

LAST OF THE SADDLE TRAMPS

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL FARMHOUSE - MINOT, MAINE - WINTER - 1954

An old-fashioned Maine winter blankets the countryside. A blizzard has drifted the roads. The main dirt road is only partly plowed. The isolated small white farmhouse is snowed in.

SUPERIMPOSE: Minot, Maine, Winter, 1954.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

An oil lamp lights the room. MESANNIE WILKINS, 62, is in bed coughing. A painful infection rattles in her lungs. Her UNCLE WALDO, in his eighties, blinking through cataracts, sits by her side. Waldo looks scared. Otherwise helpless, he starts talking.

UNCLE WALDO

I ever tell you, the revolutionary war hero, John Paul Jones, mast on his ship came from one of the tallest pines in Maine. That's right, and our own kin helped drive the oxen that hauled it to the ocean. 'Course a few Massachusetts diehards claim it was their pine...

Voices can be heard outside. Mesannie is too weak to notice. There is a BANGING on the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Waldo opens the door. Their nearest neighbor, a French farmer, and his two teenage boys, stand at the door in snowshoes. Their faces are red, stung from the cold.

FRENCH FARMER

We thought we'd check in on you, see how you've been holding up.

Waldo lifts his eyes up to the ceiling and beyond.

UNCLE WALDO

Thank you, Lord.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A snowplow arrives and plows the end road leading from the main road to the farmhouse.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A car arrives. A man gets out carrying a black doctor's bag.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

An ambulance with its lights flashing is parked in front of the house. The farmhouse door opens. Two men carry out Mesannie on a stretcher.

INT. NURSING HOME - SPRING - DAY

Mesannie reclines in a long row of iron hospital beds, defiantly dressed. Outside the window a crab apple tree blossoms in the warm springtime sun. A country doctor approaches.

DOCTOR

How you feeling today, Mesannie?

MESANNIE

Just fine. Same as yesterday. Don't know what I'm doing here taking up a perfectly good bed when someone else could be using it.

The doc eyeballs her chart and sits down in a chair by the bed.

DOCTOR

(clearly not fooled)

All right, Mesannie Wilkins. I'll permit you to go home on one condition...Rest...Be as inactive as possible. That lung of yours worries me. And it should worry you. X rays are still showing a spot I can't explain. I want you to remind yourself of these two words every day: Live restfully. Now I don't mean to frighten you, but you have two to four more years ahead of you, if you live restfully. So will you promise to take it easy?

She folds her arms on her chest and stubbornly avoids his gaze.

MESANNIE

I'm not one to pay for information and then disregard it.

The doctor stares at the floor, figuring out how to proceed.

DOCTOR

Your Uncle Waldo passed away this morning. I just got word from the old folks' home. I'm real sorry.

Mesannie fixes her gaze on the bed sheet. She just nods.

MESANNIE

Thank you.

DOCTOR

Get ready to go home. I'll drive you.

The doctor stands and leaves.

EXT. MESANNIE'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

A worn 1940s sedan pulls up and stops in front of the farmhouse.

INT. CAR - DAY

The doctor turns to Mesannie.

DOCTOR

Check with me every two weeks. And live restfully, for the rest of your life.

Mesannie nods and wordlessly gets out of the car. Worried, the doctor watches her go inside.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mesannie stands in the middle of the kitchen looking around the empty house. There's a knock on the screen door. She turns to find her neighbor and his teenage boys. One of the boys holds a dog, a shaggy little brown and white Spaniel that's been stretched courtesy of some Daschund influence.

Mesannie opens the screen door and the boy places the dog on the floor. Mesannie scoops him up. The dog covers her in kisses.

MESANNIE

Depeche Toi!

She turns to the boys.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for taking care of him.

YOUNGER BOY

He got to see his litter mates. They hadn't seen him since we brought him over as a pup last year.

FRENCH FARMER

He's true to his name. Depeche Toi, "hurry up." He's always in a hurry.

MESANNIE

Especially when he's waiting at the door to go out.

FRENCH FARMER

What will you do now?

MESANNIE

Got a contract with a pickle company to raise cucumbers. They furnish the seed and fertilizer. Cost is applied against the total paid for 'em in the fall. My whole future's in pickles.

FRENCH FARMER

Gotta pick cucumbers quick. Best if they're under four inches. And nothing grows faster. You can't possibly pick them all alone. We'll be happy to help.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mesannie sits at the table staring at a piece of paper. She's pale, tired looking, a bundle of nerves. Mesannie rereads the piece of paper, a bank foreclosure notice for the farm.

Depeche Toi is curled up at her feet under the table. Mesannie gets up and goes over to the door. She props open the screen door with an empty milk bottle. Depeche Toi watches her.

MESANNIE

In case something happens to me. I don't want you trapped in here.

EXT. FIELD - LATE SPRING/SUMMER - MONTAGE

1) Mesannie hoes a big piece of land. Depeche Toi sits under a nearby tree and watches.

2) It's raining. Mesannie works in the field pulling weeds from in between the thriving cucumber plants.

3) Mesannie picks cucumbers, working as fast as she can to fill up the wooden bushel baskets. Baskets filled with cucumbers line the rows behind her.

4) Perspiring, Mesannie places a handful of cucumbers in an overflowing bushel basket. She goes over to the tree where Depeche Toi sits and ladles a drink of water from a pail. She unwraps some food covered in a dish towel and eats in the field.

5) Mesannie picks cucumbers by lantern in the dark.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY - FALL

The leaves are changing color. An open truck with wooden slats in back and a pickle logo painted on the cab is parked out front. Mesannie helps a uniformed pickle company employee load the last of the bushels of cucumbers onto the truck.

PICKLE COMPANY MAN

You're lucky to have avoided the frost.
It's been a short crop year elsewhere.

He takes a pad from his shirt pocket and writes her a receipt.

MESANNIE

Prices are higher than expected.

The man nods, jumps into the truck, and drives away. Mesannie turns to Depeche Toi with a genuine sense of relief.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

We've got enough to winter on.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mesannie rests in an armchair by the window. The tick tock of a grandfather clock in the corner echoes in the quiet house. Outside the window the leaves on the trees are beginning to fall. Wild geese fly in a V formation, honking their way south for the winter. Depeche Toi is in his place at her feet.

Mesannie is museful. She talks out loud to herself, to Depeche Toi, to no one in particular.

MESANNIE

Geese are heading south earlier than usual. Haven't seen a crow in weeks.

Depeche Toi cocks his head to the side, listening.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Don't want to risk being isolated
again. Don't want to die here alone.

Depeche Toi cocks his head to the other side, questioning her.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I've had lots of time to think. I've
got a plan. Now all I need is a bit of
encouragement. I'll go see mama's old
school friends. I can trust them not to
gossip. I don't want everyone in Minot
knowing my business.

INT. MRS. WILLIAMS' HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Mesannie and MRS. WILLIAMS, a prim-lipped, wizened little woman
in her eighties, are having tea and chatting. Mrs. Williams' tea
cup clatters on the table.

MRS. WILLIAMS

California! You must be joking!

MESANNIE

I'm not joking.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Yes you are. And let me remind you,
Mesannie Mabel Libby Wilkins, you don't
have the courage your mother had, for
she was a true Libby of the old strain,
and even she didn't have the gumption
to go to California. And how long has
it been since you've been on a horse?
And furthermore, there's not a safe
road in America anymore!

Mesannie has a temperament that can change in a flash from
expansive geniality to defiance. Now her dander's up.

MESANNIE

I was thinking of using secondary
roads. I'm in no hurry.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Why, you couldn't begin to carry the
things you'd need on a horse! You'd
need a buggy, and the wheels wouldn't
last very long. No, you must be joking.
You've been a lady all your life,
Mesannie Mabel! Don't ruin your
reputation at this late stage.

(MORE)

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

And don't mention this to anyone else,
or you'll find yourself being sent up
to the state insane asylum in Augusta.

INT. MRS. MILLER'S HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Mesannie and MRS. MILLER, a more high-spirited version of Mrs. Williams, are having tea. Mesannie looks dejected.

MRS. MILLER

Don't you listen to her, Annie. Old pigheaded fool. Do you realize we haven't exchanged a word in over forty years? Lord knows I don't even recall why. Now, go on with your plan.

MESANNIE

Well, I figure I'd buy the cheapest horse I could find, ride him south until my money gave out, find a job, save a few dollars, and then ride on. My goal will be my mother's goal, California.

MRS. MILLER

Doesn't surprise me one bit. Your Grandma Libby, she was almost eighty when she rode from South Auburn to Bangor and back again. Stopped only to change horses and swim the river twice.

MESANNIE

I heard it said she rode a hundred and eighty miles in just under thirty hours. Surprised many men, and several horses, I imagine.

MRS. MILLER

So, this sort of thing is in your bloodstream. And if I were your age and a Libby, I'd have a notion to join you. I think you're doing something wonderful, Annie. You can do it, so long as you think you can do it. You may be tired and hungry lots of times, but trust in God, keep going, and you'll get there. And don't feel too bad about leaving Minot. All you've had here was hard work and misfortune...Now if things go wrong, or if they go right and you want to come back, remember this is a big house and there'll always be plenty of room for you.

(MORE)

MRS. MILLER (CONT'D)
 So go right ahead, and I hope you'll
 come back to see me sometime.

EXT. RIDING ACADEMY - DAY

A horse van barrels down the driveway of the riding academy kicking up dust. It rolls to a stop. The passenger door opens and Mesannie gets out. The RIDING ACADEMY OWNER, fifties, slicked hair, a suit, hurries over to her and extends his hand.

RIDING ACADEMY OWNER
 We were glad to get your letter. Good
 time of year for a bargain horse. All
 the camps and stables are reducing
 inventory. What'd you have in mind?

Mesannie notes his eagerness to sell and looks wary.

MESANNIE
 A tough one, sex and disposition
 unimportant, with looks I won't be
 ashamed of. And wearing the lowest
 possible price tag.

RIDING ACADEMY OWNER
 I've got just the horse for you.

INT. RIDING ACADEMY STABLE - DAY

Expecting a lemon, Mesannie follows the owner into the stable. They stop in front of a box stall that holds a rusty black horse of fourteen plus hands, with small pointed ears and eyes set wide apart. The horse whinnies and takes a step toward Mesannie. He has strong legs and nicely shaped feet. Overall he's well built, except for a scrawny neck due to light feed and overwork.

MESANNIE
 What name does he go by?

RIDING ACADEMY OWNER
 Name's Tarzan.

EXT. STABLE YARD - DAY

Tarzan stands like a statue when Mesannie mounts him. They walk around the yard.

RIDING ACADEMY OWNER
 What do you think?

MESANNIE

Reminds me of the old-time trotters that used to race at our fairs. He's got a nice, easy walk. I feel right at home on him.

EXT. MESANNIE'S FARMHOUSE - AROUND BACK - DAY

A horse van is parked by the barn. A stable hand leads Tarzan out of the van and hands the lead rope to Mesannie. Depeche Toi runs over to Tarzan and whips around in excited circles. Tarzan leans down and nuzzles Depeche Toi. It's love at first sight.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mesannie is working out a list at the table. A calendar on the wall indicates the date is November 6th. Mesannie crosses through an item on the list "skillet", only to add it back on. At the bottom she writes "Cucumber money, \$32."

INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie gets into bed with a brand new leatherbound diary. She opens it and marks down the date and her first journal entry.

MESANNIE (V.O.)

I start tomorrow, leaving home and friends behind. I go forth as a tramp of fate among strangers.

Mesannie closes the diary and places it on the bedside table. She leans over and shuts off the light.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Mesannie is in bed awake staring up at the ceiling. Depeche Toi is curled up on the rug by the bed fast asleep. Mesannie shifts around, fitful. She throws off the covers and sits up.

MESANNIE

Oh, it's no use.

Mesannie gets out of bed and kneels down beside it. She closes her eyes and earnestly folds her hands in prayer.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Lord, does what I'm doing meet with Your approval? Am I doing the right thing?

Mesannie waits, although not really expecting an answer.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I know You are busy, but if I toss a coin five times and it comes up heads three out of five, will that mean I have Your approval?

Mesannie labors to her feet and switches on the light. Depeche Toi stirs and through sleepy eyes watches her search through the drawer in the bedside table for a coin.

Mesannie sits on the bed and summons courage. She takes a deep breath and flips the coin. Heads. She flips it again. Tails. She flips it a third time. Heads. She flips it again. Heads. She flips it a fifth time. Heads. Mesannie looks up at the ceiling.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Four out of five. Thank You.

Mesannie shuts off the light and climbs back into bed. She closes her eyes and quickly drifts off to sleep.

EXT. BEHIND THE FARMHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Mesannie has trouble stowing the gear on Tarzan. She's dressed in male attire for comfort in the saddle and safety on the road. She wears a hunting cap, quilted vest over a wool shirt, heavy work jeans, and rubbers over lumberman's boots. Mesannie ties something on causing something else to slide off.

EXT. BEHIND THE FARMHOUSE - LATE MORNING

Tarzan is finally packed and ready to go. He's piled up like a moving van. Pots and pans hang from the saddle horn. They're setting out with just about everything Mesannie owns. She does a final check of the rope knots, grumbling to herself--

MESANNIE

So much for our early start.

The final check complete, Mesannie places her hands on her hips.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

California, here we come.

Both Tarzan's and Depeche Toi's ears perk up.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to the boys)

Now, all I ask of you is patience.

(MORE)

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

We're heading off for a long walk, but someday we'll settle down. I promise.

Mesannie takes a last look around. She pulls the ear flaps of her hunting hat down tight over her ears.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

We won't get to California standing around here.

Mesannie slips a foot in a stirrup and swings her sixty-one inches and one hundred fifty pounds up into the only clear space on Tarzan's back, the twelve inches of saddle. She points Tarzan for the main road. Depeche Toi follows behind. As they walk down the end road leading from the yard, Mesannie starts to turn but stops, not having the heart to look back at her little house.

EXT. DIRT MAIN ROAD - MORNING

They haven't progressed a hundred yards down the main road. Her farmhouse is still visible in the background. Mesannie jerks Tarzan to a halt. A wave of panic rushes over her. Her hand holding the reins is trembling.

MESANNIE

(talking to herself)

What sort of an idiot am I? Thirty-two dollars won't get us to California. And who in his right mind would hire an old woman to work at odd jobs along the way? If the newspapers are right, plenty of men are out of work. So who would hire a complete stranger? An old woman dressed like a man.

Mesannie looks down at Depeche Toi, who looks up at her, waiting. Her eyes grow moist. She swallows hard.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Depeche Toi)

According to Uncle Waldo, the best way to overcome the shakes is to talk your fool head off.

Mesannie nudges Tarzan to move on and starts talking.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

My ancestors were pioneers. And that's something to remember if we get into trouble. One of my kin was with Lewis and Clark. His name was John Libby or Jonathan Libby. Mama had his name written in her old family Bible, long since lost...

EXT. DIRT MAIN ROAD - DAY

They plod down the traffic-less road. Mesannie's confidence seems to have flowed back. A piece of the gear slips. Tarzan stops and waits. Mesannie dismounts and reties the knot.

Depeche Toi is well ahead of them, scouting every yard on both sides of the road. He comes running back, yelping all the way. A big unfriendly dog is at his heels. Depeche Toi runs right under Tarzan's belly. Tarzan snorts, lays his ears back, and rears up. He comes down with his front hoofs reaching for the big dog. The dog yelps, tucks his tail between his legs, and runs for home.

EXT. BLACKTOP HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie rides Tarzan along the shoulder of a blacktop highway. A few cars and trucks zip by. Depeche Toi trails behind them on a leash of clothesline tied to the saddle horn. He darts back and forth, full of life. Depeche Toi investigates a telephone pole and winds himself around it. Tarzan feels a tug on the rope and stops. Mesannie turns in the saddle and shakes her head, her patience wearing thin, and waits for him to unwind himself.

EXT. BLACKTOP HIGHWAY - DAY

They've reached a wooded strip with hardly any shoulder. Traffic has picked up considerably. Mesannie has shortened the lead rope to keep Depeche Toi close. He trots out in front of Tarzan. People driving by in shiny cars, radios playing, laugh and wave at her odd choice of transportation and this unusual parade.

Up ahead, Mesannie sees a truck coming at them with a loose canvas tarp over its load flapping in the wind. The truck moves to pass a car. Mesannie has nowhere to go. The truck speeds by just inches from them. Its canvas flaps in Tarzan's face, causing him to rear and head for the trees.

Tarzan runs several yards, stops, and lowers his head to nibble some grass as if nothing happened. Miraculously the gear has stayed on. Mesannie grips the saddle horn, her knuckles white.

A coast to coast moving van has pulled to the side of the road. A uniformed driver, a friendly man about Mesannie's age, walks over to her. He leans down and untangles Depeche Toi, who has circled Tarzan's front legs twice, hogtyeing him.

TRUCK DRIVER

There's terror on the road these days.

Mesannie takes off her hat and mops her brow. She simply nods.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)
I passed you earlier, going the other way. Been thinking about you ever since. Where you going?

MESANNIE
A far piece.

TRUCK DRIVER
Wish I would have done a bit of roaming in my younger days.

The driver pulls a blank check and a pen from his pocket.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)
Would you mind signing the back? I'd like your autograph. For my wife. She collects.

MESANNIE
Why would you want my autograph?

TRUCK DRIVER
Fate. Something told me to stop.

MESANNIE
But how do you know she'll want mine?

TRUCK DRIVER
I have a hunch that either you're a famous person or you will be famous.

MESANNIE
I'm not Greta Garbo.

Mesannie signs her name on the check, smiling to herself.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)
It's too bad my Uncle Waldo isn't here. Whenever I'd get uppity about something, he used to tell me I wasn't Greta Garbo.

Mesannie hands him the signed check. He hands her a dollar.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)
Oh, I can't accept that.

TRUCK DRIVER
I insist. It's a lucky dollar. You'll need some luck on your journey.

Mesannie hesitantly accepts the dollar.

MESANNIE

Was it a lucky dollar for you?

TRUCK DRIVER

Sure, I have your autograph.

The driver slips the check in his pocket and heads back to his truck. Mesannie points Tarzan back toward the road. Tarzan sets out fast. Mesannie holds him back and slows him down.

MESANNIE

It's a long time 'til night. Now mind your manners and show a little more respect. There's been a change in your cargo up here. Now you're carrying a celebrity. Ask any truck driver.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY - DUSK

Daylight is fading fast and night is not far off. Mesannie, Tarzan, and Depeche Toi are out of the wooded hills and in flat country. A cold, biting northwest wind blows. Mesannie spots a big farmhouse with a barn set back off the road.

EXT. MAINE FARMHOUSE - DUSK

A ruddy New England farm woman in her seventies talks with Mesannie at the door.

FARM WOMAN

I'm sorry. I don't have room for you. Closed off all but two of my rooms for the winter to keep the heat bill low.

MESANNIE

What I had in mind was me sleeping in your barn with my horse. And some water for us and my dog.

FARM WOMAN

I cannot permit that. A lady should never sleep in a barn.

MESANNIE

Is there anyone on this road who might let me use his barn?

FARM WOMAN

I don't think so. In these parts, we feel that barns are not for people. Why don't you camp in one of my fields? Go in the fourth gate down the road.

(MORE)

FARM WOMAN (CONT'D)

There's a little stream in that field,
and a grove of gray birch at one end.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Mesannie has unloaded the gear. She lifts the saddle off Tarzan. He rolls over and over on the ground, scratching his back. Mesannie sets up the folding sterno stove preparing for supper.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

By lantern Mesannie carries some just washed plates from the stream to where Depeche Toi is curled on a blanket fast asleep.

MESANNIE

Good idea.

Mesannie lays down on a blanket and blows out the lantern.

EXT. FIELD - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Depeche Toi's growls wake Mesannie. She sits up, grabs his collar, and looks around. A big lantern is bobbing their way. A flashlight beam shines in her face, blinding her.

MAN #1

Keep holding that dog. We're officers
of the law.

Depeche Toi growls some more.

MESANNIE

We have permission from the owner to
camp here. If you two are officers,
where are your badges?

POLICE OFFICER #2

Under cover. And that's where you
should be right now. The woman who owns
this field decided fields aren't for
ladies. She phoned the sheriff. He
found a bed for you in a town nearby.

MESANNIE

How about my horse and dog?

POLICE OFFICER #2

They've been invited back to her barn.

EXT. SMALL PRIVATE HOSPITAL - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A patrol car pulls up to the hospital. Mesannie gets out.

INT. PRIVATE HOSPITAL - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A doctor and his wife are waiting. The doctor, a quadriplegic, sixties and talkative, lays flat on his back on a special contraption. His wife, a slender refined woman with silverly blond hair, wheels him toward Mesannie and the officer.

DOCTOR

We can take it from here. Thank you, officer.

The officer tips his hat and leaves. The doctor smiles warmly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Welcome. We're glad to have you. We have a bed all ready for you. Hope you don't mind a hospital bed, but our little hospital is all the sheriff could find on such short notice.

MESANNIE

Happy to be bedding down somewhere warm. Don't care where it may be.

Mesannie follows the doctor and his wife down the hall.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BARN - MORNING

A car pulls up to the barn. The doctor's wife and Mesannie get out. They walk toward the barn. Through the barn door they see Tarzan munching a breakfast of grain. Depeche Toi comes running at them. The doctor's wife bends down and gives him a few pats.

MESANNIE

These are my two boys.

The doctor's wife smiles at her. She opens her mouth to say something but stops. Mesannie knows what she wants to say.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Some people don't approve of what I'm trying to do.

DOCTOR'S WIFE

My husband and I approve.

MESANNIE

Thank you. Your husband's a brave man.

DOCTOR'S WIFE

And we wish you would change your mind. While you and I were having breakfast this morning, my husband phoned Minot. He talked to your doctor there. Courage isn't everything. It's just one thing.

MESANNIE

I'm feeling better than I have in years. The fresh air helps, I suppose, but the nice people I'm meeting along the way helps more. And I intend to get lots of rest in the saddle.

The doctor's wife puts her hands on Mesannie's shoulders.

DOCTOR'S WIFE

You'll get there. You must get there.

She kisses Mesannie on the cheek, turns, and walks to her car. Mesannie watches the doctor's wife drive off. The woman doesn't look back. Mesannie waves goodbye anyway.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY - MORNING

Mesannie and the boys trudge along a quiet highway. She's dispirited, deep in thought. A battle takes place inside. A farmer mending a fence pauses to wordlessly watch her go by. Mesannie tightens her eyes and juts out her jaw. Determined, she nudges Tarzan to put some fire in his legs and stop dallying.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A big barn is visible behind the house. A peevish little man in his fifties stands on the porch of the farmhouse talking to Mesannie who has ridden Tarzan into the yard.

PEEVISH MAN

I'm sorry. I can't let you use my barn.

MESANNIE

I can pay you something.

PEEVISH MAN

I just can't risk it. You go on up this road. There are other farms with barns. They'll take care of you.

EXT. OTHER FARMHOUSES - NIGHT - MONTAGE

- 1) A farmer turns Mesannie away.
- 2) Another farmer turns Mesannie away.
- 2) Yet another farmer turns Mesannie away.

EXT. BACK AT THE FIRST FARMHOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A bullheaded Mesannie and the boys storm back into the yard. It's sleeting. The house is dark. Mesannie starts hollering.

MESANNIE

Hello there. Open up! Hello there.

No response. She keeps on hollering.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Hello. Hello there. Open up!

An upstairs light goes on. He sticks his head out the window.

PEEVISH MAN

What's wrong?

MESANNIE

Not a blessed thing, except that we've been on the road for fourteen hours. It's cold out here. It's sleeting. And I have to find shelter for my animals.

The man sounds irritated.

PEEVISH MAN

Oh, it's you again! Stay right where you are!

He comes out of the house.

PEEVISH MAN (CONT'D)

We'll put your horse and dog in the barn. And then I'll drive you to South Sanford. If it wasn't so late, I'd phone friends and find a place for you around here.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The man drives, intently concentrating on the road. Mesannie is in the passenger's seat scowling. She turns to him.

MESANNIE

You taking me to a hotel?

PEEVISH MAN

Police station. You can sleep there. I phoned and you're expected. I'll pick you up there in the morning and drive you back to my place. Do you mind sleeping in a police station?

MESANNIE

I don't care where I sleep. So long as it's dry. But why couldn't I have stayed in your barn?

PEEVISH MAN

Too risky. I'm a mail route man. A Government man, you see. I can't afford a scandal. You know how people gossip.

INT. SOUTH SANFORD JAIL - NIGHT

A police officer escorts Mesannie along the jail corridor. A drunk in a cage shouts to her.

DRUNK

Are you in for being a drunk too?

MESANNIE

No, I'm in for being sober.

DRUNK

Proves my point! It's senseless to stop drinking!

They continue down the hall and stop at an unlocked cell.

POLICE OFFICER

Will this do?

MESANNIE

It'll do just fine.

EXT. LOCAL ROAD - MORNING

Traffic on the road is light. Mesannie, Tarzan, and Depeche Toi are making good time. A car passes them and pulls over to the shoulder. Two men, one with a camera, and a woman hop out. Depeche Toi runs up to them, wagging his tail excitedly.

FEMALE REPORTER

We're reporters from a paper in Portland. We ran across your story at the police station in South Sanford. We'd like to ask you some questions.

Mesannie is bemused and slightly embarrassed but agrees.

MESANNIE

All right.

MALE REPORTER

First off, how'd you feel about spending a night in jail?

MESANNIE

I liked it fine. Felt right at home.

MALE REPORTER

You don't say?

MESANNIE

I was back where I started so to speak.

FEMALE REPORTER

How do you mean?

MESANNIE

I was born in a jail, in the great year of 1891. My parents were living in Water Falls when fire destroyed the regular jail. Two rooms of our house were converted into temporary cells with barred windows and doors. Mama carried the keys, Papa bought the food to the guests who were mostly tramps. Grandpa's dog, a bloodhound-mastiff mixture, was the guard.

This draws a chuckle from the reporters.

FEMALE REPORTER

You're really intending to walk to California?

MESANNIE

My horse is. And all this talking isn't getting me any closer.

The reporters laugh. The cameraman snaps some photos.

MALE REPORTER

What are your plans when you get there?

MESANNIE

I plan on finding a job taking care of cows or hogs.

MALE REPORTER

How about your horse and dog? What are their goals?

MESANNIE

Same as mine.

MALE REPORTER

Where did you say you bought Tarzan?

MESANNIE

I didn't, but from a riding academy near Portland. They picked him up from a nearby summer camp. I know the summer people rode him along the beaches. He's been in the ocean and he's not afraid of waves.

MALE REPORTER

Then Tarzan's goal should be to wash his feet in the Pacific Ocean. I daresay no horse in history has ever walked from the Atlantic to Pacific and washed his feet in both. Now, what about the dog?

MESANNIE

He's never been in the Atlantic, but I think he already has a goal in mind. Depeche Toi wants to be the first dog in history to visit every bush, tree, and telephone pole in America, from coast to coast.

EXT. HIGHWAY - BORDER BETWEEN MAINE AND NEW HAMPSHIRE - DAY

Mesannie pulls Tarzan to a stop when they reach a sign welcoming them to New Hampshire. She looks around, sentimental.

MESANNIE

I haven't been out of my beloved Maine in forty years.

She looks down at Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Seventy miles from Minot. Six full days to reach the border. We're not crows.

Mesannie takes a final look around at her beloved home state. Her eyes grow wet. She swallows hard, pushing down the lump in her throat. She touches the reigns. They move forward, leaving Maine and crossing into New Hampshire, their first new state.

EXT. ROADSIDE GAS STATION, NEW HAMPSHIRE - DAY

A crowd has formed. Mesannie sits triumphant as a bride aboard Tarzan. Locals hold up scraps of paper for her to sign. Cameramen take photos as reporters fire questions.

REPORTER #1

What do you think of Senator McCarthy?

REPORTER #2

What do you think of the space race?

REPORTER #3

What's your opinion on inflation?

MESANNIE

Time will tell.

REPORTER #4

Is that all you say? Time will tell?

MESANNIE

(winking)

Time will tell.

A big flashy car with lots of chrome and long tail fins pulls in. Two men jump out. Mesannie notices the camera one of the men carries. Her eyes just about pop out of her head.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Is that a movie camera?

MAN #1

(nodding)

We're from a TV network.

MAN #2

Go right ahead with what you're doing.

The men set up the camera on a tripod and run a line to the car battery. A little girl walks up to Tarzan.

GIRL

What do you do when you meet a lady?

Tarzan lifts up his front foot. A little boy hollers.

BOY

What about a left-handed lady?

Tarzan lifts up his left foot. Mesannie beams, impressed.

MESANNIE

He's a trick horse. How about that? I imagine he was taught right and left at the summer camp. Unless Depeche Toi taught him on the quiet.

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie and the boys walk through the picturesque countryside of weathered farms, quiet ponds, and gentle rolling wooded hills. The sky is overcast. A strong northwest wind blows. Mesannie is coughing. She pulls her coat up around her neck.

Traffic on the road is light. A few cars, all with Massachusetts license plates, pass. No one stops. Mesannie's pouting.

MESANNIE

(to the boys)

If there was one crank in the whole state of New Hampshire, they kept him well hidden. Here in the Bay State we've turned invisible.

Mesannie looks up at the sky. She taps the reigns against Tarzan's side, prompting him to walk a little faster.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Tarzan)

That sky spells snow.

The road gradually inclines uphill. Tarzan whinnies and quickens his walk. Depeche Toi runs up ahead and starts barking. Mesannie looks around but doesn't see anything at first. Then three riders, two men and a woman, appear over the crest of the hill. They ride over to greet Mesannie.

MALE RIDER #1

We're from the Brookfield Riding and Driving Club. We came out to meet you and ride in with you to Mrs. Hamlett's in Spencer.

MESANNIE

Well, thank you. But I'm in a hurry to get to Springfield.

FEMALE RIDER

That's over thirty miles away. Why Springfield?

MESANNIE

General Delivery there is the first forwarding address I gave a few folks back home in Maine. Don't know if anyone will write, but I'm hoping. Figure we can make it in two days.

MALE RIDER #2

They're predicting the first big snow for tomorrow night. But from the looks of that sky it may come sooner.

FEMALE RIDER

The roads won't be passable by this time tomorrow. Springfield will stay right where it is, but you're coming with us. Mrs. Hamlett won't hear of anything else. She wants you to have a real Thanksgiving.

MESANNIE

That's four days away!

MALE RIDER #2

So it is. And you can use those four days to rest and maybe more. How long have you had that cough?

MESANNIE

It's not a real cough. Just dust from the road.

MALE RIDER #2

If that's not a real cough, I'm not a real doctor. Now let's not debate any longer. We're all cold and Mrs. Hamlett has a fire going. Doctor's orders.

INT. MRS. HAMLETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A Thanksgiving feast is laid out on the table. Snow is falling heavily outside. Depeche Toi runs around the house playing with some cats. Mesannie and a dozen other guests circle the table.

MRS. HAMLETT, an ancient-looking but spry woman, raises her glass to Mesannie. Everyone toasts, clinking their wine glasses against Mesannie's water glass. As they sip their wine in celebration, Mesannie coughs and touches her side in pain.

INT. MRS. HAMLETT'S BARN - DAY

Tarzan shares the warm dry barn with a dozen other beautiful horses Mrs. Hamlett shows off to Mesannie. They stop in front of Tarzan. Mrs. Hamlett reaches out to pat his neck. Mesannie has shaken her cough but looks sallow and worn out.

MESANNIE

I'd like to thank you for those shoes for Tarzan. I couldn't have paid for them on my own. I can remember when a new set of shoes all around cost a dollar. Or twenty-five cents more in winter when calks had to be sharp. But it seems those days have gone forever.

Mrs. Hamlett nods her head nostalgically.

MRS. HAMLETT

You know I was thirty-eight before I was on a horse for the first time. I had to be lifted into the saddle. I was crippled with arthritis in those days...Ages ago! I lie about my age. But I'm not over one hundred...I just decided to become a horse trainer, arthritis or no arthritis, and that's the way I started. I imagine it was just as sudden as your decision to go to California. And now the arthritis is gone. Association with horses cured me. Can't explain it no other way.

Mrs. Hamlett gives Tarzan a final affectionate pat.

MRS. HAMLETT (CONT'D)

He's a fine animal. He needs a rest. And you need a vacation--

She turns to find Mesannie choked up, with tears in her eyes.

MRS. HAMLETT (CONT'D)

Why what's wrong?

It takes Mesannie a minute to pull herself together to explain.

MESANNIE

Oh, I'm not unhappy. When you said 'vacation', it was like pulling the plug out of the vinegar barrel. You see, this trip is my vacation.

Mesannie dries her eyes on her sleeve.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

In all my years, I never had a single day of vacation. This trip is a trip, yes, but it's also my first vacation. It's as if I've been saving up days for sixty-three years, but not knowing it.

Mrs. Hamlett takes her measure of Mesannie.

MRS. HAMLETT

I've been reading about you in the papers. And saw your picture. You're not opinionated. That's good.

MESANNIE

In my straits, don't see the point in being controversial. Don't know what's going on in the world anyway. Haven't read a daily paper in years, and haven't read a farm journal in months.

MRS. HAMLETT

What I don't understand is how you plan on supporting yourself?

MESANNIE

Odd jobs. I've never feared hard work. The time I spent with the Portland and Boston reporters made it easy to find places to stay all through New Hampshire. We could've spent months in that state alone. People been going out of their way to be pleasant. Real New England people. We've had one delay after the other, all based on kindness. On a good day we'd cover 30 miles. On others with stops for autographs we didn't cover more than five.

Mrs. Hamlett watches Mesannie wipe her eyes again.

MRS. HAMLETT

I don't know what's going to happen to the country when I'm gone. Young people are so irresponsible these days. Of course, if you're a true sample of Maine, then perhaps there is some hope. You're not like the other youngsters. You have the fine quality of determination young lady...You really intend to make it to California?

MESANNIE

That's the plan.

MRS. HAMLETT

You have great courage to do so alone.

MESANNIE

I'm not really alone. The horse and the dog are my companions.

MRS. HAMLETT

The Lord must be watching over you.

MESANNIE

I'm counting on him.

EXT. MRS. HAMLETT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Mesannie looks her old self again atop Tarzan. He sports a new saddle blanket, Depeche Toi a blanket and boots, and Mesannie a new warm coat. Mrs. Hamlett hands her a poncho with a hood.

MRS. HAMLETT

You'll need this as well. Oh, before I forget. Can I take your picture?

Mrs. Hamlett focuses a camera strapped around her neck before Mesannie can even agree. Mesannie and the boys pose.

MESANNIE

I thank you for all you've done. Your hospitality, gifts for Tarzan, Depeche Toi, and me.

Mrs. Hamlett simply nods and checks the sky.

MRS. HAMLETT

You should have clear sailing to Springfield. No snow predicted for a few days. Good luck. And come back when you have a free moment young lady.

Mesannie cues Tarzan to walk on. After a few feet they stop and she turns. Depeche Toi stands at Mrs. Hamlett's feet.

MESANNIE

Come on, Depeche Toi.

Depeche Toi doesn't move.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

California is right around the corner. And it's warm out there.

Mrs. Hamlett leans down and whispers to Depeche Toi.

MRS. HAMLETT

Go on. The brave lady needs you to
protect her from Indians.

Depeche Toi looks up at Mrs. Hamlett. He looks at Mesannie and
chases after her and Tarzan.

EXT. ROAD TO SPRINGFIELD - MORNING

Mesannie and the boys walk along the deserted highway. The snow
that has fallen over the past few days is pushed up on both
sides. Drifts rise to more than five feet in places. Slowly,
almost imperceptibly at first, a light snow begins falling.

EXT. ROAD TO SPRINGFIELD - DAY

The snow is coming down hard. They've walked right into a major
wind-whipped snow storm. Mesannie can't see ten feet ahead of
her except when the wind blows. Tarzan walks with his head down.
Mesannie shivers in the saddle, freezing, trying to figure out
what to do. Depeche Toi stays close, not wanting to lose them.

A truck with its headlights on emerges out of the snow a few
feet ahead. Mesannie realizes they've been walking in the middle
of the road and quickly moves Tarzan to the shoulder where he
slips and almost loses his footing. Mesannie pulls him to a halt
and dismounts.

Snow blowing in their faces, Mesannie leads Tarzan. He rests his
nose on her back, pushing her along. Depeche Toi struggles
behind them. Mesannie hollers outloud to Tarzan and Depeche Toi,
really trying to convince herself.

MESANNIE

Everything will be all right. We'll
find shelter. We'll find shelter soon.

A strong wind gust blows. By divine intervention, the gust's
timing enables the driver of a car to see them. The car stops on
the opposite side of the road. The driver rushes over to them.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

See that, boys. He has taken a hand.

DRIVER

Wherever you're going it's too far and
too dangerous.

MESANNIE

We're heading for Springfield.

DRIVER

Thought so. I'm Mr. Coolidge from the Chamber of Commerce in Springfield. No, I'm not related to Calvin's family. A truck is coming along for the horse. You and the dog will ride with me.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

MR. COOLIDGE, fifties and cordial, escorts Mesannie and Depeche Toi through the lobby of the elegant hotel. Mesannie, piled up with her belongings, looks like an alien from outerspace. Well-dressed guests, men in ties and jackets and women in skirts, step aside to clear a path for her.

MR. COOLIDGE

The Highland is not our biggest hotel, but we consider it our best.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mesannie stands in front of the full-length mirror frowning at herself. The telephone rings in the background.

MESANNIE

A hobo's what I look like. Wasn't smart enough to even think of packing a dress.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mesannie stands by the window looking down on the street. The telephone still rings. There's a knock on the door. Mesannie goes over and opens it to find the gentlemanly hotel manager.

HOTEL MANAGER

I've been ringing you. The dining room will close in one hour. We've been expecting you. Why didn't you answer?

MESANNIE

(reddening)

Don't know. I'm used to party lines. Maybe I was waiting for my combination of rings. Anyhow, I'm not properly dressed.

HOTEL MANAGER

You are wrong. But I never argue with a lady.

The hotel manager goes to the phone and makes a quick call.

A minute later there's a knock on the door. The manager lets in a headwaiter and a uniformed chef. Mesannie peruses the menu and the astronomical prices. She turns a deep shade of red.

MESANNIE

I'll have the soup.

HEADWAITER

Consomme Bellevue. And what else?

MESANNIE

Just the soup.

The headwaiter raises an already arched eyebrow.

HEADWAITER

You must have something beside soup.

CHEF

Crown roast of lamb and peas with mint cream? Fish with normandie sauce and--

MESANNIE

I'll stick with the soup.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

The headwaiter and an assistant wheel in a cart piled with covered dishes. They set the dishes out on the table and uncover them, a steak with all the trimmings for her and a smaller one for Depeche Toi. The headwaiter remains stony but winks at her.

HEADWAITER

Our compliments. We were out of soup.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Depeche Toi rides the elevator up with a dapper canoodling young couple. Everyone including Depeche Toi watches the dial turn indicating the approaching floors. The elevator lurches to a stop. The elevator operator opens the doors.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR

Your stop, sir.

Depeche Toi trots out of the elevator and down the hallway. He stops outside a door and scratches. It opens. Mesannie holds the door open as Depeche Toi goes inside.

INT. SPRINGFIELD POST OFFICE - MORNING

A hopeful Mesannie waits at the window. A postal clerk reappears behind the barred window and slides two letters toward Mesannie.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mesannie sits at the desk by the window carefully reading a letter. Depeche Toi watches. Mesannie looks down at him.

MESANNIE

From a Mrs. Sawyer. She writes freelance feature articles for the *Lewiston Journal's* magazine section. Thinks our trip is a good subject for her. She'd like me to send her some information about the three of us. She's also planning to send along a letter to me from Governor Muskie of Maine introducing me to Governor Smiley of Idaho. Don't know much about Idaho except we argued some about potatoes. And I don't know where Governor Smiley lives but I guess we'll find him.

Mesannie sets down the letter and picks up the other one. The return address shows it's from Mrs. Hamlett back in Spencer.

INT. HIGHLAND HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mesannie, still at the desk by the window, talks on the phone.

MRS. HAMLETT (ON PHONE)

I've been worried about you. I don't think you should try to find jobs along the way. Well, that picture I took of you came out beautifully. I'm having it made into folders for you, and I'll send you a supply. You can autograph them and sell them. Are people still asking for your autograph?

MESANNIE

Not in Springfield.

MRS. HAMLETT (ON PHONE)

Oh, those people are just conservative. Where shall I send the folders?

MESANNIE

I plan to be in Philadelphia by the new year. You can send them there.

EXT. CONNECTICUT HIGHWAY - MORNING

The road is uphill and down and full of curves. Banks of snow line both sides leaving little room for cars to pass each other. Depeche Toi trots a feet ahead, alert, as if sensing danger. There's not much traffic, but for safety Mesannie keeps a careful watch on every car that passes them.

SUPERIMPOSE: Connecticut. Outside Danbury.

A red car comes along and slows down as it passes. The driver swings wide of them, careful not to scare Tarzan. Mesannie waves her thanks to the driver, who seems to not know where he's going or at least acts that way.

MESANNIE

(to the boys)

He sure must be lost. Coming and going he must have passed us a dozen times this hour.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - DAY

The lot of the greasy spoon is filled with eighteen-wheeler trucks. Mesannie pulls Tarzan into a diner parking space. She dismounts and loops Tarzan's reigns around a telephone pole.

MESANNIE

(to Depeche Toi)

Trucks mean the food is good and cheap. You stay here and guard the gear.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - DAY

Mesannie sits at the counter eating a bowl of hot soup. Through the window she sees the red car pull into the parking lot. She watches the driver get out and stroll over to Tarzan. The driver's tanned face is a sharp contrast to all the snow. Depeche Toi greets the man and shakes his tail happily.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - DAY

Mesannie steps out of the diner. The man is still there talking to Tarzan. He doesn't see her until she speaks to him.

MESANNIE

He's not for sale.

SUNTANNED MAN

Can't say that I blame you. He's a sound one. How old?

MESANNIE

Aged, that's all I know.

The man has a pleasant easygoing way about him. His refined manner of speech is a stark contrast to Mesannie's down east New England accent of Maine, which now seems sharply out of place.

SUNTANNED MAN

I know a little about horses. I'd say he was about fourteen. Do you really intend to ride him to California?

MESANNIE

The Lord willing.

SUNTANNED MAN

You wouldn't have come this far if He wasn't. I've been waiting to meet you and get a good look at this horse. I've been offered ten-to-one odds that Tarzan won't make the coast.

MESANNIE

He'll make it unless we hear the Pacific has gone dry. He wants to wash his feet in it.

SUNTANNED MAN

Given any thought to a pack horse? The load might be too much for Tarzan in the mountain country out West.

MESANNIE

Haven't till now, but I will.

SUNTANNED MAN

Don't hurry. Take it easy, get there. That's what my father always told me.

MESANNIE

Makes sense to me.

The man hands her his business card.

SUNTANNED MAN

If you need anything at all, telephone me and reverse the charges.

(MORE)

SUNTANNED MAN (CONT'D)

If I'm not there, the message will get to me. I'll get help to you, and it won't cost you a penny.

Mesannie looks at the card. There's no address on the card, just his name, Albert Maida and a local telephone number. He smiles at her, seemingly genuinely interested in their welfare. Puzzled, Mesannie slips the card in her pocket.

MESANNIE

Thank you.

He nods and heads back to his car. She watches him drive away.

EXT. WINDSOR LOCKS MAIN STREET - DUSK

Mesannie rides into the tranquil town past a sign welcoming them to Windsor Locks. Many of the shops are shut for the evening and the streets are mostly deserted. A potbellied man, fifty or so, emerges from a coffee shop chewing on a toothpick.

MESANNIE

Evening.

MAN WITH TOOTHPICK

Evening.

MESANNIE

Can you tell me where I might find the John Quidam family?

MAN WITH TOOTHPICK

I've never heard of the name.

MESANNIE

I've been invited to stay with them. The two sons drove out to meet me yesterday and extend the invitation. Told me even Tarzan would be welcome in the house, though the boy who said it was smiling. When you get there, the same boy said, just ask anyone where we live. He even wrote his father's name on a paper for me.

She hands the piece of paper to him.

MAN WITH TOOTHPICK

Hold on. I'll go into the drugstore and check the telephone book.

Mesannie gets down to stretch her legs and ties Tarzan to a post. The man emerges from the drugstore shaking his head.

MAN WITH TOOTHPICK (CONT'D)

There's no such family in Windsor Locks or any other town around here. I'm afraid you may be the victim of some kind of peculiar humor. The clerk in the store is Puerto Rican. And he says that Quidam means Nobody in Spanish. I'm sorry, but I don't think those boys were from Windsor Locks.

The man moves to get into his car.

MAN WITH TOOTHPICK (CONT'D)

You'll be all right?

Her pride stung and smarting, Mesannie snaps at him.

MESANNIE

Course I'll be all right.

The man shrugs and drives off. Mesannie unhitches Tarzan. He's frisky and starts dancing, swinging into Mesannie and knocking her to the ground. She hits the pavement hard, slamming her weight down on left her shoulder. Pain shooting up and down her arm, she sits up. Grimacing Mesannie slowly gets to her feet.

EXT. HORSE FARM - DAY

Both Tarzan and Depeche Toi wear blankets. It's sleeting and cold. Though it's afternoon in the short days of winter daylight is already fading. Mesannie wears a miner's hat with the light turned backward for safety. She walks with her sore left arm tucked in at her side, leading a limping Tarzan to a sprawling horse farm. A sign reads "Shrub Oak Horse Farm, Brewster, NY."

INT. HORSE FARM - STABLE - DAY

Christmas carols play on a transistor radio hanging from a post. A sour stable manager, a grouch against all the world, sixties, with long whiskers like a goat's examines Tarzan's rear foot.

STABLE MANAGER

Shoe's just loose. That's all.

He slips a pick hammer from his overalls and taps on it.

MESANNIE

Are there many horses in the area?

STABLE MANAGER

You'd be surprised at the horse population in this area.

(MORE)

STABLE MANAGER (CONT'D)

We're not more than fifty miles from New York City, and more and more horses every year.

MESANNIE

I was thinking of buying another horse to share the load. Just a walker, but used to traffic and saddle broke. He'd have to come cheap.

STABLE MANAGER

This place raises and trains hunters and jumpers, and sells them at fancy prices. No scrubs, all show stock. But there's an auction over near Peekskill tomorrow night. You'll find just what you want. I've seen some good horses sold there for as little as three or four hundred dollars.

Mesannie is staggered by the high prices but acts nonchalant.

MESANNIE

Thanks, I'm headed for Peekskill anyway.

Mesannie pulls out the card the suntanned man gave her.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Met this man who really knows horses. He gave me the idea about a pack horse.

STABLE MANAGER

Of course he knows horses! One of the biggest gamblers in the East. Usually down at the Florida tracks this time of year. He's betting with somebody that Tarzan will make the coast. And you can be sure that it's not a small bet.

MESANNIE

(turning red)

Thanks for the information.

He starts measuring grain, then growls at her.

STABLE MANAGER

I can rent you a stall for the horse, but I won't hear of you sleeping under the same roof. There's an empty horse trailer out back. You can use that.

MESANNIE

Why can't I sleep in here?

STABLE MANAGER

Insurance. If a horse dies we're covered. But if a human dies I might get into trouble.

She shoots him a glare of indignation.

MESANNIE

I'm not planning on dying.

STABLE MANAGER

You can't ever tell when you're going. And you don't look fit for travel. I can tell that arm hurts you. Want me to phone a doctor?

MESANNIE

No. A day of rest and I'll be as good as ever.

The stable manager just nods. He starts to leave then stops.

STABLE MANAGER

And let me give you some advice. Never use a blanket on a horse. Even in storm like today. A horse stays healthy until you start pampering him. I guess you don't know much about horses.

Affronted Mesannie glowers, but she's worn and holds her tongue.

STABLE MANAGER (CONT'D)

I need to hurry home. My wife's expecting me.

He hurries away. Mesannie hollers after him--

MESANNIE

Merry Christmas.

Now it's his turn to redden.

STABLE MANAGER

Oh, yeah, Merry Christmas.

INT. HORSE TRAILER BEHIND THE STABLE - NIGHT

Mesannie and Depeche Toi are bedded down on the hay in the horse trailer. The trailer doesn't have a door on the back. It's open to the coldest wind she's known.

Depeche Toi snuggles in for warmth. Mesannie flinches. She pulls back the blankets and inches up the sleeve of her jacket. Her arm is swollen and a deep purple bruise from wrist to elbow.

MESANNIE

We don't have the funds for a pack horse or a doctor right now.

Mesannie fishes in her pocket for the gambler's card. Her eyes narrow, thinking it over. She tears the card into little pieces.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I'm not about to encourage gambling. Uncle Waldo would have a fit.

She tucks the blanket around Depeche Toi and pulls it up to her chin. They try to get some sleep.

EXT. EAST COAST TRUCK ROAD - DAY

Ignoring the stable man's advice, Tarzan wears a blanket. It's a windy, bitterly cold day. Mesannie's breath steams in the air.

The road is filled with heavy truck traffic. A sign warns about the danger of falling rocks. A truck comes toward them in the opposite direction. The driver in the cab honks and holds up two fingers in the V for victory sign.

EXT. STABLE JUST OUTSIDE PHILADELPHIA - DECEMBER 31

Tarzan and Depeche Toi are housed in a stable just outside the city. The Philadelphia skyline can be seen in the distance.

SUPERIMPOSE: Philadelphia, PA, December 31.

INT. PHILADELPHIA TROLLEY CAR - DAY

A wide-eyed Mesannie rides a trolley car into the city center. She presses her face against the window, gazing in wonder at the city's tall buildings and thrilled by its bustling activity.

INT. PHILADELPHIA POST OFFICE - DAY

A nosy male postal clerk, thirties, slides a small heavy package and about fifty letters toward her. Mesannie sorts through the letters. A few letters are addressed to "Lady Tramp on a Horse." A few postcards are addressed to either Tarzan or Depeche Toi.

Mesannie opens the package at the window. Inside is a stack of folders from Mrs. Hamlett. On the front of the folders is a photo of Mesannie and the boys. On the inside is a typeset poem.

POSTAL CLERK

What've you got there?

Mesannie slides a folder toward him.

MESANNIE

I look a sight. Still it's the best picture I've ever seen of myself.

POSTAL CLERK

The poem should have a title.

MESANNIE

The printer forgot to put it in. It's Life Begins at 63.

POSTAL CLERK

Can I buy one?

MESANNIE

That's the general idea.

POSTAL CLERK

Autograph it for me, please. My kids will get a kick out of this. How much?

She mulls it over.

MESANNIE

Five cents.

The clerk gives her a quarter.

POSTAL CLERK

Keep the change.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie soaks in a steaming bath. Her laundry is washed out and strung around the room.

EXT. CENTER CITY - JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT

The streets are packed with revelers readying to ring in the new year. A clock on a building tower indicates it is five minutes till midnight. Mesannie wanders through the crowd blinking and looking bewildered.

Out of the saddle with her hair tucked under her hat she looks like a tough tramp. A drunk man in a tuxedo staggers toward her.

MAN
Hey, pal. Got a light?

MESANNIE
I don't smoke.

Mesannie removes her hat.

MAN
Say, you're a woman! Come 'ere. Give us a New Year's hug.

The man tries to hug her but falls to the ground. He makes no effort to get up. He remains flat on his back laughing.

MAN (CONT'D)
A woman dressed as a tramp. Imagine that.

The crowd counts down in union: 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1. Horns blow, people shout. Couples embrace or share a first kiss of the new year. A group of revelers sing Auld Lang Syne. Grinning at it all, Mesannie lifts her eyes to the neon sign on a tall building glowing high above them that shines "1955".

EXT. CHADDS FORD INN - DAY

Mesannie's on-and-off again cough is on again as they plod through the pastoral Pennsylvania countryside. Looking drained, she pulls up Tarzan in front of an old stone inn with a stone stable in back. The door opens. The gentlemanly inn keeper comes out, a tall thin man, fifties, with a long thin beard.

INN KEEPER
Anything I can help you with? You lost?

Mesannie shakes her head.

MESANNIE
Just admiring your inn. Wondering if I can afford it. Pretty sure I can't.

INN KEEPER
I have a feeling maybe you can.

INT. CHADDS FORD INN - FRONT DESK - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi sign in at the counter. The inn keeper pulls out a beat up old leather ledger.

INN KEEPER

That stable out back hasn't housed a horse in years.

The inn keeper points to the last signature in the old ledger.

INN KEEPER (CONT'D)

This one belongs to a man who rode horseback from California to the New York World's Fair in 1939. When he arrived here he still had some distance to go and had already worn out several horses.

MESANNIE

Then Tarzan must be a miracle horse. He looks fitter than when we started.

A local LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN wearing an official sash rushes across the lobby to them. He extends his hand to Mesannie.

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN

On the behalf of the local Lions Club welcome.

He shakes Mesannie's hand firmly.

MESANNIE

Thank you.

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN

I'm the club Chairman. The club is dining here at the inn tonight and we'd like you to be our special guest.

MESANNIE

Thank you, but I'm weary from the road.

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN

Did I mention we're having steak for dinner?

INT. CHADDS FORD INN - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie is among the roomful of Lions Club members. Waiters clear the remnants of the steak dinner. The chairman stands, clasps his hands together, and clears his throat to speak.

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN

Although I'm sure she needs no introduction, I'd like to introduce our special guest tonight.

(MORE)

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

The woman who's proving the horse is here to stay, Mesannie Wilkins, who is walking with her horse and little dog all the way from Maine to California.

Mesannie accepts the rousing applause with nods and smiles. The chairman extends an invitation with a wave of his hand.

LIONS CLUB CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

Would you say a few words?

Mesannie goes white. She turns to the club member next to her.

MESANNIE

I've never given a speech in my life.

CLUB MEMBER

A speech is just talking, that's all.

Mesannie nervously gets to her feet and finds herself speechless. Another member shouts a question to get her started.

CLUB MEMBER #2

What gave you the idea to set out?

MESANNIE

In a way, I'm three decades late in starting for California. I can still hear mother saying, "I wish sometime we could hitch up the horse, pack in what we can carry, and just we three go like gypsies." She started saying that when it looked as if we couldn't hold the farm. The three she referred to were herself, myself, and Uncle Waldo. My father died years before during prohibition. If I encouraged her, perhaps we would have made the journey. Chances would have been slim, though. Uncle Waldo was older than mother and she respected his opinions, and nothing would have budged him from Maine. He didn't recognize any other state.

Laughter from the audience fuels her confidence. She smiles.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Uncle Waldo's opinions about farming were rigid too. Mama and I followed his advice, and within two years we were both working a fifty-six hour week in the shoe shop in Auburn to survive. Uncle Waldo looked out for things on the farm. He was a hard worker, but not the speediest farmer in Maine.

The audience cackles with warm laughter. She smiles some more.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Mama and I lent assistance Saturday afternoon and Sundays, plus evenings when necessary. Picking sweet corn for the canning factory and hauling hay were always done by moonlight. We were doing well and planning to buy some farm equipment. I found a better paying job at the mill and was riding my mule there when a truck ran into me. The mule had to be put down, and I landed in the hospital with a fractured leg. First the doctors thought they wouldn't be able to save my leg, but they did. It meant a seven months stay in the hospital. The driver wasn't insured, so it was an expensive hospital stay. I wasn't much good for two years. We lost everything except the farm itself, and without livestock farming is out of the question. Then a greater tragedy occurred. Mama died.

The laughter ebbs. A Lions Club Member shouts out--

CLUB MEMBER #3

They say, "The only sure thing about luck is that it will change."

MESANNIE

(laughing to herself)

It did. After that, it was downhill most of the way. Uncle Waldo's eyesight started failing...

INT. INN DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Lions Club members howl with laughter. Mesannie laughs so hard at her own misfortune tears stream down her cheeks.

MESANNIE

I solved his social difficulty by buying some ground meat and making a loaf of one-third meat and two-thirds cereal. I sliced the loaf, which looked all meat, for his sandwiches. After that Uncle Waldo lunched with the other men, not by himself down the road.

Mesannie pauses to catch her breath and suddenly becomes sober. Real tears, not just tears of laughter well up in her eyes. Mesannie quickly brushes them away and smiles at the crowd.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Until this experience, I'd always thought the life I lived was a hard one. I'd never seen much fun in it. But here I am in Pennsylvania laughing about it. And I thank you for that.

EXT. CHADDS FORD INN - STABLE BEHIND THE INN - MORNING

Mesannie is in high spirits. She and Depeche Toi make their way toward the stone stable. A lanky blond-haired man, late thirties, sits on a wooden box making a drawing of Tarzan.

ARTIST

I hope you don't mind. I heard you were here and I wanted to make a head sketch of your horse. I'm almost finished. My name is Andrew Wyeth. The innkeeper, Mr. Flaherty knows me.

Mesannie looks over his shoulder as he works.

MESANNIE

You're pretty good. I can tell that's Tarzan, not just any horse.

ANDREW WYETH

Thank you.

ANDREW WYETH adds a few lines to the drawing, then stands. He shows off the sketch to her.

MESANNIE

Your work is just as good as some professional artists who sell their drawings for fancy prices in Portland every summer. You should try selling yourself.

ANDREW WYETH

I'll promise to think about it.

EXT. BRANDYWINE RIVER BRIDGE - MORNING

A light, wet snow is falling. Traffic is light as they climb the slight grade to the bridge spanning the river, a two-lane paved road with wire cables strung along the sides.

Tarzan moves at a slow walk. Cars make a swishing sound on the wet road as they pass, making Tarzan dance a bit each time.

They cross the bridge and start walking downgrade. Depeche Toi trots out in front. A horn honks behind them. Mesannie turns and sees a small truck trying to pass a bigger truck, pushing the bigger truck straight into their path.

The sounds of the horn, swishing tires, and motors cause Tarzan to rear. He whirls and comes down with his front feet over the wire cable. His hind feet slip and he and Mesannie go down right as the big truck swerves and just misses them.

The driver of the big truck slams on his brakes and skids to a sideways stop, blocking off both lanes. He runs back to Mesannie who is upside down and out cold under Tarzan's belly with her feet still in the stirrups.

INT. LOCAL DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Mesannie is flat on her back on an examination table. A kindly local doctor peers at her through his spectacles.

DOCTOR

How do you feel?

MESANNIE

Well bruised. Otherwise, I'm fine. I don't need a doctor.

DOCTOR

Judging from the report of the accident, you may need ten doctors. I can tell you that you are not in a state of shock. Some pills will clear up that local infection in your lungs.

The doctor feels for broken bones in her arms and legs.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Nothing broken, but you'll be stiff for days and sore for a week. All I can prescribe is plenty of rest.

MESANNIE

Doctors keep telling me that.

DOCTOR

And they always will. By the way, I've examined your horse. Nothing to worry about. A few small scratches and a little swell in a rear ankle. The bone isn't broken. Something hit him there. He can use some rest, too.

MESANNIE

Are you a doctor or a vet?

DOCTOR

A little of both. Why are you in such a hurry to get to California?

MESANNIE

I'm not. I'm just in a hurry to lose winter. I thought we'd beat the cold weather south, but here we are right in the middle of it.

DOCTOR

You've got tunnels and mountains ahead of you. This horse's ankle will only get worse unless it has rest and warmth. That ankle will never make those mountains this time of year. Why don't you truck south?

MESANNIE

I don't know of anybody who owns a truck. And I don't know of anybody who's about to give me one.

DOCTOR

I know a man in the business of transporting horses. This time of year he sends an empty van down near Lexington, Kentucky to pick up a load of horses. Let me give him a call.

INT. HORSE VAN CAB - DAY

Mesannie is in the passenger seat of a horse van traveling through a tunnel. The van reaches the end of the tunnel and emerges on the other side. She squints as her eyes readjust and focus in on the scenery, the Kentucky countryside of weathered barns with curing tobacco plants hanging from the rafters.

EXT. KENTUCKY TWO LANE - DAY

Tarzan, Mesannie, and Depeche Toi stand on the side of the road.

MESANNIE

(to the boys)

Leaving winter behind us was worth every penny of the cost. Now the three of us own a dollar and nineteen cents. We're real tramps now.

She looks up at the darkening sky.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to the boys)

Well, my friends, it looks like we'd better get ready for some good old Kentucky rain.

EXT. KENTUCKY TWO LANE - DAY

A light snow falls. Mesannie and the boys walk along a section of road that lines fine houses set well back, each with a pasture out front filled with horses. Cars pass by. No one waves, stops to buy a folder, or even seems to notice her.

EXT. HILLS OF KENTUCKY - DAY

Light snow still falls. Mesannie, Tarzan, and Depeche Toi travel down a steep hill. There are no guard rails. The banks on either side of the road fall off sharply. Over the edge the tops of trees can be seen. A truck piled high with tobacco barrels passes by, its barrels swaying as it speeds around the curve.

EXT. KENTUCKY TWO LANE - DUSK

They're in a section of sharecroppers' shacks where mules fill the pastures instead of horses. Bedraggled children in a yard up ahead feed chickens. Mesannie hollers to them. They quickly disappear into the house. Mesannie stops Tarzan in front.

MESANNIE

(hollering)

Hello? Hello?

Mesannie shifts in the saddle and rubs her aching back. She moves to get down but thinks better of it.

EXT. KENTUCKY FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Mesannie stands in the yard of a tall thin worn old farmhouse. The door is cracked open. A gaunt farmer with a stubble beard, a blanket around his shoulders, and a thick Southern twang sticks his head out. He shakes his head.

FARMER

It's for your own good. Distemper in these parts. My family's got it.

MESANNIE

Heard of horse distemper, but never human distemper. Been having trouble finding places to stay all week.

FARMER

You've come along at just the wrong time. Gypsies are stealing everything in sight. People want no part of any stranger. They see what looks like a man on horseback and that means gypsy to them.

He notes the snow falling.

FARMER (CONT'D)

Unusual weather we're having.

MESANNIE

What's the usual weather?

EXT. TENNESSEE HIGHWAY - DAY

A downpour of rain has the road jammed with traffic. Tarzan, Mesannie, and Depeche Toi are pushed to the far shoulder. Mesannie holds a squirming Depeche Toi tight. Tarzan steps off the road into soft muddy clay and sinks into the mud up over his hooves. He slips sideways and struggles to keep his footing.

MESANNIE

Boys, I apologize. I'm only sixty-three and too young to know better than to be out in weather like this. But I'm old enough not to need a second lesson. We're going to throw ourselves on the mercy of the law again and stop at the first Tennessee jail we see.

INT. LOCAL JAIL - MESS HALL - NIGHT

The mess hall is filled with hungry inmates. At a table by herself Mesannie heartily dines on the prison food dinner.

INT. LOCAL JAIL - MESANNIE'S CELL - NIGHT

Mesannie is seated on her cell's cot opening a brown parcel package. Inside are a stack of about a thousand postcards. Mesannie inspects one. On the front is a picture of her and the boys and the flip side is blank. She shows one to Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE

Never know when folks'll ask. But I wanna have a supply just in case. Folders would've been better. As it is the cards cost eight and a half cents a piece. Not much room left for profit.

INT. LOCAL JAIL - MAIN ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Outside the window the rain is coming down hard. Cameramen snap photographs and local reporters take notes as a line of schoolchildren and their teachers file past Mesannie shaking her hand. One of the children stops to ask Mesannie a question.

GIRL

What was your favorite school subject?

MESANNIE

I'm sorry to say I spent most of my school-age years doing my best to avoid schooling. My one-roomer was painted red and made from cedar slabs. Started when I was eight with a dozen others, ranging in age from me to twenty-two. About all they drummed into me was that income is money coming in, and outgo is money spent, and if you make two columns and can add, you should know if you're going broke or getting rich.

BOY #1

What's your horse's name?

MESANNIE

He answers to Tarzan.

BOY #2

What's his sire and dam?

MESANNIE

Can't say I know. I can tell you my grandpa Libby once owned a Tennessee mare named Zara. I rode her bareback many times.

BOY #1

The mare was Haggin breed. Probably from the Haggin Farm. They used names like that. Tennessee raises the finest.

Mesannie looks up as a group of local men approach. They all nod hellos. One of them, a genial man, fifties, with a soft Tennessee drawl, steps forward and tips his hat.

LOCAL MAN

You can see you're in horse country. My name is Richards. The fellows and I stopped by the stable to get a look at your horse. He's a fine one.

MESANNIE

Tarzan's no complainer.

MR. RICHARDS

We're wondering, how'd you like to see the most beautiful sight in Tennessee?

EXT. TENNESSEE FARM - DAY

It's drizzling. Fog rises from the hills, not promising much of a view. Mesannie and MR. RICHARDS cross the yard. He points to a big weathered barn in need of paint for a good many years.

MR. RICHARDS

Over there.

Mesannie is disappointed, but acts agreeable just to be polite.

MESANNIE

It is beautiful.

MR. RICHARDS

Just wait until you see the inside.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mesannie follows Mr. Richards inside. About twenty men and women are waiting for them. They're all smiling.

MR. RICHARDS

All right, bring him out.

Mr. Richards turns to Mesannie.

MR. RICHARDS (CONT'D)

We read in the papers that you needed a second horse and couldn't find one at the right price. Now let's find out what you think of this one.

A man leads a horse out from around the corner. The horse is a big solid bay about two hands taller than Tarzan.

MR. RICHARDS (CONT'D)

He's a Tennessee Walking Horse. Name's Rex.

Mesannie goes over to admire Rex.

MESANNIE

How old?

MR. RICHARDS

Twenty. He's always been a pet horse.
And he's used to traffic.

Mesannie studies Rex and likes what she sees.

MESANNIE

Only thing troubling about him is his
size. How would a shorty like me climb
on top of such a giant?

MR. RICHARDS

Wait and see.

(to Rex)

Stretch!

Rex moves his hind legs back and his fore legs forward, bringing his back down lower than Tarzan's. One of the men saddles Rex. Mesannie climbs into the saddle and rides him around the barn. Rex has a nice easy-going gait.

MR. RICHARDS (CONT'D)

The breed was developed for comfortable
riding.

MESANNIE

He doesn't disgrace his breed. Sitting
on him is like sitting in an easy
chair. In comparison, Tarzan is a
rocking boat.

Mesannie pulls Rex to a stop.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Rex)

Stretch!

Down goes Rex's back. Mesannie steps off.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I won't ask about the price. I like
him, but I just can't afford him.

MR. RICHARDS

The price is right. And we think you
can afford him. As a matter of fact,
we've already seen to the cost. Just
tell people along the way that Rex
comes from Tennessee.

EXT. TENNESSEE TWO LANE - DAY

Mesannie is aboard Tarzan who continues to carry most of the load. Depeche Toi happily rides on the blanket rolls strapped over Rex's flanks. Tarzan and Rex walk side by side, each jockeying to get their nose out front. Poor Tarzan is forced to jog to keep up with Rex's long gait, yet Rex is wet with sweat.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF MEMPHIS - DUSK

The four of them walk toward the city. Both horses are limping. Rex is drenched in sweat. His nose is running and he's coughing. A police car comes up alongside them and stops.

POLICE OFFICER

Heard you were coming this way. Thought you would have made Memphis days ago. Everything all right?

MESANNIE

Both horses need shoes.

POLICE OFFICER

There's a stable not too far away. The shortest route is down this parkway. It's one way, but it will be all right for you to go against the traffic. Stay on the side, go through the underpass, and we'll meet you at the other end. Best for you to get there before dark.

EXT. MEMPHIS PARKWAY - DUSK

There are not many cars on the parkway. Mesannie, Tarzan, Rex, and Depeche Toi walk the wrong way against light traffic. Two carloads of trouble seekers approach with rock and roll music blaring. The cars stop and ten coarse young fellows pile out.

COARSE FELLOW #1

Where do you think you're going?

MESANNIE

I'm heading for a stable.

His face lights up with realization. He lets out a laugh.

COARSE FELLOW #1

Oh, you're a woman? A woman bum! This is a one-way parkway and you're going the wrong way.

She slits her eyes.

MESANNIE

I know it. But the police told me to come this way. It's the shortest route to the stable, and they want me off the streets before dark.

COARSE FELLOW #2

You'd better turn around and go back the way you came.

The young men rile each other up. They hoot and holler.

COARSE FELLOW #3

Yah. We don't care if it takes you all night to get to the stable.

Mesannie is thoroughly flustered and fearful.

MESANNIE

But my horses...

COARSE FELLOW #4

We don't give a spit about your horses.

The smallest fellow yells--

COARSE FELLOW #5

What are we waiting for? If she won't do it, we will! Grab the horses! Let's show this crazy old woman how things are done in Memphis!

He pushes Mesannie and tears the lead rope from her hands. Depeche Toi dives for him and grabs him by the trouser leg. The other fellows laugh and shout. Two of them kick at Depeche Toi. One of them grabs Mesannie's arm and hollers--

COARSE FELLOW #6

Take the horses.

Car brakes SQUEAL. A patrol car pulls in with its siren flashing. The police officer who sent her this way gets out.

POLICE OFFICER

What's going on here?

The young men straighten up and act innocent.

COARSE FELLOW #6

Nothing much. We were just talking to this sweet old lady.

The others snicker, trying to hold in their laughter.

POLICE OFFICER

You're just old enough to find out how expensive talking can be. Who owns these cars? It's illegal to stop on the parkway.

The young men glare at Mesannie.

EXT. MEMPHIS PARKWAY - NIGHT

The police officer escorts an exhausted and demoralized Mesannie as she leads Tarzan and Rex down the parkway.

POLICE OFFICER

You know you can press charges against them for attempting to steal your horses.

MESANNIE

I'm not hunting trouble for myself or anyone else.

INT. MEMPHIS STABLE - NIGHT

Tarzan and Rex are settled into stalls of the quality stable munching a dinner of grain. Depeche Toi sits by the rigging, guarding it. A stable hand walks too close to it and Depeche Toi growls. The stable hand snickers and shakes his head.

INT. SALVATION ARMY - SIGN-IN DESK - NIGHT

Mesannie checks in with the dour man behind the counter of the cheerless building.

SALVATION ARMY MAN

Supper, a bed, a nightgown, and breakfast will cost you a dollar.

INT. SALVATION ARMY DORM - NIGHT

Mesannie is in bed wearing all her clothes and shivering. The room is so cold she can see her breath.

INT. STABLE - MORNING

The sun is out, but it's bitterly cold. Mesannie is shivering. A stiff-legged weather-worn old blacksmith shoes Tarzan.

MESANNIE

April in Memphis is colder than any
April I can remember in Maine.

BLACKSMITH

Unusual weather we're having.

MESANNIE

I'm beginning to wonder if the south
ever has usual weather.

BLACKSMITH

This one is all ready to go. I'd like
to wait 48 hours before shoeing the
other. The Walker's feet are sore. Been
used to hard ground and not pavements
most of his life I'd say.

MESANNIE

Been coughing for three days. Doesn't
want to eat. Just picks at his food.

BLACKSMITH

Well, he doesn't have a fever. Maybe
you've been pushing him too much. He's
still soft. He'll shake this cold with
a couple of days' rest and his appetite
will pick up on the road.

MESANNIE

Got weighed in Dickson. Tarzan's been
carrying a load for a twelve hundred
pound pack horse, and he weighs less
than ten hundred. Been overloaded right
along! As soon as Rex is fit, he'll
have to start sharing the load. What'll
the charges be?

BLACKSMITH

Won't run much. Won't charge you for
labor. I'll give you the shoes for
cost. For both horses \$15.

Mesannie gulps at the price of shoes in Memphis. He notices.

BLACKSMITH (CONT'D)

I'm losing money on the deal.
Considering what you've set out to do
at your age, I'd be losing more if you
were a man, because I'd give them to
you. I learned long ago that when you
give a woman anything, all you get in
return is trouble, and I've had enough
trouble in my life.

EXT. BRIDGE OVER THE MISSISSIPPI - DAY

Mesannie is happy to be delayed by a crowd of autograph seekers at the foot of the bridge. In the saddle aboard Rex she hands an autographed postcard back to a middle-aged woman. The woman hands her a coin. Mesannie nods her thanks to her and the crowd.

MESANNIE

Thanks to you all.

The crowd breaks up. Mesannie nudges Rex to move on across a wide steel expansion plate that sits at the beginning of the bridge. Rex backs away from it, snorting and turning around and around. Mesannie turns to one of the men loitering about.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Will you try leading him across?

The man grabs a hold of Rex's reins. Rex just won't walk on that metal. He pulls back, loses his balance, and slams into Tarzan's shoulder. Irritated, Tarzan lays back his ears, takes a pinch of Rex's neck in his teeth, and yanks hard. Rex goes across the plate without realizing what he's doing.

Rex minds his manners crossing the rest of the bridge. They reach the other side of the Mississippi. Mesannie has her hands full again. Rex keeps trying to turn on her, as if he wants to go back over the river. Mesannie struggles to control him.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Rex)

You can't already be homesick for Tennessee.

EXT. ARKANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

They plod down a long, lonely highway through flat country where peaches and cotton are grown. Mesannie rides Tarzan with Rex hitched to a lead rope. They stay far to the side. Traffic is light but cars speed along the highway. A dead armadillo is in the middle of the road. They walk a few more feet and encounter a dead dog on the side of the road.

Depeche Toi starts barking, signaling he wants to ride. Mesannie dismounts and places him up on Rex and remounts.

SUPERIMPOSE: Arkansas, April. A few weeks later.

A passing car slows and pulls to the shoulder. An elderly farmer wearing overalls, seventies, open prairie manner, gets out and walks over to them. He removes his hat and nods.

ELDERLY FARMER

Hello. I was wondering if you had a place to stay tonight.

MESANNIE

I was just getting ready to look for a stable.

ELDERLY FARMER

You're welcome to stay at our place. We live just around the bend. Take the first dirt road on the right and stop at the third house. I'll go ahead and get some hay down from the hay loft.

EXT. ARKANSAS FARMHOUSE - DAY

The man waits in the yard. Mesannie and the boys ride up.

ELDERLY FARMER

Take the horses to the barn. I'll be down in a few minutes to help you unload.

INT. BARN - DAY

Mesannie has unloaded both horses. The elderly farmer appears.

ELDERLY FARMER

You should have waited. Now sit down and let me take over with the feed and water. I told my wife that you're here and she's delighted. She's readying supper now.

The man sets about feeding and watering the horses. A bell sounds from the house.

ELDERLY FARMER (CONT'D)

Supper is ready. Make yourself comfortable. I'll bring it to you.

The man hurries to the house leaving Mesannie alone and baffled.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

A cot has been set up in the barn for her. Mesannie pulls back the blankets and crawls in. Depeche Toi cocks his head at her. Mesannie shrugs and whispers to him.

MESANNIE

I expected to be invited to eat supper and sleep in the house too. We're doing both here. I figure they had a fight about our being here. Now get some sleep.

Depeche Toi curls up by the cot and closes his eyes to sleep.

INT. BARN - MORNING

Mesannie is packing Tarzan. The elderly farmer appears with a tray loaded down with a hearty hot breakfast. He sets the tray down on the edge of the cot.

MESANNIE

Morning. Thank you.

ELDERLY FARMER

Morning.

The elderly farmer looks around sheepishly.

ELDERLY FARMER (CONT'D)

Sorry I couldn't invite you into the house for meals.

MESANNIE

I'm just hoping there's no problem about my being here.

He stares at the ground, grinding his foot into the dirt of the barn floor.

ELDERLY FARMER

No, that's not it at all. You see, my wife hasn't been out of the house in years. She has a fear of meeting people.

MESANNIE

No! Not even friends?

The elderly farmer shakes his head solemnly.

ELDERLY FARMER

She won't even see old friends. I was sure she'd want to meet you, because she's been reading about you in the papers and talking about you. But I was wrong. I guess she'll be this way the rest of her life.

(MORE)

ELDERLY FARMER (CONT'D)

Except for this fear of people she's fine. Doctors can't help. She won't talk to them either.

The farmer walks over to the gear and finishes packing Tarzan.

EXT. BARN - MORNING

Tarzan and Rex are both packed and ready to go. Mesannie turns to the elderly farmer.

MESANNIE

I thank you for your hospitality.

The bell rings. The elderly farmer hurries back to the house. Mesannie mounts Rex and the boys set off toward the road. The man comes running out of the house and calls to her.

ELDERLY FARMER

Hello there! Hello there. Wait!

A tiny woman with jet black hair, a pretty face, and a shy smile who looks to be twenty or thirty years younger than her husband comes out of the house carrying a paper bag. She goes right up to where Mesannie waits on Rex and hands her the paper bag. She doesn't say a word to Mesannie, but just keeps smiling and nodding. The woman notices Depeche Toi and bends down to pat him on the head. Depeche Toi licks her hand.

ELDERLY FARMER (CONT'D)

My wife prepared some lunch for you.

MESANNIE

(to the woman)

Thank you. You are very kind.

The woman looks at Mesannie. Her lips move, but she doesn't say anything. Abruptly she turns and runs back to the house.

ELDERLY FARMER

(his eyes moist)

At least she came out of the house.
First time in years. Maybe she's improving.

Mesannie reaches into her saddlebag and pulls out a postcard. She scrawls on the back of it: "Thank you again for being so kind to an old lady tramp."

MESANNIE

Please give this to your wife.

With eyes moist and lips trembling, the elderly farmer looks at her and smiles.

ELDERLY FARMER

Thank you.

EXT. ARKANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

Dark storm clouds blanket the sky. Mesannie and the boys are on a desolate stretch. A few hundred feet up the road a neon sign glows in front of a motel with a neighboring corral.

EXT. CORRAL NEIGHBORING MOTEL - DAY

Tarzan and Rex share the corral with several mares and stallion.

INT. MOTEL - FRONT DESK - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi check in. The motel man, a straight-talking, large man of strong build who has gone to seed a bit, takes stock of her and shakes his head.

MOTEL MAN

I hope these Wyoming people are paying you a lot of money. I think it's terrible of them to use a woman your age for a publicity stunt.

MESANNIE

If they're paying me, I wish they'd tell me about it.

MOTEL MAN

It was all in the morning papers. Out in Cheyenne, Wyoming they hold a big rodeo shindig as a tourist attraction every July. They've invited you to join the parade on opening day.

MESANNIE

Well I'm one of the last persons in America to hear about the invitation. If you know anybody out there, tell them that the rest of Arkansas and then Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado stand between me and Wyoming. The month of May begins tomorrow, and I don't know where I'll be in July. And if you can collect what you think they're paying me, I'll split it with you.

MOTEL MAN

Well, I half believe you, and I half don't, so I'll charge you half rate.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The heavens have opened up outside. Mesannie lays in bed awake listening to the rain pounding on the roof. A clock by the bed shows it's 3 AM. Over the pounding of the rain on the roof Mesannie realizes someone is pounding on her door.

Mesannie hastily throws on her coat over her nightdress. She opens the door to find the motel man standing in the downpour.

MOTEL MAN

I've been pounding on your door for ten minutes.

MESANNIE

Couldn't hear you with all the rain.

MOTEL MAN

I got a call from my neighbor. He checked on his horses and found some rails down. All the inmates are gone except his stallion.

MESANNIE

My two boys?

The motel man nods.

MOTEL MAN

He can't find the horses anywhere. The police have already been called.

Mesannie looks stricken.

MOTEL MAN (CONT'D)

There's nothing you can do in this rain. I'll keep you posted if there's any news. Go back to sleep.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - DAWN

Mesannie sits in the office, glum, as the sun begins to rise. Depeche Toi, sensing the pickle they're in, is also gloomy. The motel man pours Mesannie a cup of coffee. He takes his cup of coffee over to the window.

MOTEL MAN

Looks like a two-day rain. If they stay off the road, nobody will spot them.

Mesannie's spirits looks even lower if possible.

MOTEL MAN (CONT'D)

If they get as far as the cypress swamps, it may be weeks before they're found. Those cottonmouth in the swamps have killed many a horse and cow.

MESANNIE

I heard about those snakes and swamps from my Papa.

MOTEL MAN

He traveled through here?

MESANNIE

Used to take off from Maine now and then to seek his fortune. Back in 1922 he tried his luck in Arkansas. "You just like to travel," Mama'd say when he came home without a fortune, which was always the case. But we heard all about the state from him. The trip was never a total loss. Remembering what he said in the long ago doesn't cheer me much.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - NIGHT

It's dark outside and still raining. The motel man is on the phone. Mesannie is pacing the office listening intently. Depeche Toi, still curled up in the corner, follows her with his eyes.

MOTEL MAN

...all right. I'll tell her.

He hangs up the phone.

MESANNIE

Someone's found them?

MOTEL MAN

A motorist spotted a herd of horses going single file down a road. A black horse was in the lead, and seven mares were strung out behind him. Then came a big bay.

MESANNIE

That's Tarzan and Rex.

MOTEL MAN

They were heading in the direction of a village ten miles from where we're sitting.

(MORE)

MOTEL MAN (CONT'D)

The police caught the mares but the black horse and the bay dodged them and ran off. The police won't look for them anymore tonight.

Mesannie hangs her head at the news.

MOTEL MAN (CONT'D)

You haven't had a bite to eat all day and you can't live on coffee. Now have something to eat and get a good night's sleep. I sure hope your horses don't find the swamps.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie is in bed awake listening to the rain. Depeche Toi, curled up by the bed, is awake too. Mesannie thinks she hears a pounding on the door. She jumps out of bed and hurries to the door. There's no one there.

Mesannie climbs back into bed. Abruptly she throws off the covers and kneels by the bed. She folds her hands in prayer.

MESANNIE

Papa taught me never to pray an asking prayer. I know better than to ask direct help from you Lord. It was Papa's golden rule. He always said, "If you're deserving, you don't need to ask, for He will help you. If you're undeserving, then He has every right not to help, and you're wasting His time and yours."

Mesannie looks over at Depeche Toi who is closely watching.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I have my health, my dog, my gear, and eighteen dollars or so, but I still need help to get to California.

Mesannie folds her hands in prayer and closes her eyes.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I hate to bother You. And I thank Thee for permission to go to California. But I didn't plan on walking there and the dog is a touch small for carrying the gear. So I'd appreciate some advice.

Mesannie opens her eyes. She nods at Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

It's out of my hands now.

She climbs back into bed. Depeche Toi curls into a tight ball. They both close their eyes to go to sleep.

EXT. ROADSIDE ICE CREAM STAND - MORNING

The rain is just a drizzle. A light goes on inside the ice cream stand, a white one-story cube with a neon cone on top.

INT. ICE CREAM STAND - MORNING

A man in his forties dressed in all white opens up for the day. He slides open the customer window and reaches under the counter for some supplies. When he looks up again he leaps back in fright. The first two customers of the day, Tarzan and Rex, poke their heads through the window and out over the counter.

EXT. ICE CREAM STAND - MORNING

Tarzan and Rex are tied to the fence. A police officer waits by his patrol car. A car driven by the motel man pulls up. He and Mesannie get out. She carries a saddle and a bridle over to the horses. Depeche Toi runs over to the horses, barking excitedly.

MESANNIE

From now on, I'm keeping a sharper eye
on you two boys.

Relieved but irritated, she throws the saddle over Rex's back.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Rex)

You're determined to get back to
Tennessee. Must be either homesick or
lovesick.

EXT. ARKANSAS ROAD - DAY

They're walking through rice growing country along a road of big plantation houses each with a cluster of sharecropper cabins not far from each house. The mercury has risen twenty degrees. The air is thick with billions of gnats. Mesannie swats at the gnats but it's impossible to shoo them away.

INT. ARKANSAS GENERAL STORE - DAY

Mesannie places some canned goods on the counter. A chatty counter man in his sixties leans on the counter ruminating.

COUNTER MAN

Mules working in the field sometimes
die from gnats getting up their noses.

MESANNIE

Is there nothing that can be done?

The counter man slides a pack of cigarettes toward her.

EXT. ARKANSAS CYPRESS SWAMP - DAY

Mesannie and the boys walk along a stretch of road that heads right through a cypress swamp. On each side of the road as far as the eye can see giant trees grow out of deep water with their gnarled tree roots sticking out of the water like bent fingers.

Depeche Toi's tongue hangs down to his knees. Mesannie is drenched with sweat. The temperature is in the eighties. The air teems with gnats. Mesannie chain smokes, forming a protective smoke cloud around her and the boys. She lights a fresh cigarette off the one she still smokes, coughing as she exhales.

EXT. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

They're passing through wheat country, wheat lands as far as the eye can see. The only other things growing along the way are thistles and ragweeds. Mesannie sneezes into a handkerchief and blows her nose. Her eyes are watery and red. She's aboard Rex catching up on her mail, reading letters in the saddle.

The road is straight and wide, but they have to keep to the side. Big trucks roar by followed by modern wheat combines with cranelike arms that sweep over them as they pass by. They frighten Tarzan. He rears back and dances until they clear the arms. It's a miracle the pack straps hold and the gear doesn't spill all over the road.

SUPERIMPOSE: Kansas, The State of the Saddle Tramps, July.

A beat up pick up truck rolls past. A young farm boy riding in the back shouts--

YOUNG FARM BOY

See you in Cheyenne!

Mesannie looks up from the letter she's reading.

MESANNIE

(to the boys)

I'd like to see that rodeo. But I'm not so sure we can make it in time.

A huge eighteen-wheel truck slows and stops. The friendly driver rolls down his window. He hands Mesannie a letter.

TRUCK DRIVER

Got another one for you. A truck driver from Texas asked me to pass this along. Some folks there would like you to make your home with them.

MESANNIE

Those kind people have their hearts in the right place, but none seem to understand that I don't want to be dependent on anyone but me. Now that I've tasted freedom I like it.

They share a laugh.

TRUCK DRIVER

Hope you like the Kansas scenery. It doesn't change much for miles.

MESANNIE

Other than a touch of ragweed, me and Kansas are getting along just fine. For the first time since leaving Maine, I feel completely at home in a place.

TRUCK DRIVER

I've heard my granddaddy say, in the era of the great cattle drives, Kansas was so full of drifting cowboys, some homeward bound, some looking for work, others looking for trouble, folks took to calling it The State of the Saddle Tramps.

MESANNIE

Now a Maine saddle tramp's come along.

TRUCK DRIVER

If you're camping tonight, get on the other side of that ditch. Plenty of grass there for your horses. Don't get too far from the road. I'll pass the word along. We'll keep an eye on you.

EXT. KANSAS FIELD - NIGHT

Mesannie has set up camp in an open field about thirty yards from the road. Tarzan and Rex are hitched to a cattle gate where the grass is thick. Mesannie spreads a blanket over a mat of oak leaves. She lays down and has to shift the blanket around several times before she finds a more of less comfortable spot.

Mesannie links her fingers over her chest. She gazes up in wonder at the canopy of stars that blanket the sky. A smile of contentment curls on her lips. She closes her eyes to sleep.

A few yards away a well-meaning trucker slows and honks his horn. Mesannie nearly jumps out of her skin. She calms herself down and just as she does, the horn blast from a second well-meaning trucker scares the daylights out of her. Mesannie rolls herself up in the blanket and hopes for the best.

EXT. KANSAS FIELD - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

All is quiet. Depeche Toi snuggles next to Mesannie who is rolled up in the blanket asleep and snoring. But not for long. About fifty cows arrive on the other side of the cattle gate. They start talking to Tarzan and Rex, mooing their greetings.

EXT. KANSAS FIELD - MORNING

The ground is covered in dew. Mesannie wakes up wrapped in blankets but shivering. She sits up, looking completely tuckered out. About two hundred cows are grouped on the other side of the cattle fence. Mesannie shakes her head, mad as a hornet, and turns to Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE

I can't recall when I've been so tired so early in the day. Back in Maine I read about the joys of sleeping under the western sky. And I looked forward to doing just that. But there wasn't even a single joy for me last night.

She struggles to her feet and angrily shakes out the blanket.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to the cows)

You don't know how close I came to throwing Kansas rocks at Kansas cows.

Mesannie kicks a tuft of grass and starts packing up the gear.

EXT. KANSAS STABLE - DAY

Mesannie and the boys ride up to a stable. She owns a pesky cold and is sweating like a trooper. She dismounts Rex. Her knees buckle. Dizzy, she grips the saddle horn to steady herself.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Mesannie, woozy, sits on box watching a pleasant, muscular stable man, thirties, unload her horses. She has a painful coughing fit and has a hard time catching her breath.

STABLE MAN

Have you had mumps?

Mesannie labors to even lift her head to look at him.

MESANNIE

I don't know. Why, is my face swollen?

STABLE MAN

No, but you sure look like you should lie down and get some rest. The reason I asked is that my kids have mumps. I was going to ask you into the house, but maybe you better stay here.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Mesannie struggles to spread her blankets over bales of straw to make a bed. Depeche Toi whines and licks her face.

INT. STABLE - MORNING

Mesannie is awake but hasn't moved off of her makeshift bed. Her cough has turned into a ragged bark. The stable man arrives. Mesannie struggles to sit up.

MESANNIE

Doc back in Maine warned I'd be an easy mark for pneumonia. Had it the winter before. Where can I find a doctor?

STABLE MAN

Two miles down the road at the clinic. You can't miss it. I'll saddle the big horse for you.

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Mesannie leans on the counter to hold herself up. She talks to a bossy, businesslike nurse manning the front desk.

NURSE

All the doctors are out of town at a convention. Won't be back 'til Monday.

MESANNIE

I can't wait that long.

Mesannie has a violent coughing fit.

NURSE

Now look at you. You haven't been taking care of yourself properly. You're plain foolish not to have seen a doctor before this morning.

MESANNIE

Where's the nearest doctor?

NURSE

There are just a few others in town. But you can't see any of them without an appointment.

EXT. STABLE - DAY

Mesannie is slumped forward in the saddle, clutching the saddle horn. Rex finds his way back to the stable on his own and comes to a stop. Mesannie stirs. Rex stretches as low as he can go. Mesannie is just able to roll off onto her unsteady legs.

The stable man stands a few feet away talking to a pretty, neatly dressed young lady in her twenties.

STABLE MAN

Sure we rent horses. I can show you a couple--

He notices Mesannie staggering back inside.

STABLE MAN (CONT'D)

'Scuse me.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Mesannie staggers over to her bed on the straw. Depeche Toi follows her and starts whining. The stable man comes in.

STABLE MAN

What did the doctor say?

Mesannie's voice is a whisper. She's too weak to open her eyes.

MESANNIE

Couldn't find one who'd see me. Talked to three nurses who said three doctors' schedules were all filled up.

The young lady comes over and looks at her with a sense of pity.

YOUNG LADY

What's wrong?

STABLE MAN

She can't find a doctor who will tend to her.

YOUNG LADY

How do you like that? This poor woman is dying and she's a citizen of the United States, and no doctor will help her!

(to Mesannie)

Are you the woman from Maine?

Mesannie opens her eyes to find them standing over her.

MESANNIE

Just barely. If I don't see a doctor, I won't be from anywhere.

YOUNG LADY

Now don't move. I'll find you a doctor.

(to stable man)

I'll tell you something. The next time you see somebody who needs a doctor and you can't find a doctor, call the hospital. That's where I'm taking this woman. Now let's get her into my car.

INT. HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Mesannie is resting comfortably. A doctor gives her an injection in her arm. A nurse places a bottle of pills on the bed stand.

DOCTOR

You'll feel much better in a few hours and much better in the morning. But you'll also need some rest. Don't travel for ten days.

MESANNIE

I'll never make Cheyenne in time. I've always dreamed of seeing a big time rodeo. May not have another chance.

DOCTOR

You will. But not this year. Next year.

EXT. KANSAS ROAD - MORNING

The four of them walk along a quiet local road with little traffic. Mesannie is aboard Rex, semiconscious, her cheeks bright, burning with fever. The animals are quiet, sensing something's wrong. A wave of dizziness hits her. She slumps forward and grabs Rex's mane. He halts and stands there waiting.

SUPERIMPOSE: The next morning.

The dizziness passes. Mesannie labors to loop a stout strap around the front of the saddle and fasten it through her belt.

EXT. ROADSIDE RESTAURANT - DAY

They walk up to a sleepy roadside restaurant. The parking lot is empty. Mesannie pulls Rex to a stop. She looks down. The ground seems a long way down. Mesannie just sits there in the saddle.

The lunch man, fifties, crew cut and wearing a clean white apron, comes walking out of his place.

LUNCH MAN

Lost?

MESANNIE

Not if this is the road to Clay Center.

LUNCH MAN

It is and you're lost. I saw you going by over an hour ago. Right now, you're headed for Manhattan.

MESANNIE

(panicked)

I must have blacked out. Somehow Rex turned himself around.

LUNCH MAN

You sure you know where you're going?

MESANNIE

I do, but the trouble is that my friends don't. Do you think I could have some hot soup out here?

LUNCH MAN

Plenty of tables inside.

MESANNIE

I like to eat in the saddle. Saves time.

The lunch man goes back inside. He quickly reappears with a mug of soup. Mesannie takes it and sips the hot soup.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

What do I owe you?

LUNCH MAN

No charge.

MESANNIE

Thank you.

LUNCH MAN

I read you sell postcards. You have one handy?

Mesannie reaches into the bag on Rex's shoulder and pulls out a card. It's a new batch, one with a photo of all four of them including Rex. The lunch man hands her a dime. Mesannie refuses.

MESANNIE

No charge. I'd like you to have it.

He insists, pressing the dime into her hand.

LUNCH MAN

And take some free advice. Not many places to stay between here and Clay Center. Lonely road for somebody in the best of health. And you look like you belong in a hospital bed. I notice you got yourself lashed onto the saddle. Why not rest here for a few days?

MESANNIE

I'm feeling better by the minute and can't lose any more time feeling sorry for myself.

The lunch man takes a long look at her.

LUNCH MAN

All right then.

He takes hold of Rex's halter and turns him around for her.

EXT. KANSAS FIELD - DUSK

Mesannie has pulled the horses well off the road into a grassy site. Dizzy and weak, she starts to unpack the gear. A few cars pull off the highway and stop. Several people cross the field and stand around watching. None of them offer to help.

A woman with a movie camera and two men with regular cameras photograph Mesannie as she staggers around unpacking.

CAMERAWOMAN

I don't believe it. There's that crazy old lady from Maine.

Mesannie just has to sit down. The camerawoman approaches.

CAMERAWOMAN (CONT'D)

We'd just love to get some pictures of you getting your horses ready for the road, too. Would you mind packing just one of the horses for us please?

Mesannie is too tuckered to lift her head to look at the woman.

MESANNIE

Lady, these are union horses. They've put in an eight-hour day, and I can't afford overtime.

The woman turns to the others.

CAMERAWOMAN

Did you hear that?

They snicker and head back to the cars. The woman lingers.

CAMERAWOMAN (CONT'D)

I didn't want to say anything in front of the others. Now just why have you been gadding around the country dressed like a man?

MESANNIE

For comfort mostly.

CAMERAWOMAN

Well, I think what you're doing is most unladylike.

(MORE)

CAMERAWOMAN (CONT'D)

I know these are modern times, but a woman your age should stay at home. Why, people all over the country are laughing at you.

The woman waits for a reply. Mesannie doesn't give her one.

CAMERAWOMAN (CONT'D)

And I wouldn't be caught dead dressed like a man.

The woman quickly heads back to her car and rejoins the group. Mesannie begins to set up the folding sterno stove. Another car pulls off the road and coasts across the field toward her. A thin pallid woman in her forties gets out and opens the trunk.

WOMAN

Had supper yet?

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The woman has set out a hot supper on a folding table she's brought. She and Mesannie sit on folding chairs eating in the glare of the car's headlights. Although Mesannie's her guest, the woman is quiet and withdrawn. Mesannie does most of the talking, pausing to allow the woman to reply, but she doesn't.

MESANNIE

Been walking through quite a hot spell. But the heat's doing me good. Baking my ailments out of me...My Uncle Waldo would've liked this country. Bird hunting was the favorite sport of his younger days...Quail are thick along the roadsides here in Kansas. Day after day, Depeche Toi runs himself silly through the thick growths of weeds. The Spaniel blood in him leads him to the quail, but the Dachshund part of him holds him back from catching any.

The woman distractedly pushes the food around on her plate.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

You live here in Norton?

The woman stops pushing her food around but doesn't look at Mesannie. She stares down into her plate.

SICKLY WOMAN

I'm happy to listen to you talk. Who I am doesn't mean anything. We'll never see each other again.

The woman carefully puts down her fork.

SICKLY WOMAN (CONT'D)

You see, I don't have much longer to live.

Mesannie tries to cover her surprise with a warm smile.

MESANNIE

My doctor told me the same thing. But don't give up. Cause doctors don't always know everything.

The woman looks up. Tears form in her eyes.

SICKLY WOMAN

They know.

Mesannie puts down her fork. She begins slowly, gently.

MESANNIE

It took sixty-three years and this trip to teach me one thing. Most things in life are foreordained, or I wouldn't be here telling you this. With all due credit to doctors, some don't know what's foreordained and what isn't. Twelve months ago, I was too dumb to realize that a contract to grow pickles was really His grant for me to carry on awhile longer.

Tears roll silently down the woman's face as she listens, triggering tears to well up in Mesannie's eyes.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

When I set out, I told my horse and dog we were going for a long walk. I promised them someday we'd settle down. The someday I had in mind was twenty-five months away, when I'd be sixty-five and eligible for old age benefits. Didn't tell them that, nor did I tell them that when and if we settled down, why it wouldn't be for long.

Mesannie quickly brushes away her tears and smiles.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I wish I had one of them folders Mrs. Hamlett had printed up to give you. Regardless, I memorized the poem printed on it...If you think you're beaten, you are;

(MORE)

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

If you think you dare not, you don't.
 If you'd like to win but think you
 can't, It's almost a cinch that you
 won't. If you think you'll lose, you're
 lost, For out in the world we find,
 Success begins with a fellow's will,
 And it's all in the State of Mind...I
 don't know who wrote the poem, but he
 had the right idea.

Mesannie reaches out and pats the woman's hand and smiles.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

Now, our supper's getting cold.

The woman dries her eyes, smiles, and lets out a little laugh.
 They resume eating.

SICKLY WOMAN

You know what I think? I think that
 you'll end up in the movies.

A wild laugh flies out of Mesannie. She slaps a hand on her leg.

MESANNIE

The movies?! Nobody could have been
 more surprised than I was when just
 over the Maine state line a TV crew
 showed up in the morning and stayed
 with me all day. After that I never
 knew when one would pop up. I was on TV
 indoors the first time during a rainy
 week in Scottsville. I didn't know I
 was on. I was having a nice chat with a
 lady and looked around to see my big
 nose on the monitor. I swallowed so
 hard I couldn't say more than yes or no
 from then on. Anyhow, Depeche Toi was
 the real star. He spent most of the
 time sitting on a table with his paws
 up, or leaning over and kissing me. He
 did the same thing on two radio shows.
 I didn't have the heart to tell him
 none of his acting was being seen.

The woman gives Mesannie a warm smile.

SICKLY WOMAN

Next time you get the chance, look
 those cameras full in the face. You
 don't ever know who's watching.

EXT. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The four of them plod down the shoulder on a secluded stretch. Mesannie is in the saddle back on Tarzan smiling to herself. She looks suntanned and restored. She daydreams to pass the time.

MESANNIE

Boys, when we get to California, we'll pay a visit to the movie people. I'll dress up in a skirt and sweater and a big white hat...

EXT. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The four of them are still plodding along.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

...don't laugh, boys, because we might make it big. Did Tom Mix or Hoot Gibson or William S. Hart ever ride horseback coast to coast? Why, I've spent more time in the saddle on this trip than they did in all their lives...

EXT. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The four of them are still plodding along.

MESANNIE

...the very next time a reporter asks what I plan on doing after reaching California, I'll tell them I plan on getting into the movies. I've even picked out a screen name for myself: Mesannie Hart. In honor of William S. Hart, Uncle Waldo's favorite hero. "There's nobody around today who can touch him" Uncle Waldo told me a thousand times.

EXT. COLORADO CATTLE COUNTRY - DAY

Mesannie and the boys are cutting through cattle country. The midsummer plowing is already done. Northerly winds blowing down from Wyoming pick up the dry earth and blow it in their faces. Rex and Tarzan walk with their heads lowered. Mesannie squints and tries to keep the map she's reading from blowing away.

MESANNIE

(hollers to the boys)

We have eight full days to make Cheyenne. We can make it if we cut across this corner of Colorado. It's a race against time boys. In our case really a walk against time.

EXT. COLORADO STABLE - LATE AFTERNOON

They pull into a stable, dusty and tired from the road. Mesannie unpacks Tarzan first. Free of the gear, Tarzan rolls on the ground, scratching his itching back. Mesannie unpacks Rex. Tarzan walks over to a stream close to the stable yard.

A burly stable man comes running and shouting.

STABLE MAN

You trying to kill that horse?

He runs to the stream where Tarzan is drinking and yanks his head out of the water.

STABLE MAN (CONT'D)

Some damn fool upstream put out poison for rodents.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Mesannie and the stable man stand outside a stall watching a local veterinarian examine Tarzan. The vet reaches into his bag and pulls out a syringe. He gives Tarzan an injection.

VETERINARIAN

Now, don't baby him. He should start sweating in a couple of hours. And the more he sweats the better. So keep him on the move. He won't feel well tomorrow, but travel will do him good.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Mesannie and Depeche Toi are bedded down on the floor outside of Tarzan's stall. None of them are getting much sleep. Tarzan makes mournful moaning sounds. Rex, in the next stall, chimes in with nickers and stomps. Then Depeche Toi starts whining. His whining soon turns into a howl that frightens Mesannie.

MESANNIE

(quietly to herself)

A dog howling in the night means only
one thing in Maine.

Mesannie goes into Tarzan's stall to try and comfort him. Tarzan is wet with sweat. She strokes his neck. Hot tears of anguish flow silently down both of her cheeks.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Tarzan)

Only family I have is right here in
this stable with me. I know you're
sick. You've got to pull through. I
won't go on to California without you.
Rex, Depeche Toi, and I will have to go
on somewhere else, but not to the
coast. It won't be right to continue
without you.

EXT. COLORADO ROAD - DAY

The culverts are dry. Cattle gates block the roads leading to the houses, cutting them off from any streams. Rex carries Mesannie, Depeche Toi, and most of the gear. Tarzan doesn't look like his real self as he walks through the heat profusely sweating out the poison. Mesannie is mad at herself.

MESANNIE

(to Tarzan)

I wish I had the brains to figure out
how to get us some water. We'll take
our time. I don't care if it's
Christmas before we reach Cheyenne.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CHEYENNE - DAY

Mesannie and the boys press toward the city on a road clogged with traffic. Motorists honk their horns and wave. A Stetson wearing teen in a passing car leans out and shouts.

STETSON WEARING TEEN

Welcome to Cheyenne. Glad you made it.

MESANNIE

I must have gotten my days mixed up.
Thought we were a day late.

The teen shakes his head.

STETSON WEARING TEEN

You reached Cheyenne just in time for
the big parade. It's just starting now.

EXT. CHEYENNE MAIN STREET - DAY

A marching band out in front plays "California Here I Come." Twenty beautiful cowgirls mounted on white horses are followed by twenty cowboys on black horses, each carrying a flag. They're followed by Mesannie on Rex, with Tarzan on lead right behind them, and Depeche Toi sitting on top of him. After them are about a hundred kids, most marching out of step.

EXT. RODEO GROUNDS - GRAND STAND AREA - DAY

A roping event is underway in the main arena. A crowd circles Mesannie and Tarzan who are standing by the outer fence doing a brisk postcard business from the saddle. A local reporter with a press badge in his cowboy hat shoots a question at her.

REPORTER

What'll you do when you reach
California?

Mesannie pauses and smiles to herself. She starts boldly--

MESANNIE

I reckon I'll get a big white hat....

But soon she trails off and changes tact. She replies meekly.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

And aim to get a job taking care of
hogs or cows.

EXT. RODEO GROUNDS - GRAND STAND AREA - DAY

Mesannie sits on the edge of the bleachers on the bottom row, enjoying the chuck wagon races. No one recognizes her out of the saddle. A man almost as short as her, weighing less, and looking a little older stands next to her. All the other men in the crowd wear hats, mostly western ones, and string ties. This man is hatless and wears an eastern white shirt with a regular tie.

The man strikes up a conversation with her. He's a peaceful soul who speaks in a deliberate manner. Each word seems heart felt.

MAN

I wish they'd stop having these races.
They're dangerous is what they are. The
wagons often smash up.

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

And when that happens, we can be sure the drivers suffer injuries and that one or more horses will be killed. The men know they are running a risk, but not the horses. I mean, it's not fair to the horses. You understand?

Mesannie nods and looks guilty for enjoying the races. The man shakes his head in disapproval and walks away. Mesannie sits frowning for a moment then gets up and walks away too, her appetite for the chuck wagon races ruined.

INT. RODEO EXHIBITION HALLS - DAY

Mesannie walks through a show of old and new farm machinery, primitive tractors and plows sit side by side with hulking state of the art machines. Mesannie's distracted, looking around for the man, unable to shake what he said.

EXT. WYOMING - MONTAGE - DAY

1) Mesannie and the boys stand on the top of a hill looking down at the spectacular view of the hills of the Laramie Range.

2) They reach the snowline at the top of a hard climb and Mesannie pulls Tarzan to a halt. All four of his feet are planted in the snow. She has a hard time catching her breath. A sign shows the altitude is ten thousand feet.

3) Mesannie and the boys follow a road that cuts through the red desert, a barren endless expanse of nothing but sand, rocks, and sagebrush. Mesannie squints, trying to keep out the sun. Her eyelids are swollen and red from the glistening sand, and her lips are dry and cracked. Depeche Toi chases everything, rabbits, kangaroo rats, and desert mice, and catches nothing.

EXT. WYOMING EVERYTHING STORE - DAY

Mesannie and the boys trace a road through the lonesome country. A few ranch building dot the landscape. Towns are far apart and there's little in between.

SUPERIMPOSE: Still in Wyoming. Near Rock Springs. September.

They come upon a sort of general store with a sign indicating it calls itself an "Everything Store." Mesannie looks up at the rain clouds forming and pulls in. She dismounts Tarzan, hitches him and Rex to post out front, and goes into the store.

INT. EVERYTHING STORE - DAY

Mesannie enters the store. A friendly type Spanish man in his forties is behind the counter. He nods a greeting.

MESANNIE

Hello. I was wondering if you might point out a place where I could camp. I don't like the looks of those clouds. I'd like to get my pup tent up and gear covered before any rain comes.

SPANISH MAN

Sure, I know a place. Take the next dirt road down that hill past the church. You'll find a big, dry wash with plenty of grass for the horses on the slopes.

MESANNIE

Church? Are there enough people around here to support a church?

SPANISH MAN

You'd be surprised. The church serves a lot of territory. Not many people live along the main road, but there are quite a few ranches and small farms scattered in all directions from here. Oh, I've got plenty of neighbors. Of course, they live five or ten miles from each other, so you Easterners might not call them neighbors.

MESANNIE

Is there any water for my horses in that wash?

SPANISH MAN

Not at the moment, but there will be in short order. From the looks of the sky, we're in for a little shower. The wash is bone dry now, but there'll be a few inches of water in the bowl of it right after the rain.

EXT. WASH - DAY

The wash is just as the Spanish man described it, bone dry but with plenty of lush grass on the slopes. Tarzan is already unpacked. Mesannie finishes unpacking Rex and turns him loose as well. She covers the gear with her poncho.

EXT. WASH - DAY

The pup tent is set up on the edge of the wash on a flat sandy spot among the tufts of sagebrush and Russian thistle. Mesannie hurries to get the sleeping bag under it. She and Depeche Toi dive into the tent just as the first drops fall out of the sky.

--A shower falls for just a few minutes and quickly stops--

Mesannie climbs out of the tent and finds the ground wet. A pool of water has accumulated in the bowl of the wash for the horses.

INT. EVERYTHING STORE - DAY

Mesannie places a few necessities, coffee and cans of cooking sterno, on the counter. The Spanish Man rings them up.

SPANISH MAN

Hope you made camp in time to keep things from getting wet?

MESANNIE

(a little self-satisfied)
Just in the nick of time. It wasn't much of a shower.

SPANISH MAN

Not here, but according to the radio, it came down real heavy in the mountains above us.

EXT. WASH - ALMOST DARK

Back at the camp, Mesannie hitches each horse to one of the thorny Russian thistles, with enough rope to reach the grass.

INT. PUP TENT - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Mesannie bolts upright, awakened by a horse's frightened calls.

EXT. WASH - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

By flashlight Mesannie discovers Rex has tangled his rope around several of the thistles. He's trembling. Mesannie tries to quiet him. Tarzan starts squalling. Mesannie turns her flashlight his way and sees he's not tangled. Depeche Toi who's there with them starts barking. Mesannie can't figure out what's wrong.

--A funny sound grows into a roar--

Mesannie turns just in time to get her face wet. A wall of water knocks her flat and rushes over her. Flailing about, she manages to scramble out of the flash flood on all fours, with Depeche Toi's tail in her face, coughing and spitting out water.

Her flashlight gone, Mesannie wanders in the dark over to her gear. The flood has seeped over the wash to soak the pup tent and the gear. Everything is soaking wet. The tent is down and the gear is scattered all over the place.

Mesannie whips around and realizes the horses are gone. Frightened out of their wits, they've yanked their halters loose and disappeared into the night. Mesannie calls for Tarzan and Rex several times and listens. No answering whinnies. She drops to the ground to wait with Depeche Toi for the dawn. Mesannie looks up at the heavens, raging, tears brim on her lower lids.

MESANNIE

What did I do?

EXT. WASH - FIRST LIGHT

The soggy blankets hang on rope strung between the big thistles. Mesannie collects their belongings, hanging the lighter things over the sagebrush. She turns to Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE

Stay here and guard the things while I go looking for the horses.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Mesannie inspects horse tracks on the ground near the church.

EXT. EVERYTHING STORE - MORNING

Mesannie sits on the porch steps leading to the store waiting for the Spanish man to arrive and open up. A pick up truck pulls up and he gets out.

INT. EVERYTHING STORE - MORNING

Mesannie stands at the counter with her head hung low. The Spanish man scolds her as he scurries around opening up.

SPANISH MAN

I don't understand how you got caught like that. Didn't you hear me when I said they'd had heavy rains in the mountains?

(MORE)

SPANISH MAN (CONT'D)

Why, any darn fool knows that a wash is no place to stay near when that happens. I thought for sure that you'd have the brains to move camp up higher near the church. Don't you Easterners ever use your heads? I can't understand how you got this far, knowing as little as you do about simple things like flash floods!

INT. EVERYTHING STORE - MORNING

The Spanish man stands with his arms folded behind the counter listening as Mesannie tells her sorrowful tale to the know-it-all sheriff. Unlike the sheriff, the store owner is too polite to laugh, but he can't help but smile every now and again.

MESANNIE

Trouble is I didn't have the horse sense or dog sense to get out the way--

The sheriff shakes with another fit of laughter. Mesannie flushes to the roots of her head with humiliation.

SHERIFF

(his eyes tearing)

Funniest story I ever heard. Now don't you worry about the horses. By this time, somebody has found them. I'll run back to the office and get the word around. You stay right here.

SPANISH MAN

He's right. If the horses didn't head into the mountains, somebody has found them by now.

MESANNIE

You don't know my Rex. If I do, he's heading back for Tennessee and Tarzan is tagging along behind him.

SHERIFF

Don't worry, somebody will find them. And most folks around here are honest. Of course, some do steal loose horses that aren't branded. But people like that sleep late.

He laughs at his own joke. Mesannie turns to the store owner.

MESANNIE

Do people around here steal horses?

SPANISH MAN

It does happen, but nobody would be fool enough to risk stealing yours. I wouldn't be surprised if they are the best known horses in America by now.

INT. SHERIFF'S CAR - DAY

The sheriff chats with Mesannie who's in the back seat with her dignity in tatters. On the seat next to her is a saddle. Depeche Toi is perched on top.

SHERIFF

Found them late this afternoon. They're almost thirty miles down the road.

MESANNIE

We'll have to cover the identical miles we covered two days before.

(under her breath)

Is it possible I'm not supposed to reach California?

The sheriff overhears her and gloats.

SHERIFF

You'll never make California with those horses.

She grunts, enraged.

MESANNIE

Why, what's wrong with my horses?

SHERIFF

It ain't the horses so much as the winter. The snows come early out in these parts. You'd be smart to hole up some place and wait for spring.

MESANNIE

I'm toying with the idea of visiting Yellowstone before swinging over to Idaho. I've wanted to see the park since I was a little girl.

SHERIFF

Are you out of your mind? Why, Yellowstone is full of bears! And bears favor horses in their diet. And they eat anything they can find just before they go into hibernation. I'm a religious man.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

What would the Lord think if I'm bringing you to these horses to carry you to your doom? You carrying a gun?

Mesannie's stiff backed and bristling with resentment.

MESANNIE

No. My dog's all the protection I need.

SHERIFF

I'll tell you something lady, you need a gun in Wyoming's mountains. Wolf, lynx, cougar, bear. You'd best find safe shelter at night. And a gun won't help much, unless you intend to stay awake all night long. A bear strikes quickly for a big animal.

EXT. FLAT LANDS - WESTERN WYOMING - DAY

Mesannie and the boys traverse the expansive flat lands. Up ahead along the main road is an endless string of telephone poles and little else except for a few houses clustered around a railway yard.

SUPERIMPOSE: Flatlands, Western Wyoming.

EXT. FLAT LANDS - DUSK

Mesannie pitches the tent off the main road. The winds pick up.

EXT. PUP TENT - NIGHT

The winds whistle and blow against the tent all through the black hours.

INT. PUP TENT - NIGHT

Mesannie is wide awake, heart pounding, alert to every sound.

EXT. FLAT LANDS - DAY

Mesannie and the boys walk on through the sameness. Traffic is almost nonexistent. They're lucky if they see a car an hour. Mesannie pulls Rex up where a side road intersects. She looks around at the same scenery she's been staring at for a week.

MESANNIE

Boys, what do you say to a little side trip up into the mountains?

(MORE)

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

There'll be better grass up there, and maybe some ranches where we can find shelter and water. It's high time you had some relief from pavements and traffic.

She waits for objections from the boys. There are none. Mesannie taps Rex's reins. They set off down a dirt side road.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The sun is directly overhead. Mesannie and the boys walk along a curving mountain road. They come to a fork in the road and stop. They stand there staring at the two forks. Mesannie leans forward to talk to Rex.

MESANNIE

Doesn't make any difference to me which branch we take. I'll let you make up your own mind.

It takes Rex just a minute to make up his mind. He takes the right-hand branch, the one that runs downgrade.

EXT. RIGHT FORK - DAY

They round a curve and Mesannie pulls Rex up short. A hundred yards ahead is a farmhouse that looks like it's been flown in from New England. It's white and fresh painted, but otherwise seems the carbon copy of the house they left back in Maine.

Depeche Toi trots up ahead and disappears into the yard. Mesannie nudges Rex to move on.

MESANNIE

(to herself)

I can almost see mama opening the front door and stepping out.

The door opens. Out steps the man from the rodeo in Cheyenne, the one who complained the chuck wagon races were too dangerous.

MAN FROM RODEO

Why, hello. Remember me? Cheyenne in July?

MESANNIE

I do.

Depeche Toi jumps up on his leg. The man pets the dog as if they were old friends. He looks up at Mesannie.

MAN FROM RODEO

Let's bring your horses out back.
You're just in time for lunch.

MESANNIE

Shouldn't you ask your wife?

MAN FROM RODEO

My wife would be pleased to have you,
too, except that I don't have a wife.

He takes Rex's lead rope and leads them around to the barn.

EXT. BARNYARD - DAY

Mesannie dismounts Rex.

MAN FROM RODEO

If you're not in a hurry, we might as
well unpack.

The man is already unpacking Tarzan. Mesannie starts on Rex.

MAN FROM RODEO (CONT'D)

Strip them down, saddle and all.
There's a fine strand of grass behind
the barn and a pool of water.

MESANNIE

I'd better hitch them. I don't trust
this Rex anymore.

MAN FROM RODEO

Don't bother. They won't stray. Adam
and Eve will see to that.

He turns and whistles. Two old dogs, Border Collies, come
jumping out of an open window and trot over to him.

MAN FROM RODEO (CONT'D)

(to the dogs)
Keep an eye on these horses.

The dogs crouch and watch the horses but pay no attention to
Depeche Toi.

MAN FROM RODEO (CONT'D)

These two are the best herders I ever
owned. In their younger days, they
could handle up to five hundred goats.

MESANNIE

You're a goat rancher I take it?

MAN FROM RODEO

Where are my manners? I am. Name's
Harvey Kelsey.

MESANNIE

Mesannie Wilkins.

HARVEY

Welcome.

They share a smile.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

My two men are in the hills with close
to a hundred goats. Don't expect them
back for another month. It gets a
little lonely here at times. You're the
first traveler to come by in a week.

INT. HARVEY'S FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The inside of the house is neat as a pin. Mesannie finishes
washing up at the sink. HARVEY busies himself setting the table.

MESANNIE

Can I help?

HARVEY

Everything is about ready. Make
yourself comfortable at the table.

Mesannie takes a seat at the table, a fancy one for a rancher,
wax flowers for a center piece, two ivory candles in glass
holders, and a clean Irish linen tablecloth. Harvey has laid out
a loaf of black rye, some goat cheese, and giant ripe pears.

Harvey carries two dishes of stew to the table. He goes back to
the stove and dishes out a smaller serving for Depeche Toi. He
places the dish on the edge of the table to cool and has a seat.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

We'll let that cool for the dog.
Please, go ahead. I baked the bread
myself.

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN - AFTER LUNCH

Mesannie and Harvey have finished lunch and sip coffee. Depeche
Toi gobbles down the plate of stew on the floor.

HARVEY

I was eighty in December. I'd judge you to be somewhere in your early fifties.

Mesannie is surprised by his age. With his boyish face and sparkling blue eyes, Harvey looks much younger than eighty.

MESANNIE

Sixty-three in December.

HARVEY

You look much younger. Must be the outdoor life. What day in December?

MESANNIE

The thirteenth.

HARVEY

How about that! We share the same birthdate.

MESANNIE

What a coincidence.

HARVEY

Another one is that horses brought me to Wyoming too. In my case, the horses had pulled a wagon. Me and my parents rode in the wagon all the way from Pennsylvania. That was back in 1890, the year Wyoming became a state. We got started out here at the same time, the state and I.

They share a laugh. Harvey stares into his coffee.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

You're welcome to stay here a few days if you'd like.

He quickly adds--

HARVEY (CONT'D)

Of course, I'll sleep in the barn.

MESANNIE

It's a kind offer. But I've dallied enough the last few days. I need to push on for Boise. It's out of the way, I know. But I promised to deliver a letter. And a promise is a promise. After that, I'll make a bee line for California. I know the Lord can't hold back winter just for me.

(MORE)

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

I'm the last of my line, but I'll be the first of my line to see California.

HARVEY

I'm the last of my line, too, and I'll probably never see California. Why is seeing California so important to you?

MESANNIE

For one thing, I promised myself.

Harvey just looks at her, as if waiting for her to say more, but she doesn't know what else to say. Harvey looks down into his coffee again. Mesannie gets the feeling he has something special to say, but doesn't know quite how to say it. Finally he smiles.

HARVEY

I asked for a personal reason. Now I don't know what your beliefs are, but I'll tell you one of mine. I believe that all things are foreordained by some Higher Power. Nothing really happens by chance, you see. Why were you and I born on the same day of the month? Why did we both come to Wyoming? Why did we meet as strangers in Cheyenne? Why did you select this road to travel?

MESANNIE

Rex chose it.

HARVEY

You see? Even his action was foreordained. And all these things happen for a purpose. Now then, I don't mean to startle you, but I'm hoping that you will remain here as my wife.

Mesannie's so startled she comes close to spilling her coffee. She shakes her head as if she hadn't heard right.

MESANNIE

Are you proposing?

Eyes watery, Harvey nods. Mesannie stares at him wide-eyed, flustered, giddy as a school girl. She smooths her hair, suddenly self-conscious.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

You don't know anything about me.

HARVEY

I know a great deal about you. I've been reading about you for months.

(MORE)

HARVEY (CONT'D)

And I know too that you love animals. What will happen to my goats when I'm gone? What will happen to my ranch?

MESANNIE

But you've known me for less than two hours.

HARVEY

That's true. But how do you know that I haven't been waiting for these two hours since 1890?

Mesannie doesn't know what to say. Harvey continues.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

I'll put half the ranch in your name right here and now. And will you the other half in case I go to my reward first.

MESANNIE

I've never rushed into things. I'll have to think about your offer.

HARVEY

I understand. My proposal will last as long as I do. It isn't likely that I'll meet another woman like you.

EXT. HARVEY'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

The horses are all packed again and Mesannie is in the saddle aboard Rex. Harvey looks up at Mesannie and smiles.

HARVEY

I'll be waiting. Come back as soon as you can. But if your decision is no, please don't write. So long as I don't know you won't return, I can keep on hoping.

Mesannie manages to nod. She nudges Rex and the four of them move on. Mesannie looks back once and waves. She puts a hand to her hot cheeks. Her face shows her outright astonishment.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF BOISE - DUSK

The road starts down a steep pitch, and eventually winds around a curve and through a narrow tunnel. Traffic is heavy in both directions. Mesannie, aboard Tarzan, has her hands full trying to keep the horses down to a walk.

Car horns sound behind them, but there's no place to step aside. All they can do is walk slowly ahead and through the tunnel and up the grade on the other side. Finally, where the road widens a bit, a young cowboy-hatted deputy waves them to one side.

DEPUTY

Look behind you. You have over three miles of traffic piled up. Even the cross streets are clogged. You are responsible for the biggest traffic jam in the history of Boise.

Mesannie turns and looks behind her at the massive traffic jam.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

Let's get your livestock into the parking lot over there. Do you have a place to stay? I could point you to a hotel.

MESANNIE

Don't you have heat in the jail?

YOUNG DEPUTY

If that's how you want it, so be it.

EXT. BOISE STATE HOUSE - DAY

Mesannie walks up the state house steps, letter in hand.

INT. BOISE STATE HOUSE - DAY

Mesannie enters the marbled foyer. Men and women in business attire intently hurry around her.

INT. STATE HOUSE - OUTSIDE OF GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Mesannie locates the governor's office. She walks through the open outer door leading from the hallway right up to the inner closed door. Nobody stops her. Mesannie paces back and forth, mustering the courage to open it and walk through.

An officious young man in a suit steps up to her.

OFFICIOUS YOUNG MAN

Yes? May I help you?

MESANNIE

I'm looking for Governor Smiley. I have this letter for him.

OFFICIOUS YOUNG MAN

Thank you. I'll see that he gets it.

He extends his hand. Mesannie holds onto the letter.

MESANNIE

Governor Muskie of Maine wants me to deliver this letter in person.

The young man smiles smugly.

OFFICIOUS YOUNG MAN

The governor is a very busy man. I'm afraid his schedule is filled for today. I suggest you mail the letter.

The young man leads her back to the outer door. Mesannie walks out, her face turning beet red.

INT. STATE HOUSE LOBBY - DAY

Mesannie, blood boiling and redfaced, mutters to herself.

MESANNIE

Hundreds of miles out of my way with this darn letter, and now I'm not able to deliver it. It's an insult to Maine. And I intend to tell the next reporter I talk to!

The young man runs up behind Mesannie and touches her arm.

OFFICIOUS YOUNG MAN

Governor Smiley wants to see you right now. I'm sorry I didn't recognize you.

MESANNIE

Don't apologize. Nobody knows me when I'm out of the saddle.

INT. GOVERNOR SMILEY'S OFFICE - DAY

True to his name, Governor Smiley is a friendly sort. He shakes hands with Mesannie. She hands him the letter. The governor takes it over to his desk and sits down. He opens it right away.

Mesannie looks around his office as he's reading. There's a giant-sized potato with smooth reddish skin the size of a melon on a nearby table. The Governor catches Mesannie admiring it.

GOVERNOR SMILEY

That's an Idaho potato. Biggest one ever grown. We think it's a world record.

MESANNIE

It's a real big one, that's for sure. It has the color of the old type Carmen. The Carmen was popular in Maine about fifty years ago.

GOVERNOR SMILEY

I want you to have this one. I thought of having it preserved for one of our museums, but when I heard you were coming this way. I thought it would make a nice gift from Idaho to you. Something to make you remember us.

Mesannie takes another look at the potato, judging its weight.

MESANNIE

Thank you, but it wouldn't be right to take it away from its home state. But I'd say you were wrong about it being a world's record potato. I've seen bigger ones at Maine fairs. Usually a Green Mountain.

GOVERNOR SMILEY

You're kidding!

MESANNIE

I am, of course. This beautiful Idaho potato is too big to be true.

GOVERNOR SMILEY

You almost got me.

MESANNIE

The Mountains and Katahdins folks mostly grow back in Maine are beauties but nowhere near this size.

GOVERNOR SMILEY

And how do you find Maine politics?

Mesannie's stumped for an answer but is desperate to not look ignorant. Her eyes fall on the wall clock. She answers glibly.

MESANNIE

Regular as a clock.

INT. BOISE JAIL - DAY

Mesannie enters the jail. The young deputy flags her down.

DEPUTY

Go to the office for a telephone call.
Somebody has been trying to reach you
long distance.

INT. JAIL OFFICE - DAY

The young deputy slouches in the doorway. Mesannie sits at the desk in the office with the phone to her ear. She waits as the operators try to clear the lines.

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)

I've cleared the line. I have a Mr. Fox
for you from California.

MR. FOX (ON PHONE)

Hello?

MESANNIE

Hello, Mr. Fox. Mesannie Wilkins here.

MR. FOX (ON PHONE)

Hello, Miss Wilkins. I'm with the Art
Linkletter show. When you get to Los
Angeles, Mr. Linkletter would like you
to be on his show. How about it?

MESANNIE

Suits me. The only trouble is, I may
not get to Los Angeles.

MR. FOX (ON PHONE)

Why not?

MESANNIE

I'm not getting any younger. Been on
the road 11 months. And at this rate it
might take me years to get there.

MR. FOX (ON PHONE)

We're all sure that you'll make it. Mr.
Linkletter wants you to know that you
can count on him for help at any time.
Do you have a pencil? I'll give you our
phone number.

Mesannie jots the phone number down on a piece of paper.

MESANNIE

All right, I've got it. And thank you.

She hangs up the phone. The deputy cranes his neck at the paper.

DEPUTY

Lucky you. You're well known now, but after the Art Linkletter show, even people who can't read will know about you. You'll be famous!

MESANNIE

Who is this Linkletter?

DEPUTY

Are you kidding? You don't know Linkletter?

MESANNIE

It's not a Maine family. Not an old Maine family, anyway.

DEPUTY

The biggest name in radio and television, that's who Art Linkletter is! Don't you ever listen to the radio? Don't you ever watch television?

MESANNIE

Owned a radio since before the war, but we listened mostly to early morning weather reports. As for television, I've never owned a set. And I don't suppose I've seen ten shows in my life, and most of them have been in homes on this trip. You're never too old to learn. This afternoon in Boise I've learned about Art Linkletter.

DEPUTY

Tell Mr. Linkletter hello for me when you reach California.

MESANNIE

We'll see what Oregon mountain country has to say about that. It stands between me and it.

EXT. OREGON MOUNTAIN COUNTRY - DAY

The mountain landscape has been transformed by a heavy snowfall, nearly two feet deep and still coming down.

Mesannie and the boys are the only things moving in the snow-blanketed countryside. A razor sharp northern wind, a cutting, changing one blows. Mesannie rides Tarzan and Depeche Toi is up on Rex. She holds the top of her parka close against her throat with her heavy gloves, which are ripped in the thumbs.

SUPERIMPOSE: Oregon. Three Weeks Later, November 7. One Year on the Road.

They come up to a sawmill with acres of lumber stacked up around it. A jovial, barrel-chested man working there, thirties, notices her and comes running at her hollering.

LUMBER MAN

What in thunder are you doing out here?
You thinking of going to Burns today?

MESANNIE

That's my idea.

LUMBER MAN

Forget it. This storm is turning into a ringtail norther. Earliest we've ever had one. The road will be blocked before you get ten miles, and you won't see a house for twenty miles along the way. Best thing for you to do is to take the secondary about three miles up ahead. Follow it for a half mile and you'll come to a house. They'll take care of you, but don't say that I sent you. They don't like me. They don't like anyone who cuts down trees.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

It's been slow going, a long three miles and growing dark. The snow has drifted and almost covers the fences making the road no longer visible. Both horses are snow-crusted and plod ahead with necks bowed. Mesannie frantically searches for house lights. In the distance a weak light glimmers. Unable to find the secondary road into the house, they bully their way across country.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Stiff and frozen, Mesannie slides off Tarzan. She labors through the drifts up to the small, one-level house. The porch light goes out. Caked with snow Mesannie scrambles onto the dark porch and knocks on the door. An upstairs window opens.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Go on to Burns, Mister. The road's not too bad from here on it. We can't take anyone in here, Mister.

The porch light comes on. The woman starts shouting.

WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Horses! Horses!

The door opens and the woman rushes out.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Get into the house and take the dog with you.

A hired man appears from nowhere. He leads the horses down to the barn.

INT. HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie and Depeche Toi make a beeline for the fireplace. The woman who's big, strong, and half Mesannie's age, rushes into the room with a red flannel nightgown and a blue blanket as Mesannie and Depeche Toi warm themselves by the fire.

BIG STRONG WOMAN

You're crazy to be out on a night like this! Where did you come from?

Through chattering teeth Mesannie answers.

MESANNIE

Maine.

BIG STRONG WOMAN

Oh, so you're that one? Well, I suppose you must have some brains if you're standing here, but you didn't use them today. You look like the next thing to frozen stiff.

MESANNIE

I feel that way.

BIG STRONG WOMAN

Serves you right, taking horses out in this weather. Now go into the sitting room and take off every stitch of clothing.

Mesannie doesn't move. The woman puts her hands on her hips.

BIG STRONG WOMAN (CONT'D)

My name is Elsie Eisenhower. And I am not related to the President. However, he rules this country and I rule this home. Now climb out of those things before I tear them off you.

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie reclines on the sofa near the stove. She wears the red flannel gown and is wrapped in the blanket. ELSIE tucks some water bottles around her and hurries off to the kitchen.

The back door opens and shuts.

MAN (O.S.)

How is she?

ELSIE (O.S.)

She'll live. The Lord is on her side. You know who she is? That crazy old woman from Maine.

MAN (O.S.)

Anyone who leaves Maine can't be crazy.

Elsie walks into the room followed by the man from the mill.

MESANNIE

But I thought...you said folks here don't like anyone who cuts down trees?

ELSIE

He would say a thing like that. My husband has quite a sense of humor.

ELSIE'S HUSBAND

Name's Henry Eisenhower. Although of late my friends have been calling me Dwight.

MESANNIE

I'm--

HENRY

I know who you are.

INT. EISENHOWER HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Elsie stares out the window. A porch thermometer reads seventeen below zero. Elsie picks up the phone and taps the receiver. She turns to Mesannie and HENRY eating breakfast at the table.

ELSIE

Phone lines are down. Roads are blocked. No hope of getting to Burns for days.

HENRY

The thing to do is to forget about California until spring. The winter around you is only the beginning. It'll get far worse in the months to come.

ELSIE

Far as we're concerned you can sit tight with us til spring. Right, Henry?

Henry nods. Elsie notices Mesannie frowning.

ELSIE (CONT'D)

Tell me what's going through that stubborn head of yours.

MESANNIE

I do appreciate the offer, but I just can't see it that way.

ELSIE

But why not? Why, when spring comes, you may decide not to leave. By then you'll be a member of the family.

Mesannie looks troubled.

MESANNIE

That's just it. If I ever have a home again, it'll have to be an independent home, so to speak. At least, that's the way I feel now. You never know how you're going to feel when you're older.

HENRY

She's as stubborn as you are.

ELSIE

I have an idea.

EXT. ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

A quaint three-story house is nestled on a tree-lined street.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

An elderly woman, white hair in a severe bun, seemingly very unfriendly, scowls at Mesannie, then points to a chair by the kitchen table. Mesannie sits down. The woman, lame in one leg, brings a loaf of bread to the table. She pours some salt on a piece of paper and sits down opposite Mesannie.

Mesannie watches her tear off a hunk of bread, sprinkle salt on it, and start eating. Without saying a word, Mesannie does the same, figuring it's the right thing to do. They sit there, each taking a turn at the bread, until they've eaten the whole loaf.

The old woman's stony face cracks into a smile.

OLD WOMAN
(a Scandinavian accent)
You stay here. Welcome.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - AN UPSTAIRS ROOM - DAY

Mesannie sits at a desk by the window writing in her diary.

MESANNIE (V.O.)
Though I appreciated Elsie and Henry's kindness, I was afraid of becoming a member of any family. It'd mean they'd think they owned me body and soul. And I want to be free for the rest of my life. No strings attached. I left Maine in order to be free, and I haven't sought bonds along the way. Not even when Harvey Kelsey offered security for the rest of my days. In the end the Lord found the solution. Elsie and Henry have an elderly friend who takes in roomers to help pay her taxes. She's lame with arthritis and finds it difficult to go down stairs and tend the furnace. Elsie and Henry promised to take care of the horses and Depeche Toi for me. So I'm working and living in the rooming house now that my second Thanksgiving on the road has rolled around, though I'm not really on the road. I'm sitting pretty 'til spring. Still, I'm not content. I want to push on to California. We're so close.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Mesannie shovels coal into the furnace. Upstairs the phone rings. The door opens. The elderly woman calls down to her.

ELDERLY WOMAN (O.S.)
Mesannie, Elsie is calling for you.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Mesannie sits in a chair in the parlor hall talking to Elsie.

MESANNIE
I did think of trucking before, but the rates are far more than I can afford.

ELSIE (ON PHONE)
Henry and I heard of a young couple who are driving their open truck to Alturas, California to visit relatives. They're willing to take you along. It amounts to a hundred and sixty-five miles over dangerous mountain roads. It's risky. But they think they can make it. All sorts of things can happen. Henry doesn't think you should risk it. You wanna talk to Henry?

MESANNIE
No. I don't have to think twice about this. I'm going. Henry may not know what I know. Free trucking trips are always foreordained.

EXT. OREGON MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The horses ride in back of a big open truck. Its tires wrapped in thick chains, it crawls cautiously over the icy mountain road. On one side is sheer rock and the other a sheer drop.

EXT. COUNTY JAIL - ALTURAS, CALIFORNIA - DAY

A young man helps Mesannie lead Rex and Tarzan out of the back of the truck. The young woman in the passenger seat looks at the sign for the Alturas County Jail. She leans out the window.

YOUNG WOMAN
You sure we can't drop you at a hotel?

Mesannie smiles and shakes her head. Her breath steams in the cold air. So much for sunny and warm California.

MESANNIE

Doesn't matter where I sleep. Back in Little Rock I spent the night in a truck cab in a junk yard, locked in with all the other valuable junk. Price at jails is usually right.

INT. ALTURAS COUNTY JAIL - DAY

A lanky deputy, twenties, all ears and elbows, reads a newspaper with his feet propped up on the desk. The front page headline reads, "Montgomery Bus Arrest May Bring Test of Segregation." On the inside the deputy reads an article about Mesannie. She walks in, causing him to nearly jump out of his skin.

DEPUTY

What are you doing here? According to the papers, you're hibernating in Oregon.

MESANNIE

The Eisenhowers arranged to have us trucked down.

DEPUTY

The Eisenhowers! Really? I'll phone the sheriff. Which hotel do you want?

MESANNIE

This one, if you have room.

The deputy grabs a phone and dials.

DEPUTY

Sheriff, sorry to bother you at home...That woman from Maine just arrived from Oregon. The President of the United States arranged it!..Yes!..She doesn't want a hotel. She wants to stay here.

INT. JAIL CELL - MORNING

The deputy serves Mesannie breakfast in her cell.

DEPUTY

The Chamber of Commerce is having a fit downtown.

(MORE)

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

They're blaming the sheriff for not putting you in a hotel last night, so we're moving you into the best one in town as soon as you're ready. The dog will be a special guest, too. How is Mrs. Eisenhower the president's wife?

Mesannie almost chokes on her food.

MESANNIE

It's been a hard winter for her, but she's holding up.

EXT. ALTURAS HOTEL - DAY

The stately hotel exudes old-world charm.

INT. ALTURAS HOTEL - DINING ROOM - DAY

Mesannie eats lunch. The hotel manager approaches her.

HOTEL MANAGER

We've arranged a surprise for you after lunch. I read in the papers that you've never seen a talking picture.

INT. NEARBY FILM HOUSE - DAY

The film house is packed with moviegoers. Mesannie stares at the screen, mesmerized. The film house manager appears and taps her on the shoulder. He whispers in her ear.

FILM HOUSE MANAGER

You're wanted back at the hotel. Somebody in San Francisco wants to talk to you on the phone.

Mesannie looks disappointed and a bit annoyed.

FILM HOUSE MANAGER (CONT'D)

You can come back anytime and see the rest. I show it twice each afternoon.

INT. ALTURAS HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie takes the phone call in her room.

MESANNIE

Hello?

REPORTER (ON PHONE)

Hello, Ms. Wilkins. I'm calling from the Associated Press in San Francisco. Sorry to take you away from the movie.

MESANNIE

It's all right. It was an interesting movie. But not as good as some of the old-time silent ones I've seen. You couldn't have dragged Uncle Waldo to a talkie. He used to say, "Why pay good money to hear women talk?"

REPORTER (ON PHONE)

(laughing)

I'd like to know when you're leaving Alturas and what the itinerary will be.

MESANNIE

We leave here in the morning, if the weather is fair. Alturas is a nice town, but for over a year we've been headed for warm and sunny California. Up here in the Golden State's northeast corner it's just as cold as Oregon and the snow is almost as deep. I'm not a mountain girl. We're going to Redding as fast as we can.

REPORTER (ON PHONE)

What's the mileage to Redding?

MESANNIE

Almost two hundred miles. I plan to be there by Christmas. That means early starts and at least twenty miles a day. We have twenty days to get there. Twenty times twenty is four hundred miles, and Redding is only two hundred away. But I'm playing it safe, leaving room for unexpected delays. Something always seems to delay us when we plan to get somewhere by a certain date.

REPORTER (ON PHONE)

Our company will be taking pictures of you along the way. And what's this about the Eisenhowers hiring a truck for you? The White House refuses to comment.

She taps the phone, pretending the connection is breaking up.

MESANNIE

What was that? Must be something wrong.
I can hardly hear you. Thanks for
calling and goodbye.

Mesannie quickly hangs up and breathes a sigh of relief.

EXT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL, REDDING, CA - DAY

A sign in front of the very fine hotel reads, "Golden Eagle
Hotel, Redding, CA. Est. 1888."

INT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

A lit up Christmas tree decorates the grand hotel lobby.
Mesannie has a duffle bag slung over her shoulder. An impromptu
press conference is breaking up. She shakes hands with
reporters. She and Depeche Toi pose for a few final photographs.
Mesannie nods and smiles and begins crossing the lobby.

MESANNIE

If that'll be all, my room's waiting.

A bespectacled man in a blue suit who has been sitting in a
chair in the lobby waiting stands and extends his hand.

BESPECTACLED MAN

Hello, I'm Mr. Fox. I telephoned you
when you were in Boise about appearing
on the Linkletter show.

Mesannie shakes the hand of MR. FOX and smiles.

MESANNIE

Oh, yes. Well, hello, Mr. Fox. How'd
you know we'd be stopping here?

MR. FOX

With all the press you're easy to find.

Mr. Fox hands her an envelope.

MR. FOX (CONT'D)

This is a letter to you from Mr.
Linkletter. It confirms the invitation
to be on his show. When do you think
you'll reach Los Angeles?

Mesannie mulls it over. She hazards a guess.

MESANNIE

Early February, if all goes well.

MR. FOX

Fine. We'll keep track of your progress. Please telephone Mr. Linkletter collect when you get to San Fernando, and you can discuss the date for your appearance on his show.

INT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie studies a California state map spread out on the table. Depeche Toi watches her intently. Mesannie chews her lip.

MESANNIE

(to Depeche Toi)

Five hundred and fifty miles. I'll have to put wings on the horses to get to Los Angeles by early February. We can't get an early start tomorrow, because we have to pick up our mail. But after tomorrow, we'd best get cracking at every dawn.

EXT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - MORNING

The heavens have opened up. The rain comes down in buckets. Mesannie hurries toward the hotel with a sack of mail against her chest bundled inside her jacket.

INT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - MESANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mesannie is glued to the radio. The weatherman predicts three straight days of rain and the possibility of floods.

INT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Guests in the lobby circle Mesannie who sells postcards.

INT. MESANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Mesannie listens to the weather report. The weatherman predicts three more days and bigger floods.

INT. GOLDEN EAGLE HOTEL - LOBBY - MORNING

Mesannie settles her bill at the front desk. She turns and heads for the front door. She stops when she reaches it and counts the money left in her hand. In her palm is thirty-seven cents.

EXT. HIGHWAY TO LOS ANGELES - NEW YEAR'S DAY - MORNING

Mesannie is back in the saddle aboard Tarzan. Depeche Toi rides on Rex who's hitched on a short rope close to them. They walk through a cold, light drizzle.

SUPERIMPOSE: Highway to Los Angeles, New Year's Day, 1955.

There are pools and puddles all over the main road. Some side roads look like rivers. The drains just can't handle the water.

A truck speeds by. Its wheels churn up a wave of water that hits them. Rex panics and rears across Tarzan's neck. Both horses go down in a muddy ditch. Mesannie ends up sitting back to back with Tarzan in a foot of water. Rex too is on his side, with half his gear soaked.

They all struggle to their feet. Mesannie removes her hat and wipes her muddy face with her sleeve. She slaps her soggy hat back on her rain soaked head.

MESANNIE

We're on a schedule, but we need to get there in one piece.

EXT. LOCAL TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

It's a clear fine day. Traffic on the highway is somewhat heavy. Mesannie and the boys are making fair time along the shoulder.

SUPERIMPOSE: 395 Miles From Los Angeles. South of Fresno and a few miles short of Goshen.

They come to a spot where a load of wooden crates have toppled from a truck. Other trucks and cars have passed over the crates and smashed them. The road is littered with pieces of wood.

Mesannie is up on Rex. She stops him, giving him time to study the lumber on the road. Mesannie nudges him and sends him on. Rex takes his time walking among the scattered wood.

Mesannie looks up at the sounds of shouts and a horn. A car full of young trouble seekers is barreling toward them. The driver swerves, making a half moon, and scares the daylights out of Rex. He rears and jumps around, almost going over the shoulder. Then Rex stands quiet. His whole body is shaking.

Mesannie strokes Rex's shoulder, trying to calm him down. After a few minutes, she squeezes Rex's ribs with her heels, asking him to move on. When he does, he limps.

Mesannie quickly pulls him up. She jumps down and inspects Rex's foot. A piece of wood is stuck on his left hind foot. A nail stuck right through the wood has gone right under Rex's shoe. Mesannie tries to pry the wood loose. It won't budge.

Mesannie continues to struggle. She throws her weight into it and finally pries the wood and the nail clear. Mesannie pats Rex's shoulder.

MESANNIE

You take it easy for a while.

Mesannie mounts Tarzan. Rex follows behind walking lame.

INT. GOSHEN STABLE - NIGHT

Several horsemen crowded into a stable stall inspect Rex's foot. Mesannie leans in for a closer look.

MESANNIE

What I'm fearing is that part of that nail might still be in his foot.

The men are sure of themselves and snicker at her, knowing better. One of them, a quarrelsome man in his forties, insists.

HORSE MAN

He'll be all right in a couple of days. Rest assured of that. There's nothing wrong with this horse.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - MORNING

Mesannie rides Tarzan. She keeps a close watch on Rex. He's not limping at all. Yet Mesannie still looks concerned.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie rides Rex. He shows no signs of favoring his left hind foot. Still she can't shake her worried look.

A big horse van passes them and pulls into a gas station up ahead. Mesannie takes this as a sign that her hunch to double check is correct and pulls the boys off the road.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mesannie talks with the driver of the horse van.

DRIVER

Closest fair-sized town is Visalia.
It's some way from your road. You'll
have to turn off. But there's a horse
vet there in Visalia my boss swears by.

EXT. VISALIA STABLE - DAY

Rex and Tarzan are settled in box stalls. Mesannie talks with
the stable owner, a pockfaced, amicable man in his fifties.

STABLE OWNER

He's out of town and not due back until
morning. I'm waiting for him myself.
Why do you need a vet?

MESANNIE

We came across some apple crates
smashed in the road. My big Bay here
stepped on a nail. I'm suspecting part
of the nail may still be in that foot.

STABLE OWNER

You've come to the right stable. I'm
the second-best horse doctor in the
state.

The stable owner pulls a pen knife from his pocket and scratches
it back and forth against Rex's foot. He uncovers a tiny, rusted
piece of nail between the left hind hoof and the shoe.

STABLE OWNER (CONT'D)

He'll be all right now. But I'd advise
resting him for a few days. Just lead
him around a bit every once in a while.

EXT. STABLE - MORNING

Mesannie leads Rex back and forth. The stable owner walks over
to them. He watches Rex closely and nods.

STABLE OWNER

No sign of a limp.

MESANNIE

I'd still like the vet to take a look
at him and give him a tetanus shot.

STABLE OWNER

I was just coming to tell you he's been
delayed.

MESANNIE

When is he expected?

STABLE OWNER

He'll be home tonight. Now stop worrying. We'll get him over here tonight. There's nothing wrong with your horse, believe me. But just to ease your mind, I'll put a little turpentine on that foot.

MESANNIE

Isn't there another vet in town?

STABLE OWNER

This one is the best. The others don't know half as much as I do.

EXT. STABLE - NIGHT

Mesannie paces back and forth outside the stable still waiting.

INT. STABLE OWNER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mesannie stands in the doorway. The stable owner is at his desk in the corner. He hangs up the phone and turns to her.

STABLE OWNER

He'll be over first thing in the morning. Said to put some carbolic acid on it, so we'll do that right now. Not as good as turpentine, in my opinion, but we'll do as he says.

INT. STABLE STALL - MORNING

The vet examines Rex's foot. He puts some more carbolic acid on it then wipes his hands with a clean rag.

VETERINARIAN

There's no danger of infection.

Mesannie looks relieved.

VETERINARIAN (CONT'D)

No need for a tetanus shot.

STABLE OWNER

Just what I told her. It was the turpentine that did the trick.

MESANNIE

Is it safe to have him travel?

VETERINARIAN

Absolutely. There's nothing wrong with this horse.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie is aboard Rex on a well-traveled interstate. She and the boys walk among moderate traffic. Rex is nervous. He wants to hurry. Mesannie has a hard time holding him back.

EXT. FAIR GROUNDS STABLES - NIGHT

Mesannie and the boys have pulled into the fair grounds stables. Rex is fidgety and dances around as Mesannie unpacks him. A neighborly man, forties, steps up and holds his bridle.

MESANNIE

Thank you.

MAN

How long has he been doing this?

MESANNIE

Doing what?

MAN

Rolling his eyes.

MESANNIE

Noticed it first this morning. He was in an open-box stall facing out. We figured something scared him during the night. The men at the stable said that kids cutting across the yard often tried to scare the horses.

MAN

This horse needs a vet.

Mesannie goes cold all over.

MAN (CONT'D)

He needs a vet and you're talking to one. Name's Bell. Let's get him inside.

INT. FAIR GROUNDS STABLES - NIGHT

MR. BELL gives Rex an injection. Mesannie looks stricken.

MR. BELL

This tetanus shot is long overdue.
Let's hold out hope. His jaws haven't
locked yet. He'll be able to eat some.

INT. FAIR GROUNDS STABLES - MONTAGE

- 1) Mr. Bell examines Rex who has begun drooling from his mouth.
- 2) Rex is shaking on unsteady legs. He's feverish, sweating. Mesannie nurses him, feeding him medication with a syringe.
- 3) Rex is fading away. His breathing is labored. He lays on his side in a deep bed of straw.

INT. FAIR GROUNDS STABLES - NIGHT

Rex's last hour. He lays on his side on the stall floor. Mesannie sits on the stall floor, near his head, stroking him. Tarzan is two stalls away. He starts calling in a low, plaintive tone, sensing the end is near for his friend Rex. Depeche Toi senses it too. He crouches, whining outside Rex's stall.

Mesannie listens to the other two with tears streaming down her face. She gently strokes his head. Rex's body trembles, and then he is gone. Mesannie buries her face in his mane and cries as if her heart will break.

INT. FAIR GROUNDS STABLES - NIGHT

Mesannie leaves Rex's stall. Tarzan still calls out. Depeche Toi stands in front of his stall whining. Mesannie opens the door. Depeche Toi trots in to make sure his old friend is all right.

Mesannie goes into the stall between her two horses and lays down. Her eyes swollen from crying, she wipes the grief from her cheeks. She looks worn out, but lays there wide-eyed staring at the ceiling with Tarzan still calling from the next stall.

EXT. FAIR GROUNDS - DAY

Mesannie rides Tarzan around the fair grounds wearing a mournful look of loss in her eyes. Depeche Toi trails behind them. A cross, deaf old lady approaches her, shouting.

DEAF OLD LADY

You're that woman from Maine. I'd like
to buy a postcard.

Mesannie hands the woman a postcard. She admires the card, which shows Mesannie up on Rex. She hands Mesannie a ten dollar bill.

DEAF OLD LADY (CONT'D)

I'm from Poland, Maine, not five miles from Minot. Even lived in Waterville for a time. Buy some steaks for your cute little dog.

The woman walks away. Mesannie looks down at Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE

We've got bread money. We won't buy any steaks if you don't mind. Don't have the heart to sell any more cards. Just doesn't seem right.

Mr. Bell walks up to her.

MR. BELL

Thought you'd never leave the stable. Been holed up there for weeks. It's good to see you finally out and about.

MESANNIE

I'm thinking of continuing on.

MR. BELL

So you've finally come back to life. We'll miss having you around.

MESANNIE

Trouble is, besides being real short on supplies, even shorter on ready cash, I have too much gear for one horse.

MR. BELL

We'll find you another horse.

MESANNIE

It will have to carry the cheapest price tag of any horse in history.

MR. BELL

I got an idea. We'll go to the papers and explain your predicament.

EXT. FAIR GROUND STABLES - DAY

Mesannie is up on a horse. The horse rears, spins in circles.

EXT. FAIR GROUND STABLES - DAY

Mesannie tries another horse. She squeezes its sides. It won't move. She gives its sides a little kick. It still won't budge.

EXT. FAIR GROUND STABLES - DAY

Mesannie is up on a camel. She looks ridiculous but, fast running out of options, seriously tests the animal.

MESANNIE

Is she traffic wise? None of the horses offered to me have been traffic wise.

The camel owner, a foreign with an accent, beams proudly.

CAMEL OWNER

A big truck wouldn't scare Sheba. Although Sheba might scare a truck driver.

EXT. FAIR GROUND STABLES - EXERCISE CORRAL - DAY

Mesannie exercises Tarzan in one of the corrals. A teenaged stable hand runs up to her.

STABLE HAND

Senator Elliot is here to see you.

MESANNIE

Are you sure? I'm not a registered voter in California.

STABLE HAND

You're supposed to see a horse of his.

EXT. SENATOR ELLIOT'S RANCH - DAY

The distinguished Senator Elliot and Mesannie get out of his car and walk toward the sprawling horse ranch's enormous barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Senator Elliot shows Mesannie a magnificent white horse. Under his coat, the horse's hide is covered with tiny black spots from his Appaloosa dam. Mesannie is thunderstruck.

MESANNIE

He's a real beauty.

SENATOR ELLIOT

His name's King. He's been in big parades. He's perfectly safe anywhere.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie rides King on the highway. King acts as if the cars and trucks aren't even there.

EXT. SENATOR ELLIOT'S BARN - DAY

Senator Elliot waits for them. Mesannie rides up on King.

SENATOR ELLIOT

What do you think of him? Will he do?

MESANNIE

He stood well when I mounted. Has a nice brisk walk. He's well mannered all around. There's nothing wrong with King, but there might be with the price. How much?

SENATOR ELLIOT

Five hundred dollars.

Mesannie comes close to falling off of King.

SENATOR ELLIOT (CONT'D)

And I wouldn't sell him at that low figure, but I really should cut down. I'm spending most of my time in Washington. So do you want him?

MESANNIE

You're breaking my heart.

SENATOR ELLIOT

Why don't you bring Tarzan up here for a few days and let the two of them get acquainted? Now, let's go to the house. Mrs. Elliot is anxious to meet you. Oh, by the way, Art Linkletter phoned me. He's just bought King for you.

EXT. LONE RANGER STABLES - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Tarzan and King are at home in the fanciest excuse for stables you have ever seen. A beautiful white horse that's been scrubbed until it shines is in the stall next to Tarzan. A nameplate tacked on the door frame above the stall reads "Silver."

SUPERIMPOSE: Lone Ranger Stables, LA. Second Week in March.

EXT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD MOTEL - DAY

The swanky motel has more flower gardens than rooms.

INT. MESANNIE'S SUITE - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi relax in front of the television in the luxurious suite. A western plays on the TV.

EXT. LONE RANGER STABLES - MORNING

A horse van with a CBS broadcast logo is parked in front.

SUPERIMPOSE: March 26. Art Linkletter's House Party show.

INT. LONE RANGER STABLES - SAME TIME

Mesannie is all dressed up for her big day. A man tries to lead Tarzan out of his box stall. Tarzan won't budge. Mesannie tries. Tarzan digs his feet in. He's not going anywhere.

EXT. CBS STUDIOS - DAY

The sprawling studio compound stands ready.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Mesannie leads King out onto the stage to thunderous applause. Depeche Toi prances out behind them. Mesannie's excitement and nervousness are apparent. She keeps smiling and nodding, making sure to look the cameras full in the face.

INT. STUDIO BACKSTAGE - AFTER THE SHOW

Mesannie leads King backstage. Art Linkletter follows her. He reaches into his jacket pocket and hands her a slip of paper.

ART LINKLETTER

A little check to buy King a saddle.

Mesannie tucks the check into her pocket without looking at it.

INT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD MOTEL - MESANNIE'S SUITE - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi return to the suite. She's buzzing with excitement. Mesannie wears a little self-satisfied grin.

MESANNIE

(to Depeche Toi)

I stared those cameras so full in the face, Mr. Linkletter had to repeat the questions.

Mesannie remembers the check and reaches into her pocket. Her eyes grow wide.

MESANNIE (CONT'D)

(to Depeche Toi)

Either that man knows little about the cost of saddles in California, or he thinks a horse should wear a different saddle every day of the week. This is enough to make living easy for the four of us for quite some time.

INT. LONE RANGER STABLES - MORNING

Mesannie saddles up Tarzan. A reporter wearing a press badge takes notes on a note pad. A cameraman snaps photos.

REPORTER

Where to now?

MESANNIE

Long Beach. Depeche Toi and I have reached our goals, but Tarzan here has a little unfinished business. He still has to wet his feet in the Pacific.

EXT. LONG BEACH - DAY

The four of them make their way down the beach. Mesannie rides Tarzan. King is at their side. Depeche Toi runs along the edge of the water.

MESANNIE (V.O.)

The distance Tarzan walked from Minot to Los Angeles was close to seven thousand miles, and I sat on top of him for two thousand of them. According to my diaries, we had been through eighteen states on our seventeen-month journey.

(MORE)

MESANNIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The total of seven thousand miles was a short figure in his case, of course, for I had no way of knowing the number of miles he had covered during his runaway sprees with Rex.

EXT. LONG BEACH - DAY

They've found a pretty section of sandy beach along the scenic coastline. Tarzan walks into the foaming water and washes his feet in the Pacific Ocean with Mesannie on top of him. King is at his side. Depeche Toi barks at the waves.

Mesannie pats Tarzan's mane and stares out at the waves crashing against the beach. Her eyes well up with emotion.

They stand there in the water for a few minutes, then walk along the beach a ways before making a turn for the coast road.

EXT. SOUTH PASADENA HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie and the boys trudge along the shoulder. A canary yellow sports car pulls up to them. The fortyish female driver has flaming red hair, dark glasses, and wears expensive clothes.

FEMALE DRIVER

I have a proposition for you. Live in my house for as long as you like. I'll pay all your day-to-day living expenses. You see, I'm a lawyer. I'm often out of town on business trips. I hate to leave the house unoccupied for fear of being robbed. You'd be doing me a favor just living at my place.

INT. HOUSE IN PASADENA - DAY

Mesannie reads her mail on the imported Italian leather sofa in the posh bungalow. Depeche Toi is on the sofa at her side.

MESANNIE

(to Depeche Toi)

Now we have a more or less permanent address. The movie people will know where to look if they want me.

EXT. PASADENA ROSE BOWL - DAY

Mesannie and Tarzan are at a street light in front of the Rose Bowl waiting for it to turn green.

A handsome young man in his twenties wearing sunglasses and white yachting pants steps off the curb to addresses her.

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

Hello, there. Can we talk for a minute?

MESANNIE

Sure.

Mesannie pulls Tarzan over to the curb.

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

I'm an agent for actors. I've been looking for you. Hollywood is shooting a great many westerns these days, and I can land you some big character roles. Ever done any acting?

MESANNIE

All my life I've acted the fool.

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

You'll need a new name, probably. Mesannie Wilkins doesn't sound right for an actress.

MESANNIE

My acting name is Mesannie Hart. Ever hear of William S. Hart?

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

A relative? Really? Why this is perfect! Write down your phone number.

He hands her a pen and paper. Mesannie writes down her number.

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Stay by the phone from ten till two every weekday until you hear from me.

INT. HOUSE IN PASADENA - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi sit on the sofa staring at the phone.

INT. PASADENA SUPERMARKET - DAY

Mesannie pushes a shopping cart down the aisle. She comes face to face with the young agent.

MESANNIE

Hello.

YOUNG AGENT

Hello. I'm sorry I haven't called you.

MESANNIE

Been waiting by the phone just like you asked for nearly four weeks.

YOUNG AGENT

I'm an actor now. I've been so busy with my own career that I forgot about yours. But I have an agent, and he's a good one. I'll tell him about you. You have a great future in westerns. Your publicity should get you into every studio. What's your phone number again?

INT. HOUSE IN PASADENA - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mesannie and Depeche Toi wait by the phone.

INT. HOUSE IN PASADENA - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mesannie has her diaries from the trip, eight in total, some waterlogged, some with pages torn, spread out on the coffee table along with piles of cards and envelopes. She copies down names and address from the envelopes onto a pad, getting them in order. Mesannie turns to Depeche Toi.

MESANNIE

How would you like to visit Texas?

Depeche Toi gives her one of those "Not again!" looks and trots out of the room.

EXT. NEARBY STABLE - DAY

Mesannie saddles Tarzan.

EXT. PASADENA HIGHWAY GAS STATION - DAY

Mesannie and Tarzan ride up to a gas station.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mesannie tosses a new supply of road maps on the counter.

MESANNIE (V.O.)

It had taken me more than six decades to realize the fact, but now I knew that I had been born restless.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Mesannie rides King. Depeche Toi rides on Tarzan who is at her side. They plod down the highway, headed for a brilliant sunset.

MESANNIE (V.O.)

I'll always be thankful we made the journey. It wasn't all clover. But there was more clover than grass and not many weeds. We found America full of wonderful people. Anyone who doesn't like us should try meeting us on our home grounds. By now, I should have written all those people I'd met, and all those others who invited me to visit. But you lose things when you travel light and move around, and I still haven't settled down. Pages from diaries are missing. From notes on scraps of paper and envelopes and from the way I've remembered things, all the names should be correct, except for one: Harvey Kelsey. His real name is a private matter. I haven't been back to Maine, but it's been getting along real well without me. Mrs. Miller is gone now, and so are other old friends. I don't know if the doctor who gave me "four more years" is still there. And I haven't been back to Wyoming. So far as I know, Harvey is still waiting. Sometimes, during lonely spells, I'm tempted to go back there and join him, and maybe I will some day. I never was one to rush into things.

Mesannie and her boys disappear over the horizon.

SUPERIMPOSE: In 1967, Mesannie Wilkins published her memoirs of the trip. She died in Whitefield, Maine in 1980. She was 89.

FADE TO BLACK.