STACI

(puzzled)

Did Daddy hate her?

PEARL

Only for dyin' on him. He thought it was his fault. On top of the normal, brother-sister things - well, it was too much for him.

STACI

Did Grampa blame Daddy?

Pearl's whole body slumps.

PEARL

No, child. I told Delroy so, again
- just this morning. Earl bore it
as best he could, which the boy
took for shuttin' him out. Earl
was just a creature of his time.

Staci laces her hands on her head and bites a cheek.

STACI

Why can't we talk to the people we
love the most?

Pearl throws her an "Excuse me?" look.

STACI (CONT'D)

My parents, I mean.

PEARL

Things are more complicated now, I
guess. Every time you feel right
about somethin' and just take the
risk of sayin' or doin' it, you
have to find a label to put on what
you said or did.

Pearl reflects a little, then shakes her head.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Then, you've got to pay a head-
shrinker to lie down and talk about
it. Doesn't matter how it turned
out!

Pearl extends her arms and makes circles with her hands,
framing her Freud impression.

PEARL (CONT'D)

"How does zis make you feel?" "How
does zat make you feel?"

Staci guffaws, then crosses her arms and frowns.

STACI

There's just so much I always
wanted to say to Dad and Mom -
about me, my problems, my dreams.
Seems like what they fear most is
hearing that I'm as fragile and
vulnerable as they are, in spite of
my "advantages."

(beat)

(MORE)

STACI (CONT'D)

The worst part is feeling like I'm disappointing them, without every really knowing why.

PEARL

I know, dear, I know. Lord knows, Hattie and I were wild enough at your age. I can't say what's changed. Seeing yearlings run, buck, and kick, then just grow out of it, must've been a lesson for me.

Josh fusses. Staci takes him back and pushes him under her top. Pearl admires them.

STACI

So, Gran. What are you going to do now?

PEARL

Don't know, child. It all seemed so clear before. First Hattie, that TV man, then Mr. Hammer. Put you and the baby in harm's way. Maybe Delroy's right...

STACI

About what?

PEARL

That I'm too old. Life's passed me by. I belong in a home.

Pearl gets up and goes to the WINDOW, her back to Staci.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Guess I'll just have to wait on the law to end all this...

Staci can't find words. Pearl returns. They fall silent, touching each other in random, needful ways. LIGHT from the western parlor WINDOWS seeps across the floor until it bathes their feet.

Pearl catches a breath halfway out and purses her lips.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Staci, how are you gettin' on, right now?

STACI

Like I said, Gran - waiting tables and temporary office work.

PEARL

No. I mean, how are you living?

STACI

Oh. I have two roommates; one actually has a little girl. We kinda look out for each other. Expensive, though.

PEARL

That's good... That's real good.

She ruminates. Pete comes through the DOOR.

PETE

Pearl - 's'cuse me. The man from the mortuary is here.

WILL WAITE, 60, enters behind him, wearing the standard-issue dark SUIT, starched white SHIRT, and nondescript TIE. He crosses stiffly to Pearl and seizes her hands. He sees the baby asleep and tones it down a little.

WILL

H'lo, Miz Mutter. I'm so sorry for your loss.

PEARL

Thank you, Will. How's the senior partner these days?

WILL

Oh, Ralph passed on three years ago. Had a real nice service --
(chagrined)
If I do say so, myself.
Circumstances aside, Miz Mutter, I'd be lyin' if I said I wasn't glad you and Hattie are back home again.

PEARL

(slowly)
Home...

Pearl leaps up and starts to pull Staci up. Staci complies, but has to keep an arm back to cradle a startled Josh.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Granddaughter, how'd you like to take a little ride down the road with me?

STACI

Gran?

PEARL

Will, what are you driving? Van or
hearse?

WILL

I've got the panel truck, Pearl.
The hearse is for burials.

PEARL

Does it have windows?

WILL

In the back door, but they're
tinted.

PEARL

Got room in the back for anything
besides the body?

WILL

Not to sit, but there's leftover
floor space, once the gurney's in.
Why?

Pearl fixes on Pete

PEARL

Think Will can get his wagon close
enough so's we can get Hattie in
there privately?

PETE

Not through the parlor. We could
get him around to the break between
Buildings A and B, though.

Pearl squeezes Staci's hand.

PEARL

Anything in your car you can't part
with?

STACI

No... No - not a goddamned thing!

PEARL

Well, then hitch Josh up! We've
got a lot to talk about.

Staci begins gathering herself. Barney wanders in.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Barney, could you get our bags from
the bedroom, please?

Pearl does a double-take.

PEARL (V.O.)
Barney!

PEARL
(embarrassed)
Barney, did you want to come with --

Barney smiles charitably.

BARNEY
Naw, Pearl- but thanks, just the
same. Me'n Pete been talkin'. He
says he can use a driver to run
errands and such, for room and
board. I'm old enough to handle a
car, but too old to handle the
girls!

Barney and Pete share a laugh.

BARNEY (CONT'D)
Pete says it'd be like ancient
times, havin' a "Eunice" around to
tend the harem. Best thing is,
I'll be no burden to the God-
fearin' nor the Medi-Cal any more.

Pearl spins Barney gaily around.

PEARL
Barney Rasmussen, you're a Helluva
wheel man, and a true friend. I
get in a scrape again, I'll know
right where to turn!

Barney radiates pleasure. Pearl turns and kisses Pete on the
neck.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Caswell P. Collier - Mister Triple-
X, whichever - you're a wonder, and
I'm grateful. If I was a twenty-
five-year-old man, I'd spend every
other paycheck up here.

PETE
(sniffles)
You're welcome anytime, Miz Mutter.

He abandons caution for a tearful bear hug.

PETE (CONT'D)

Aw, Hell - welcome home, Pearl!
Sure wish I could still ride and
rope.

Pearl winks.

PEARL

Don't you fret - the bunkhouse at
the "Diamond M" will always have a
poker table!

Pearl smiles tenderly at Pete, pushes back, and looks around.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Well, time's short. Pete, you tell
Stevie if anybody still has
business with me, he knows where I
live.

Everyone scatters to their assumed tasks.

INT. RABBIT RANCH HALLWAY - DAY

We follow Pearl and Staci, arm in arm, as they walk the
hallway toward where the mortuary VAN is. Will wheels
Hattie's CORPSE ahead of them and Barney trails with their
BELONGINGS.

PEARL

What do you want to be when you
grow up, dear?

STACI

Artist, I think - though Daddy
always thought that idea frivolous.

PEARL

Huh! Feels the same way about
runnin' cows, even though it fed
him pretty well.

Staci stops and looks at Pearl.

STACI

Why?

PEARL

How about cowgirl for a while, to
hold the ends together?

(MORE)

PEARL (CONT'D)

Lived in or sold, I'll bet my half
of the "Diamond M" will be worth a
lot of paint and brushes one day!

Staci stoops a little, captures the back of Pearl's neck in
her hands, and kisses her forehead.

STACY

We're a pair, ain't we, Gran?

Pearl pinches her granddaughter's cheeks.

PEARL

Not yet, honey - but we will be!

They continue, laughing, toward the open DOOR at the end of
the BUILDING.

EXT. RABBIT RANCH - DAY

The press MOB stirs as the mortuary VAN circles out from
behind BUILDING A. It is the lone vehicle and Li'l Jimmy
remains on guard, so there's little apparent curiosity.

REPORTER #1

Think we ought to follow it?

REPORTER #2

Why? Ever get a good stand-up from
a dead body?

REPORTER #1

Guess not. God knows old people
are boring enough, alive!

The van passes the reporters and heads down the ROAD, into
the fading afternoon SUN. From inside we hear two voices,
rising together in song:

PEARL & STACI

"Some-where, Over the rain-
bow/Skies are blue ..."

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOUTH TAHOE CHURCH - NIGHT

Rev. Alston twirls the kinks out of a SLIDE PROJECTOR'S
REMOTE CONTROL and takes his place in front of a blank SCREEN
at the LECTERN in the SANCTUARY.

REV. ALSTON

Well, thanks for your patience,
everyone.

(MORE)

REV. ALSTON (CONT'D)
 We're finally ready for our
 "virtual" Holy Land tour - a day
 late. Any questions?

REV. ALSTON'S P.O.V. - THE TINY FLOCK

Only four of 24 SEATS are filled. In the rear, one
 MARANATHER is asleep, the OTHER bored. In the front ROW, an
 eager Ellie Bush launches her hand, while Elmer sits by in
 worship.

BACK TO SCENE

Rev. Alston winces, but quickly forces a smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOUTH TAHOE CASINO - EVENING

We glide through the CASINO, catching the happy faces of the
 other fifteen Maranatha VOYAGERS, busy working the TABLES,
 SLOT MACHINES, and ROULETTE WHEEL. Through the lounge DOORS,
 Beatrice climbs up on STAGE and helps an ELVIS IMPERSONATOR
 shimmy and croon. On the main DANCE FLOOR, the Sad-Eyed Man
 steers a laughing female CASHIER through a tango.

INT. RENO WEDDING CHAPEL - NIGHT

A smiling "MINISTER" stands before Skip and Anna Mae. She
 sports a small, elastic bridal VEIL and admires the thin,
 cheap WEDDING BAND on her left hand. A drowsy, bath-robed
 KEYBOARDIST prepares to hammer out the chords of the "WEDDING
 MARCH." Visibly drunk, Skip is finishing his vows.

SKIP

I dah-uh. I dah-uh. I dew.

MINISTER

You may now kiss the wife, Sparky.

SKIP

That's "Skip," Paaaarrrrson.

MINISTER

Whatever. Thirty-five bucks, plus
 tax and license.

Skip gropes for his WALLET and turns to the bride.

SKIP

NOW can we get a room?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STEVE HUTCHINSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Capt. Hutchinson, his feet up, is on the PHONE. He's mildly irritated.

STEVE

(on phone)

Look, Special Agent Rector. I appreciate your point of view. Problem is, we can't scare up anybody locally to press charges, either.

(beat)

Yes, kidnapping and interstate flight are serious matters. If you want to work those from the California side, be my guest.

(beat)

All right. You get a grand jury to kick out an indictment, call me back, and we'll talk arrest and extradition.

(beat)

Fine. You do that. Okay. Goodbye, Special Agent.

Steve hangs up and stares at the phone.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Not on your best day, G-Man.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RABBIT RANCH LIMO - DAY

Through the WINDSHIELD, we see Barney driving and humming. Party CHATTER can be heard in the back. There's a knock at the smoked-glass WINDOW behind him. He locates a SWITCH and lowers it. A laughing Rikki pokes her head through and playfully kisses and nibbles his ear.

Barney blushes. He slams on the brakes. Rikki stops laughing. Barney looks in his lap; so does Rikki. She smiles and returns to her business. He looks up.

BARNEY

Uh-oh!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MARANATHA SENIOR RESIDENCE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

The long-suffering charge NURSE gawks from her STATION as "Marine Corps Marla" swivels up the hallway in full regalia.

Arriving, she finishes her GUM noisily and parks it under the LEDGE.

MARLA
I'm lookin' for Hector Alvarez.

NURSE
(wearily)
Are you family?

MARLA
Yeah. I'm his "niece," Marla.

NURSE
(points)
Two-Oh-One. Around the corner.

MARLA
Thanks.

NURSE
Don't mention it. Please.

Marla takes a few steps, hesitates, and turns.

MARLA
Oh. This is the third Friday of
the month, right?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SACRAMENTO TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

Bertha Sue Hanks sits in the CHAIR as the MAKEUP ARTIST finishes. A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT ducks in.

ASSISTANT
Bertha Sue, we're ready for you.

She looks in the CORNER. Her two GRANDCHILDREN look up from their PLAYSTATION 2s, impressed. She rises, airily.

BERTHA SUE
Well? Shall we go shoot a
commercial?

They leave together, bubbling. The game consoles stay.

EXT. CATTLE RANCH - DAY (FLASH FORWARD)

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

MINDEN, NV

INSERT - TITLE OVER:

Two Years Later

BACK TO SCENE

A silver BOXSTER races toward us on a two-lane HIGHWAY. It slides into a turn onto an unpaved DRIVE and passes under a weathered, primitive Western sign:

Diamond-M

It rolls past green HAY and fat CATTLE, trailing DUST up to the PORCH of a 19th Century two-story RANCH HOUSE. Delroy and Bitsy, all Marin County chic, climb out. SOUNDS from a big BARBECUE, complete with JUG BAND, draw them around to the BACK YARD. He's tentative; she takes his hand and drags him, with firm affection.

Pearl and Staci turn. Pearl looks the same, maybe a little sturdier. Fully the cowgirl, a fit Staci glows with peace; Josh, now 3, runs up and tackles her leg. They're all there: Barney; Pete; Hammer (with cane), Li'l Jimmy, and the other bodyguards; Mia and Rikki; Steve and LANA HUTCHINSON, 40, and their twins; Bobby Sangiacomo; Will Waite; CHARLIE NYE and a couple other HIRED HANDS; and a good share of Minden's POPULATION. As one, they look up and see Delroy and Bitsy.

Delroy resists, rooted. Bitsy drops his hand and heads for Staci, embracing her warmly. She turns to Pearl; they hesitate, then open to one another with their eyes.

Pearl offers a long-stemmed GOBLET and wine BOTTLE in her direction.

PEARL

Coastal Chardonnay, Bitsy? It's a little young, but the butternut-squash finish should suit you.

Bitsy's mouth falls open. Pearl's sidelong glance meets Staci's wink. Bitsy looks at Staci, who cranks up her eyebrows and shrugs.

BITSY

Why, thank you, Pearl! That sounds lovely. Right after I get reacquainted with my grandson!

Bitsy kneels to find Josh's eye level.

BITSY (CONT'D)

Hey, cowboy. New in town?

JOSH

Hi...

Josh chews his finger, looks up, and gets the go-ahead prompt.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Grandma.

Bitsy sweeps him up eagerly and wheels to find Delroy, who hasn't moved. He still refuses to look directly at them. Stymied, she turns to Pearl, who gives the glass and bottle to Staci.

PEARL

Twenty-two years don't fall away
just like that. Give us a minute.

Pearl walks to Delroy and cradles his hands, as though they might bruise easily. She speaks softly.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Come on in the house, Delroy. See
if it's like you remember.

Delroy follows, lagging and dreadfully quiet.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY

They cross the THRESHOLD into the FOYER. Pearl patiently steers a halting Delroy up a long STAIRCASE and down the HALL, to a BEDROOM on the end.

INT. RANCH HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

It is Opal's old ROOM. He stands in the DOORWAY, scarcely breathing. It's all there: her old twin BED, with an updated BEDSPREAD. The DRESSER, littered with a teen female's KNICK-KNACKS and MEMORABILIA. The only obvious big addition is a small, race-car BED. Pearl sees him looking at it.

PEARL

That's Josh's. He'll move to your
old room when he's big enough.

DELROY

Uh-huh.

The WALLS are loaded with bold, post-modern PAINTINGS - many more than Delroy remembers. He looks at Pearl quizzically; she divides a wall with her hand.

PEARL

All those from here over are
Staci's. Uncanny, isn't it?

The definition and symmetry of the work overpower Delroy. He cannot speak.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Yeah, she's a lot quicker to it
than Opal was. Seems more
determined, too. She's mountin' a
show in Carson City next month.

Delroy follows the work around the room to the dresser. Side by side are two PHOTOGRAPHS: Opal with Delroy, and Staci with Josh. Delroy stares at them; slowly and carefully, he picks them up as though they might burn his hands. The subject-pairs' poses and expressions are nearly identical.

Delroy buckles onto Staci's BED and breaks down. Pearl quickly sits beside him. He grasps for her, dropping the photos, and is wracked with sobs. She cradles his head.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Welcome home, son. Welcome home.

Pearl strokes Delroy tenderly until he stops. He sits up and wipes his face with his SLEEVE.

DELROY

It's okay, Ma. I-I'm okay.

Pearl stands up and grasps his shoulders. He looks up at her like he's 10 again, and just roused from a nightmare.

PEARL

You come on, when you're ready.
We'll all be there.

DELROY

I'll be down soon. I need to look
around a little more. Okay?

Pearl nods and goes DOWNSTAIRS. Delroy folds his hands and just stares. Momentarily, he gets up and goes through the DOOR. We watch him inch the length of the HALLWAY toward the BEDROOM at the other end.

INT. RANCH HOUSE/MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Delroy halts at the edge of the time warp that is his parents' BEDROOM. Everything is as it was before he left. His fearful but needy eyes deliberately follow every contour and feature, settling on the carved oak BUREAU.

Hanging from the beveled MIRROR, next to his reflection, is his father's worn and sweat-stained Silver STETSON.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY

The backyard festivities continue, but a bit muted. Pearl, Staci, and Bitsy share affection and concern. Pearl has her back to the screened BACK PORCH.

O.S., the SOUND of the SCREEN DOOR OPENING.

Pearl sees every now-quiet FACE before her looking slightly over her head. The MUSIC stops. She turns, slowly. Her eyes widen and she throws her hands over her mouth.

PEARL'S P.O.V. - DELROY RETURNS

Framed in the doorway is Delroy; his stern features relax and promise a smile. Placed confidently on his head is Earl Mutter's silver Stetson.

P.O.V. - FROM THE DOORWAY

As a riotous REEL breaks out, Delroy strides to his WOMEN and hugs them into a bunch. He breaks free, squats, plops the hat on Josh's head and hoists him onto his shoulders. They hop around boisterously as the women laugh, cry, and applaud.

The SQUARE DANCER CALLER steps up to the MICROPHONE.

CALLER

Now, grab your best gal...

Delroy hands Josh to Bitsy and offers Pearl and Staci each an arm. Everyone else falls into place, and joy reigns.

FADE OUT.