

GO WEST YOUNG WOMAN

by Pam Gems

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GO WEST YOUNG WOMAN

a fictionalised documentary of the pioneer west, in two acts.

CAST:

JOSIAH WEEKS
EMMA WEEKS
ANNIE
LIZZIE
OFFICIAL
EMIGRANT WOMEN
STOREMAN
OLAF
ERIKA
MRS DOLAN
FRANCES DOLAN
MRS CARMODY
MRS DE WITT
MR DE WITT
LOLA
PIECES
VERA
MAC
MANDA
TRAILMASTER
INDIAN
INDIAN CHIEF
INDIAN SQUAW
WATANYE
RED EAGLE
OLDER MINER
DULL KNIFE
PREACHER
TEACHER (MISS DORA)
CATHERINE BEECHER
ASA MERCER
OLDTIMER
JIM MCCOURT
LEWIS
ARCHER BURNETT
MISS KITTY
MRS BURNETT
UNION SOLDIER
GENERAL
AGENT
COLONEL
COLONEL'S WIFE

GO WEST YOUNG WOMAN

1. THE BEGINNING

INDIAN

O...a...eeeeeee.....

Great spirit...let my voice rise up to you. All things are thine - the wings of the air, and the beasts, and all green things that live. Oh Great Spirit, the Crow country is a good country. The air is sweet, the grasses are fresh, and bright streams flow out of the snowbanks. You give us the elk, the deer, the antelope, and our buffalo are fine and large. You give us cottonwood bark for our horses, and the cool air of high places. Preserve us, oh great Grandfather, from all enemies. Make the rivers free from rocks for our canoes to pass. Let not wild animals molest the holy places of our dead. Bless for us the oak trees that thrive on the winter's storm, the summer's heat. Make me strong, like the oak. I give worship for the mysteries of light, by which the earth and all living things are moved. I give worship for the mysteries of darkness and the great bodies of the upper world that travel without hindrance. Oh beloved Father, accept my worship and the gifts of my heart. There is no place like the Crow country. Oh Great Spirit.....O...aa...
eeeeeeee.....

2. THE TEA PARTY

MOTHER, two grown DAUGHTERS and a well-dressed GUEST.

LIZZIE

Annie and I are so excited!

ANNIE

We can hardly wait to be off...I intend to horseride!

EMMA

Hush, girls!...your father hasn't agreed to that.
We must see what kind of figure you intend to cut.

ANNIE

I hear the women in the west ride the way men do - in pants!

JOSEPHINE

Oh yes. With an overdress, of course. It's a little strange, but you get used to the sight.

ANNIE

Lizzie wants to marry a soldier - maybe one of Custer's brave lads.

LIZZIE

Can you imagine it, life on the frontier?

ANNIE

Space - freedom...all around you...

EMMA

Girls, girls...they've been getting so restless lately.

LIZZIE

Because Pa won't let us take up anything...

ANNIE

That's why.

EMMA

And the answer is still no. I will not have you renting yourselves out in paid work. Your father would never live it down.

ANNIE

Maybe things'll be different in the west.

LIZZIE

Sure hope so.

EMMA

Hush. There is so much for you to tell us, my dear. Ah - my husband. Josiah, here's young Mrs Carlton, back from ~~her honeymoon~~ in the west.

JOSEPHINE

Not the true west, Mr Weeks, not as far as you'll be travelling, but we did see Texas, and it was a mighty fine sight.

JOSIAH

Welcome home. We shall be glad of any information you can afford us, Mrs Carlton. Thank you, Emma. (*His wife serves him tea.*)

LIZZIE

They picnicked all the time!

ANNIE

And she and Mr Carlton slept in the hay!

LIZZIE

Mrs Carlton says we should take a cow, for fresh milk!

JOSEPHINE

We did indeed miss the benefit of fresh eggs and milk, Mr Weeks, but George, my husband's old army sergeant, was most industrious in foraging for us and I can truly say there was not a day we did not dine in style.

JOSIAH

You were not too much out of comfort?

JOSEPHINE

Naturally, we had to rough it at times.

JOSIAH

Of course! We intend to cross a continent, Mrs Carlton.

EMMA offers JOSEPHINE the cake tray.

JOSEPHINE

Thank you. If it's not too brash to ask, why quit this pleasant spot?

JOSIAH

Land, Mrs Carlton, land. As much acreage as a man can see, in all directions - more, if he chooses and has the wherewithal.

EMMA

It's all took up here, there's none to spare.
Josiah, I don't know how the bank will get
along without you.

JOSIAH

A man must expand his talents or fear the Lord.

EMMA

I won't deny it grieves me to think of leaving all
our dear friends and neighbours. Weeks, even
months for a letter to reach us...

ANNIE

We'll be back on visits, Ma - there'll be a
railroad by then!

JOSIAH

Well, my decision is made, so there's an end to
it. We go west. Lizzie, fetch pen and paper.
You may write down any hints and notions our
young friend is disposed to furnish us with.

EMMA

I only pray the weather's not inclement. Mr
Weeks is liable to the rheumatics.

JOSIAH

We shall not travel in discomfort, Emma...a
little roughing will do none of us any harm, as
you may see from our charming guest. No, this
is a man's country. A challenge to true grit. I
would not say no to another muffin, if pressed,
ladies.

The WOMEN swoop to his needs.

3. GO WEST YOUNG WOMAN

ASA MERCER, a well-dressed man, addresses us directly.

MERCER

Young ladies...young ladies! I come with an offer that I dare to think you will not lightly refuse. I need but a few more examples of what I see before me...the flower of our Eastern womanhood. If you do not seek adventure of the most respectable nature, ladies, if you do not seek good fortune and happiness at the end of the trail, why then, dear ladies, walk away this instant. But I must tell you that there are those who await your presence in the new territories with respectful anticipation...nay, dare I say, with love in their hearts. I speak of the brave boys who are seeking their fortunes in the silver mines of Nevada, in the rich golden soil of California. The men of the West await the soft, bright radiance of your presence, asking only to cherish you with all the love and protection of true American pep. The future beckons! Don't hesitate! Positions with excellent wages await you, though any young woman who becomes immediately Engaged will not be prevented from embarking at once on her life's destiny...the ship of matrimony! California, young ladies... here we come!

On the other side of the stage, CATHERINE BEECHER, a soberly dressed woman, steps onto a podium.

CATHERINE

(A quiet and unhipstrionic manner, she can only speak in public because of her fervent belief in her message.) Young women. I have an important message to convey to you. You are needed to fulfil a noble function. I come to acquaint you with a purpose that you may feel the need to engage upon, for God, and for your country. I speak of the education of our children in the new western territory. Every day out in the west men are deserting their posts for the lure of more profitable pursuits. Who better fitted than women to fill the gap? A whole generation of children is in danger of being deprived of mental and moral instruction. I urge you, ladies...abandon your lives of shopping, and dressing, calling and gossiping.

CATHERINE (*Cont'd*)

Demand to offer a higher contribution. Go west, where you are needed! I believe it is we women who have the nature to be content with modest gain, who seek no gold mine but the shining eyes of our pupils. I must tell you, the going will not be easy. I know the life to be demanding and full of risk. But I say to you all - go west! Go west where our children are crying out for your devotion and your example. I implore you to answer the challenge - go west, young woman!

4. THE STORE

A STOREMAN, list in hand. His customers a poorly dressed YOUNG COUPLE.

STOREMAN

Six sacks of corn, two sides of bacon...green coffee beans, yeast, soda...

OLAF

Erika?

ERIKA

A little faint...it's nothing.

STOREMAN

Lady feeling the heat?

ERIKA

Tell him I am well.

OLAF

She is well.

STOREMAN

Pretty hard journey to be taking in that condition.

ERIKA

Finish the business...I shall be well.

MAN

She is willing.

STOREMAN

Willing's one thing, doing's another. Danged if I'd take a wife of mine like that.

OLAF

We have no choice.

STOREMAN

Guess you know your own minds.

OLAF

I have to enquire about a handcart.

STOREMAN

A handcart? (*Laughs*) You don't mean for to say you intend to cross the states of America on foot?

OLAF

(*Serious*) We don't have the means for a waggon.

STOREMAN

You mean it, son? I guess you do. Here, a little gift for the lady. Hope it's a boy.

5. THE DRESSMAKER

LIZZIE and ANNIE, giggling over a book.

LIZZIE

(*Reading*) 'They were the best looking Indians I ever saw...tall, strongly made, and light in colour. The glare of the fire fell on their bare, brawny arms and naked bodies'...naked bodies! (*They giggle. Their MOTHER enters with the DRESSMAKER, they hide the book.*)

EMMA

Here's Miss Amy, girls, to fit your outfits. Annie, since you intend to ride, we may as well see what kind of figure you intend to cut. (*The DRESSMAKER fits ANNIE.*) Mr Weeks won't have the girls get into fast ways, that's for sure. How are the bonnets?

AMY

Just finishing the calico trim, real pretty colours.

EMMA

Calico?

LIZZIE

It's what they all wear, Ma, I read it in the journal.

AMY

I've put in plenty of tucks and a little fancy lace.

EMMA

Well, no sense in travelling without decent togs.
(She looks at AMY's open bag.)

AMY

Oh, those are the latest merino shawls...you'll be needing them to keep out the cool of the evening.

EMMA

What do you think, girls?

6. THE EMIGRANTS

A group of WOMEN, poorly dressed, with bundles.

MAN

Step forward...one at a time.

They don't understand. He gestures the first one. He looks in her hair for lice, and at her teeth.

MAN

Next. Next!

GIRL

He doesn't have to treat us like animals.

A well-dressed WOMAN approaches with an AGENT.

AGENT

Here you are, maam...take your pick. Mrs Blake is looking for a homely maid to send out to her daughter on the frontier.

WOMAN

My son-in-law's with the first cavalry. No sooner do they get a maid than she takes off and marries a soldier! The last one stayed barely three weeks!

MAN

Well maam, you won't see a homelier bunch than these females. Straight off the boat.

WOMAN

Poor souls, they look miserable enough. Are they all bound for the west?

AGENT

That's right, maam. Going for laundresses to the troops, that kind of thing. Great shortage of female labour.

WOMAN

Maybe the little one at the end. She looks a clean body and goodness knows, no man could ever take a shine to her, if you'll pardon the expression.

AGENT

Just leave the arrangements to us, Mrs M'Carthy.

WOMAN

See that she's fixed up with a decent uniform, my husband will attend to the account for it.

MAN

Right...move out! I haven't got all day to attend to immigrant riffraff. Step on...step on!

7. ON THE TRAIN

Benches athwart to denote a train. The passengers include MRS CARMODY and her young daughter MANDA, a SOLDIER, a SCHOOLTEACHER (MISS DORA), and a painted lady, LOLA, and her maid, PIECES.

MANDA

Look, Ma! Buffalo!

SOLDIER

Them ain't buffalo young lady...them's oxen.

MRS CARMODY

Manda, quit shoving...mighty big animals, soldier.

MISS DORA

I believe they haul the waggons.

SOLDIER

Best thing out. What's more you can feed off 'em when the going gits tough.

MISS DORA

If it's all the same to you, I'll stick to ham and eggs.

SOLDIER

You'll be lucky to find that on the Plains, maam.

MISS DORA

Won't we be stopping off for refreshment?

SOLDIER

No sir. There ain't that kind of establishment. Not on the Plains.

MISS DORA

But what is there, then?

SOLDIER

Why nothing. Not a damned thing.

With produces a silence.

MRS CARMODY

I've heard there's wolves.

SOLDIER

Yes maam. But don't fret yourself about that.
A good waggon train will take care of you.

MANDA

Old Blue'll see them off. Paw's got a mighty
fine dog...Old Blue'll see them right off!

MRS CARMODY

She's crazy for that dog.

MANDA

Look, Ma - a cross!

SOLDIER

See plenty of those on the trail. Leastways,
except in Indian country. Sure don't leave no
crosses for some danged Indian to come
grubbing up the corpse for his purposes...
begging your pardon, maam, but she'll see it
soon enough.

MISS DORA

I was reading in the journal the Indians have
been pretty badly done by. Turned out of their
villages and such.

SOLDIER

Don't you believe that, miss - you ain't seen
what I seen.

MISS DORA

Oh?

SOLDIER

Muh best friend was mutilated. I seen a good
man fall with a arrow in his eye -

MOTHER

Oh hush!

SOLDIER

I ain't saying no more, maam...only they're
fiends to me.

MISS DORA

Well I'm sure we'll feel safe with you army
boys around.

SOLDIER

Sure thing, miss! Yup, only good Indian's a dead Indian.

VOICE

St Louis! St Louis! End of the line!

8. ST LOUIS

The PASSENGERS alight. The TRAILMASTER enters, and the WEEKS FAMILY, severally.

PIECES

(To TRAILMASTER) She say, is this here the waggon train?

TRAILMASTER

Sure is, Topsy. *(He moves away.)*

LOLA

Are we all right, Pieces?

PIECES

So he say.

LOLA

You better hop along then, and fix us a billet. Buck up...what's the matter?

PIECES

I don't wanna go - I'm missing Sagaboy!

LOLA

Plenty of fellers where we're going. Fetch us a sarsparilla and buy one for yourself.

EMMA, LIZZIE and ANNIE approach.

EMMA

If I sit down to one more meal of beef and potatoes I shall throw up.

ANNIE

Hush, Ma. At least we have a bed in the hotel.

EMMA

Hotel, do you call it? All sleeping together like a passel of roosters, with the wind whistling through the walls. Your father will be ruined, the prices they have the neck to charge. We should quit right now.

LIZZIE

We must get used to roughing it, Ma.

ANNIE

Oh look, Lizzie - an Indian!

An INDIAN with deep brimmed black hat and swathed in a blanket draws close. The SCANDINAVIAN COUPLE approach looking bewildered. MANDA's MOTHER enters and exits.

MRS CARMODY

Have you folks seen a little girl?

PIECES returns with a drink.

LOLA

Where you been?

PIECES

Ain't no sarsparilla, had to settle for a root beer.

LOLA

Oh!

ANNIE

(Looking at the INDIAN) He looks quite human - apart from being swart in the face.

EMMA

Don't get too close, girls.

TRAILMASTER

(To OLAF and ERIKA) You folks on the trail?
(They confer.)

LIZZIE

Imagine wearing a blanket in this heat!

EMMA

I wonder how he came by that, that's a white man's blanket. Don't get too close, I warrant he's full of bugs.

She jumps as the MEDICINE MAN begins his spiel.

MEDICINE MAN

Ladies and gentlemen...now, which of you fellers, which lady on behalf of a beloved child has not spent money with the medical profession only to find persisting that same ailment took 'em hurrying along in the first place? Ladies and gentlemen...folks...known tragedy muhself ...lost muh first dear spouse, two little ones laid out right beside her. But I was blessed, folks... I was blessed. Travelled west to assuage muh grief, got pitched off muh horse, lay two days in a gulley, praying blue murder, with the buzzards overhead acawing for their supper. Raving with fever, folks, raving with fever, I was rescued by an Indian tribe of Exceeding Remoteness and carried to the tepee of their Chief...Great Noble Face. You see me here before you today, fully recovered...with muh dear present wife...the Princess Chiwawa...never a day of ill health, not even a female disorder. Friends, I am not a selfish man. Not for yours truly the uppity ways of the town medical man, ahugging his lore to himself jest to squeeze another dollar from the weak widder, the ailing working man. No sirree! The secret cure I learned from those Indians I patented, as a remedy for folks who might meet with jest such a misfortune!

Friends...do you suffer from the rheumatics, from the ague? From sore foot, pink eye, swollen thumb, the headache? Gumrot, toothache, bleeding, noises in the head? Dr Farnum's Elixir will see you through to perfect health! Unwillingly recognised by the medical profession for its efficaciousness in gripe, the distemper, nosebleed, coughing in horses, for children's ailments, spots, boils, pimples, for its fast qualities in dyeing cloth - ladies and gentlemen, put ill health aside...the cure is in your pockets! And what do I ask for this precious, this irreplaceable elixir? Do I ask ten dollars a bottle...it's worth it! Do I ask five, it's cheap at the price...do I ask three...two... that's giving it away...why, a rich cotton man in the south gave me a hundred dollars a bottle after his little girl was cured right out of the swoons - no! To you folks...remember, I owe it my life...to you the price is - one dollar!

MEDICINE MAN (*Cont'd*)

Ladies and gentlemen, don't miss this golden opportunity...muh dear wife will now step among you. Be sure not to miss this chance, may be quite a while before we step this way again, there's other folks to cure...how about a bottle for the pretty lady?

PIECES

He want us to pay for that?

LOLA

Don't worry.

ANNIE

Jus think, this time tomorrow we shall be on the trail!

EMMA

And not a day too soon. At least on the waggon I shall be mistress of my own house again. I've baked many a picnic loaf for your father in his hunting days...I'm no stranger to the extempore, as you'll see. It's being rooked as sticks in my craw. Lizzie, go and get me a bottle of the doctor's medicine, I feel one of my headaches coming on.

TRAILMASTER

Trail's mustering up, folks. Get to your waggons, we're pulling out. No waiting for stragglers, settle up your affairs. Riffraff and hangers-on won't be tolerated, we'll be counting heads in the hour so make up your goods pretty sharp. There's blankets still for sale, and hay...*(To LOLA)* This way, maam, hope you like the open air.

LOLA

Depends on the company, don't it?

Enter JOSIAH WEEKS, flustered.

EMMA

There you are! Thought you were half way to Fort Worth!

JOSIAH

Annie, you must content yourself not to horseback, there ain't an animal to be had. And to judge by the way women ride out here, no question of your aping that kind of caper.

ANNIE

Oh Pa, after all our contrivance!

JOSIAH

No daughter of mine's going to wear britches!

LIZZIE

Pa, did you get my ribbons?

JOSIAH

Ribbons!

EMMA

Who's going to shift the gear for us?

TRAILMASTER

Move yourselves, I ain't got all day!

EMMA

We need help.

TRAILMASTER

You got it. These two...*(he indicates the SCANDINAVIANS)* will be travelling with you - be useful with the chores.

EMMA

Oh we couldn't do that, there's barely enough sleeping room as it is.

TRAILMASTER

Sorry, you ain't got no choice.

EMMA

Josiah, do we stand for that?

TRAILMASTER

Likely to be the least of your troubles. Get ready to roll!

ERIKA pauses, at EMMA's glare. OLAF helps load the waggon. MRS WEEKS makes a fuss about her china. The waggon is loaded.

TRAILMASTER
Chain up! Waggons roll!

9. INDIAN SPEECH OF WORSHIP

PLAINS INDIAN
O...a...eeeeeee.....O...a...eeeeeeeeeee.....
O...aa...eeeeeeeeeee.....

10. ON THE TRAIL

Bright white light.

TRAILMASTER
Keep up there...keep up.

OLAF
We can't go faster.

TRAILMASTER
No stragglers.

MRS DOLAN
It's this blamed dust. It gets into everything. In
the food, in the water, in your eyes, in your
mouth...you get to hate yourself.

OLAF
Any chance of fresh meat?

TRAILMASTER
Not until we hit the fork, day after tomorrow...
liable to see buffalo then.

ERIKA
I could not eat.

OLAF
Don't worry - I'll fix you something along the
line.

ERIKA

Each time you pay more.

MRS DOLAN

We're running low on water.

FRANCES DOLAN

It's the baby.

TRAILMASTER

Use rags and throw them away, ma'am.

MRS DOLAN

Ain't nothing we can dispose of.

TRAILMASTER

Use your petticoats. There'll be no more water till we reach the hole, now move on and less complaining.

MRS DE WITT

There's a cross over there. What does it say?

MR DE WITT

I can't read it.

MRS DOLAN

It just says "WOMAN".

Pause.

TRAILMASTER

Waggons.....halt!

The WOMEN go into the waggon, brush their hair, relax, tend to one another. The GIRL calls to her dog.

OLAF, the TRAILMASTER and an OLDER MAN sing 'Rye Whiskey'.

MRS DOLAN

Still suffering from the flow, Mrs Carmody?

MRS CARMODY (*Manda's Mother*)

Sure thing. Tried just about everything. Clothes is just hanging off me.

DOLAN

Yup, we're pretty parched up ourselves.

MRS DE WITT

It's the children I fear for.

DOLAN

Muh daughter here's all cramped up with the diarrhoea. Boiled up some rice but it takes the water. Miss Dora here baked for us, grateful for that.

MISS DORA

It was no trouble.

OLAF

(Apart with the men) I'm willing to try anything ...anything to get a stake for my family.

OLDER MAN

Railroading's hard. Damn hard.

MRS CARMODY

(Calls) Manda...Manda...come and git your supper.

FRANCES

It ain't but jerked beef, Ma...

MRS DOLAN

Hit'll do. Food is food.

MRS DE WITT

Amen to that.

MRS DOLAN

I mind me of the time we wuz in Kentucky - oh, they was bad times...children all acrying fur somethin' to eat. Remember that, Frances?

FRANCES

I do.

DOLAN

Did somethin' I wanted fur once. Took a fifty pound sugar sack and muh old forty-five special - being a midwife carried it fur muh protection ... and went on down to the commissary with muh son, little Henry Dolan, as he was then. Hit was ahearing the mothers and children crying whut did it.

MRS CARMODY

Why, what happened?

DOLAN

Said to the clerk - well, Mr Martin, I says... it may be hard times but I can always find a little something to git by on. Give me a 24 pound sack of flour - and I whispers to muh little son Henry, take this sack of flour and walk out. Which he done. Thin I called fur the things as was most necessary, filled muh sugar sack...and then I says, now Martin, I ses...I'll see you in ninety days, soon as ever I cin git the money, I ses...I have some starving children to feed and they won't wait. He ses, Aunt Molly, he ses, don't you ask to walk out of this store without paying fur them there groceries. I pulled out the pistol and I ses, Martin, if you tries to take this grub I'll shoot you, if they's to hang me fur it tomorrow morning. And I walked out, and by God, those children was so hungry that when the mother was amaking up the dough for to cook the bread they was grabbing the raw mix off her hands and cramming it into their mouths and swallowing it down. Course by the time I got back to my own door, sheriff was there for to arrest me.

MANDA

Did you go to jail, Mrs Dolan?

DOLAN

Nope. He ses to me, he ses, Aunt Molly, what in the world, he ses, have you turned out for to be a robber? I says, oh no, Frank, I'm no robber, but I've heard these little children cry out till I'm desperate and nearly out of my mind...I'll get out and collect the money just as soon as I'm able, you know I'm as honest as the day is long. And the tears come in his eyes and he ses, Aunt Molly, he ses...I come up here to arrest you, but if you...if you got the heart to do that for other people's children he ses, I'll pay that bill myself. And he ses, if they fire me for NOT arresting you, why then I'll be damn glad of it. And he walked out, and he didn't arrest me.

OLDER MAN

Best money on the railroad is working on ahead, with the surveying party. They'll take a labourer or two, if he's an agile man. Git picked off by Indians though.

OLAF

I just need to get started.

OLDER MAN

Work as a blaster, or a bridge monkey...that's good pay. Then there's the graders. Breaking down the rock, laying the track...pretty heavy labour...timbers is all cut and sawn ahead and sent back, d'yuh see? Mebbe rust-eating's the best job. Yup. Working in teams of four, whipping the rails off the truck, spike, couple and bolt. *(Makes the sound of tightening a nut)* ...by golly, some of those teams lay four rails a minute, pile up the pelf that way.

OLAF

How come you quit?

OLDER MAN

Spent up as soon as I made it! Nope, it's the silver mines for me.

OLAF

Is there a real chance of a strike?

OLDER MAN

Wouldn't recommend it. Not for a man with a family.

FRANCES

Coffee! *(The MEN join the WOMEN.)*

MRS DOLAN

Sure feels a whole heap better with victuals inside you.

MRS DE WITT

I never thought to be using buffalo droppings for firewood.

TRAILMASTER

Never fear, maam...improves the taste!
(Laughter.)

TEACHER

Just think, in California there'll be fruit for the picking outside the door.

MRS DE WITT

I read of a woman looking up from her washbasket, sees a vein of silver wide as a side of beef, just staring right at her on the wall.

OLAF

They say the gold lies in nuggets at your feet.

EMMA

(Enters with her FAMILY) It certainly puts a shine on the whole endeavour.

MRS CARMODY

Everyone walking about in silk and fine hats, all free and equal.

MANDA

And rich, Ma, and rich!

MRS DOLAN

(Smiling) Hush, child.

MANDA

We'll be rich!

*Music. Fast song, a square dance.
Light change to low. Gentle song.*

ANNIE stands apart, looking at the stars. The TRAILMASTER joins her.

ANNIE

So peaceful. *(He does not answer. She looks at him.)* I guess we can't complain.

TRAILMASTER

Nope.

ANNIE

The journey has been hard, I don't deny.

TRAILMASTER

Hard? Ma'am, we ain't even started yet.

The sound of Indian drums.

11. DISPOSSESSION

ARMY GENERAL, AGENT and an INDIAN CHIEF, ceremoniously dressed.

GENERAL

The great father in Washington wants you all to be his friends, and friends to the white man. If you agree to our terms, he wishes to make presents to you and to your people as a token of his friendship.

AGENT

The general, you must understand, is not here to Ask you to make peace, but to advise you that you may have it, by signing the treaty.

The CHIEF does not reply.

GENERAL

Chief, you may as well know it. The white man is coming out here so fast that nothing can stop it.

AGENT

The general is right. It will be like a prairie fire in a high wind. Nothing can stop it, nothing.

GENERAL

The whites are a numerous people. They require room and cannot help but take it.

AGENT

We realise that it is hard for you to leave your land, and the graves of your ancestors, but unfortunately these men are now in your country and there is no portion where you may live but what you will come into contact with them. The consequence is that you are in constant danger of being imposed upon, and you have to resort to arms in self-defence. Under the circumstances you must see that it is in the best interests of your people.

Pause.

CHIEF

Look at me. I am a part of this land where the sun rises. Now you wish us to go where the sun sets. Whose voice says this? The voice of the red man? The great father says that he is kind to us. I do not think so. When he sent us soldiers and agents who told us to behave well ...we did so. We welcomed the white man.

AGENT

Chief White Cloud, there is no reason why your people should not be the most happy and prosperous and well provided-for Indians in the United States. *(Aside)* Believe me, General, it will be cheaper to feed these people than to fight them. *(To the CHIEF)* You must give the General answer.

Pause.

CHIEF

I have no pockets wherein to put your talk. Words do not pay for my country, nor give my people a home where they can live. *(Pause)* A river will run backwards before any man born free will be content to be denied liberty to go where he pleases. Let us be free men - free to think and talk and act for ourselves. Give us our freedom and we will obey your advice, or submit to the penalty.

GENERAL

I can't listen to this talk.

AGENT

You must consider your options, Chief. I have explained all this to you.

CHIEF

We will not leave our country. We intend to die here.

GENERAL

Call an end to the parley.

AGENT

General Carlton -

GENERAL

There will be no further council with the Indians, nor any more talk. Lock him up.

AGENT

The Chief was offered safe conduct.

CHIEF

Your women are here. We will not spill blood in this place. (*He stands.*) If you wish to send your soldiers after us, let us get a little distance from this place. Then if you wish to fight us, we will fight you. Let us make the ground bloody at that place.

GENERAL

Take your savage away. You have till tomorrow morning. After that my soldiers will hunt you down. No peace on any terms! This war shall be pursued against you if it takes years, until you cease to exist or move.

12. MONOLOGUE

FRANCES

(*Irish*) I don't make the sense of it I really don't. I never heard of an illness taking off so many people, not all at once. There's no sickness can take a whole family that way all in the space of three days, the one after the other ...how are we going to eat all that fodder, the old woman and me, it's too much for two women to eat and my god, there's the cart. How're we going to manage that and all the gear, that's not a woman's work. Perhaps it was the water and me drinking the more of it, feeding the baby, well that's off my mind, there was nothing for him, he's at rest now and I wish I were too, with the old man - his legs were giving way I could tell, and doubled up with the stone, they think you see nothing. If you give him the physic he wouldn't take it, never listen that family, God knows how we'll get on now, it'll be the laundering again, arms cracked up with soda the way it was before, I've seen it all, didn't I lose three before birth and -

FRANCES (*Cont'd*)

two after, not to mention the little girl, sitting up with her the three days and nights and her just laying there and dying on me and the priest telling me it was the good Lord loved her so, and the old mother crying into her shawl not a bit of use and not a piece of bread in the house, and every spud rotten, oh, there's a lot owing I'm telling you there's plenty owing, and where's it to come from, who's going to pay for it, I'm sure I'm not the one to ask...

She kneads at a bowl of washing furiously throughout.

13. WORSHIP THE LORD

The TRAILERS enter severally; clean bonnets for the Sabbath. They kneel and pray at random.

MRS CARMODY

Will you take a prayer, sister?

MRS DE WITT

With your blessing, sister. Dear Lord, you have seen fit to bring us to the test with sickness and sorrow.

The others respond severally, praising the Lord in undertone, calling out His name, or sometimes repeating the end of the speaker's sentences.

MRS DE WITT

We know you love us, Lord, and that you wish us to abide in Thee. Give us Thy strength and protection through this baleful land. Give us the strength of Samson, the wisdom of Elijah... protect us, O Lord.

VOICES

Protect us...worship Thy name...lead us into righteousness...hallow His name...

The PREACHER has been walking among the kneeling, praying flock.

PREACHER

It bein' the Lord's day, this trail comes to a restful halt while we gathers to give praise to God fur His mercy and goodness, and to worship His name!

VOICES

Worship His name...praise the Lord!

PREACHER

Likewise to ask His blessing on all us souls gathered together - and one or two faces as I notices is missing...

VOICE

God strike the Unbeliever!

VOICE

Praise His name!

PREACHER

Likewise to ask divine support and protection on this long and arduous journey to whut we fully believe is gonna be The Promised Land!

VOICES

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Praise His name!
Hallelujah!

PREACHER

There's people among us, Lord, of different denominations. Some of us come from way off in foreign parts, cain't even understand a word of God's English. They come to us from heathen places where they wasn't even allowed to hallow Thy name in a quiet and sociable way without frills and the worship of idols. Please God we all intend to reach territory where we can spread the word of the Lord to one and all, to painted savages, in a manner that's decent and in words for to be heard and understood by the whole congregation, and not just Some!

VOICES

Hallelujah! Praise Jesus! Praise His name!

PREACHER

Folks, we have all of us here - just taken off!

VOICES

Taken off!

PREACHER

We have responded to the call of Manifest
Destiny!

VOICES

Manifest Destiny!

PREACHER

I call on all you sinners to cleanse your hearts
and souls for the test!

VOICES

For the test! Hallelujah!

PREACHER

Give yourselves to Jesus!

VOICES

I do...I do!

PREACHER

Come to the Lord!

VOICES

I come...I come!

PREACHER

Come to Jesus!

VOICES

I'm acoming...I'm coming, Lord!

PREACHER

Let me hear it now...let me hear you coming!

VOICES

Oh Lord! Take me, Lord! I'm coming, Jesus!
I'm coming, Lord!

PREACHER

Come to the Lord! Come to His bosom! Let
me hear you now! Come to Jesus - will
somebody catch that female over there before
she keels right over into the molasses - Praise
the Lord!

The CONGREGATION break into an ecstatic hymn, moving in rhythm.

14. MRS WEEK'S REFUSAL

The TRAILERS cross the stage, slowly. MRS WEEKS stops, and is passed. Her FAMILY stop.

EMMA

It's no use, Josiah. I can't go on. *(She sits down mutinously, arms round her knees.)*

JOSIAH

Come on, old girl.

EMMA

I'm not your old girl. Shut up, I say. Shut up.

ANNIE

Come on, Ma. We'll get you a ride later on.

LIZZIE

The sick have to be cared for - they can't walk.

EMMA

It's our waggon, we should ride. That man's a crook.

ANNIE

No he ain't, Ma. If you were sick you'd be in the waggon...think of it that way.

JOSIAH

Get up, Emma, there's folk passing us...we mustn't straggle, it's dangerous.

EMMA

Dangerous! There's nothing here but nothing! We're nowhere, nowhere at all.

JOSIAH

Emma you know that everything that breathes here bites, everything that grows stings. Get up.

EMMA

No. I've a mind to stay where I am. *(Sighing, he gives her the water bottle. She grabs it greedily, spilling the precious liquid. He wrestles it back.)*

JOSIAH

Now hold on! You girls get ahead, your Ma and I will follow. I'll favour her a little.

The GIRLS go. OLAF passes with his WIFE.

OLAF

Better get along there, friend. Trail boss is right behind.

JOSIAH

You hear that, Emma? Thanks, we'll be along. Emma...Emma, now listen here. I'm not disposed to take any more of your nonsense. I've suffered the wrong side of your tongue since we hit the fort. You should be grateful to God we weren't took by the cholera...deuce knows how we came out of it alive, but we did, and I don't intend to let you give way into mindlessness. So if you don't get up on your two feet I'm going to shake you up, which is a thing I never expected to have to do. Now do you hear me?

EMMA

I ain't moving and that's that.

He tries to lift her and she spits in his face.

JOSIAH

Emma! (*Shocked*) Now I know you're not yourself! Come on, get up.

He tries to haul her to her feet without success.

EMMA

Look at you, what do you think you look like... your nose all burnt up, your cheeks all blistered with alkali - you look like a crittur from hell, you ain't Josiah Weeks. I don't know you. My husband wouldn't drag me across this baking oven of hell, I'm a respectable woman. You promised me! You promised me we'd travel in comfort like civilised folk. You lied to me, you're a liar...you're a liar! Well I ain't moving and you can suit yourself.

JOSIAH

There's no-one behind us but the Trailmaster. We'll see what he has to say.

EMMA
I ain't moving.

JOSIAH
If you don't get up this instant I shall walk off
and leave you. *(She does not move.)* I mean it,
wife. Very well...if that's the way you want it.
(He goes. The TRAILMASTER enters.)

TRAILMASTER
What's this?

EMMA
I ain't moving.

The TRAILMASTER screws up his eyes, looks off.

TRAILMASTER
(Calls) Weeks! Weeks, is that you? Come and
get your wife!

JOSIAH
(Approaches. Aside) She won't budge - I'm
trying to trick her on.

TRAILMASTER
Well it ain't worked. See to it, man.

JOSIAH
Mr Ames, I'm out of notion. She won't get up.

TRAILMASTER
Well are you going to discipline her or shall I
do it myself?

JOSIAH
You mean beat her?

TRAILMASTER
She's your wife. You can't leave her here.
Take your strap to her, man, there's no other
way. I've seen it before, man and beast.

JOSIAH
I begin to enquire the difference.

*He takes off his strap and flails out at his WIFE, shouting to give himself the nerve
to do it.*

JOSIAH

Get up...get up, you cat! Get up, you varmint!

Holding her arms over her head to shield herself from the blows, EMMA staggers to her feet and runs off.

15. THE DESERT

The TRAILMASTER comes on, with a WIZENED OLD MAN of strange appearance. Apart, the WOMEN walk on severally, and gaze out at the desert.

OLD MAN

Now hold on...you hold on, son...jest hold on...hit ain't that easy. Question of know-how, ain't it?

TRAILMASTER

Make your deal. *(They confer.)*

MISS DORA

Nothing but salt wastes. It seems like the hand of death is upon us.

MRS DOLAN

The animals is dropping, ain't but barely a team of oxen left. We shoulda hit water by now.

OLD MAN

Willing to pay, are yuh? Willing to pay? Ye don't have the wherewithal.

TRAILMASTER

I'm willing to offer a fair price.

Apart, MRS DE WITT prays on her knees.

MRS CARMODY

(Nodding towards the praying WOMAN) She had a miserable day yesterday. Her baby died.

MRS DE WITT

Oh God look down and grant us Thy favour not to let us perish in this cruel and hateful wilderness.

MRS CARMODY

Reckon he's looking in the other direction.

DOLAN

It surely seems we're lost to his sight.

OLD MAN

Bunch of critturs you seen fit to bring in here messing up the territory...going to need more know-how than you got the wit to provide. Keep the dust, there's more gold here than a man needs if he knows where to grub for it...keep it - you can't drink it, heh?

TRAILMASTER

Are you going to help us or ain't you?

OLD MAN

Go on, strike me down...see where it will git you!

TRAILMASTER

State your terms, man. *(They begin to move off.)*

OLD MAN

Folks should stay where they belongs. Desert belongs to them as is fit fur it. How many mules you got?

MISS DORA

It's funny. All those hours I spent embroidering holy texts...sewing straight seams...making fine handkerchieves. It seems everything I ever learned was useless.

MRS CARMODY

I know what you mean.

MRS DOLAN

We're losing our shape.

MRS DE WITT

Lord, take pity on us. Show us the way.

EMMA enters, and gazes out at the horizon with them.

EMMA

We are nowhere. Nowhere at all.

16. THE MEETING

A rough interior indicated...one wall plastered with pink sheets from the Police Gazette. The furniture is primitive. ANNIE and LIZZIE, washing in a tin bath.

LIZZIE

I surely wish I'd stay back at Fort Filey with Mareta.

ANNIE

She was taking an awful chance - a soldier's pay ain't that good.

LIZZIE

I figgered that. Still, to be married to a man in blue. Mareta's feller looked a mighty fine sight.

ANNIE

What if he gets killed?

LIZZIE

She could marry another one! *(They giggle.)* Say, you know what I just saw? The painted lady playing poker with the men. They say she's winning a passel of money on the trail.

ANNIE

She's no better than she should be, that's what Ma says. Hey, did you notice the walls...it's the Police Gazette. Ma says not to look, it's too racy. Take a read, I'll watch the door. *(LIZZIE reads.)* I'm sure yearning to get to Fort Laramie.

LIZZIE

(Reading) Yeah.

ANNIE

Not that I'm not grateful to spell up in this place. Makes you real happy to be setting under a roof again, even if it is made of mud.

LIZZIE

Uhuh. *(Reading the wall)* Wow!

ANNIE

Wild stories, eeh?

LIZZIE
(Crouching) Wonder who lived here?

ANNIE
Whoever it was had to walk a mile to that miserable little crick.

LIZZIE
Maybe they had a mule.

ANNIE does not reply. She is transfixed...an INDIAN has walked in the door. He is partially naked, and painted. ANNIE stands, her mouth open.

LIZZIE
I said, maybe they had a mule. What's the matter with you?

She sees the INDIAN and screams. The INDIAN advances on ANNIE and inspects her. He is fascinated by her yellow hair. He advances. She shoos him with her apron.

ANNIE
Shoo...shoo!

He steps back, puzzled. He dips his fingers into the pot of soap and tastes.

ANNIE
That's soap!

Challenged, he eats some more proudly, eyes blinking. He advances on ANNIE again. She stands her ground. He takes out his knife. LIZZIE trembles violently. He lifts a lock of ANNIE's hair. Once she realises that he does not intend to scalp her, she rallies. She picks up a pair of scissors and cuts a piece of her hair for him. He slices off a lock of his hair with his knife and gives it to her, and goes. The GIRLS stare at each other, transfixed.

ACT TWO

A simple room. The COLONEL enters, sits at table. A SOLDIER, STENOGRAPHER, apart. ANNIE enters with an OLDER WOMAN, an officer's wife. The COLONEL rises.

COLONEL

Would you care to take a seat, Miss Weeks?

ANNIE

If it's all the same, Colonel, I'd prefer to stand.

COLONEL

As you wish. This, of course, is an official investigation. It is not to be published in the newspapers or anything of that kind. I wish to hear the whole truth in regard to the matter. Just consider yourself on the witness stand. If the Ute Indians are guilty the government will punish them, and we must know the truth.

ANNIE

I understand, sir.

COLONEL

Will you place your hand on the bible and repeat after me...I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

ANNIE repeats the oath.

COLONEL

Wouldn't you rather sit down, Miss Weeks?

ANNIE

No sir, I'd rather stand - I feel more comfortable.

COLONEL

Very well. *(He clears his throat.)* How long did...*(He refers to his notes for the name)*...how long did Watanye keep you with him?

ANNIE

All the time.

COLONEL

He had you all the time.

ANNIE

Yes sir.

COLONEL

Was he willing at any time to let you go?

ANNIE

I asked him repeatedly. He couldn't seem to make up his mind.

COLONEL

Were you well treated?

ANNIE

(After a pause) No better than what I expected. I had heard of their natures on the trail.

COLONEL

Miss Weeks, we have to have the whole truth.

ANNIE

I understand that, sir. We were all insulted a good many times, including my mother. We expected to be.

COLONEL

What do you mean by insult, and of what did it consist?

ANNIE

Of outrageous treatment at night.

COLONEL

Am I to understand that they outraged you several times during the nights that you were with them?

ANNIE

Yes sir.

COLONEL

They forced you against your will?

ANNIE

Yes sir.

COLONEL

Did they threaten to kill you if you did not comply?

ANNIE

Oh no - only on the one occasion. I asked him if he wanted to kill me. He said 'Yes'. I said 'Get up and shoot me then, and leave me alone'. He turned over and didn't do anything more that night.

COLONEL

Was it a constant thing?

ANNIE

Yes sir.

COLONEL

How long after the actual capture did the outrages take place?

ANNIE

They began the same night. The Monday. A good many times I pushed him off, made a fuss, and raised a difficulty.

COLONEL

Was it done while his own squaws were in the tent?

ANNIE

Yes sir. Sometimes on the ground outside.

COLONEL

And they knew about it?

ANNIE

Yes sir. Watanye's squaw said I must not make a fuss about it. I think she felt sorry for me... it was pretty good - but she didn't dare do anything.

COLONEL

Did any of the other men do the same thing to you?

ANNIE

Oh no sir. He took me as his squaw and the rest dared not come near.

COLONEL

None of the others came near you?

ANNIE

No sir.

COLONEL

Did he say anything when he released you?

ANNIE

The day you came?

COLONEL

Yes.

ANNIE

He asked me the day before what I was going to tell...he said: 'You say the Utes are no good'. I said I wouldn't. He...he asked me to stay in the camp and be his squaw. He said I should not have to work like the other women if I would stay with him. I said no, I couldn't do that. He seemed very upset...I - I've heard he's behaving oddly in the compound.

COLONEL

You need not concern yourself on that score, Miss Weeks. He did not seem to think it was wrong?

ANNIE

Oh no sir. They think it a pretty good thing to have a white squaw, a white woman.

COLONEL

Did you see any clothes in anyone's possession?

ANNIE

One Indian had father's shoes on...they were all pretty drunk and throwing goods around.

COLONEL

Did you see Mr McBride's coat?

ANNIE

No sir.

COLONEL

Did you hear anyone say who killed Mr Whaley and Mr McBride?

ANNIE

No sir. My father says he would recognise the Indian who struck down Mr Brough.

COLONEL

I see. Thank you, Miss Weeks. Have you told this to anybody beside your mother?

ANNIE

No sir.

COLONEL

And no-one else shall know. We are grateful for your testimony.

The OFFICER'S WIFE rises.

ANNIE

Sir, what will happen to Watanye?

COLONEL

They will all be tried and punished according to the law.

ANNIE

I - I just wanted to say that on the whole he...he looked after me pretty well, accordingly to his style...and I believe he is the cause of my father being alive. I...I...requested it of him. (*The OFFICER looks up at her keenly. He knows what she means.*)

OFFICER'S WIFE

Come, my dear. We must leave the army to decide the case.

During this scene WATANYE, apart, daubs himself with black, watched by his SQUAW. As ANNIE leaves the courtroom he howls in anguish.

ANNIE

(*Jumps nervously.*) What is that noise?

WIFE

Oh that's just an Indian.

ANNIE

It sounds as though he's in torture!

WIFE

No, no...they hate to be confined. Don't worry your head, my dear. They don't feel things as we do.

ANNIE

Of course not.

WATANYE howls again as the WOMEN go.

17. YOUNG WAR CHIEFS

RED EAGLE

Our hearts are sore for you. Many of our blood are among your dead.

DULL KNIFE

We sought no war. The treaty promises were broken. To stay meant to die. We thought it better to die fighting, so we came here.

RED EAGLE

You are welcome to share our lands. In the spring we will make war. The Sioux and the Cheyenne are blood brothers. We will descend like a swarm of bees.

DULL KNIFE

The Cheyenne have made mistakes. When we fought the soldiers and they ran away, we did not pursue them and kill them. We showed we were the bravest and we thought that was enough. We did not understand that they meant to kill us all.

RED EAGLE

The white man has taken our country. The white man has taken our game. The white man has taken our women. Now no peace. We will raise the battle axe until death.

They let out ululating cries, sustained.

18. WOMEN OF THE WEST

A Bar. MAC, the barman...PIECES AND LOLA, drinking with VERA, the owner of the bar.

VOICES

Look out, here comes Jim McCourt...get off the streets...it's McCourt!

MRS DE WITT rushes in, and then gapes as she realises where she is. Shots, off.

LOLA

What's up?

MAN

(Sticks his head in the door) It's Jim McCourt, Vera! *(Goes.)*

VERA

I figgered. *(Stops MRS DE WITT from leaving.)*
I wouldn't if'n I was you.

PIECES

This ain't the mission hall!

VERA

Best be safe. He won't come in here -

LOLA

Why not?

VERA

Owes me money. Set down a spell, ma'am...Mac, give the lady a drink.

MRS DE WITT

Thank you but I never touch' liquor.

VERA

Suit yourself. Set down. *(MRS DE WITT, troubled, sits. VERA turns to LOLA.)* You could do worse than take a piece of this place. I do good business.

LOLA

Thanks but we're for 'Frisco.

VERA

Think about it. *(To MRS DE WITT)* On the trail, huh?

MRS DE WITT

With my husband and kin. We're - we're from Pittsburgh.

LOLA

That's near Detroit, ain't it? (*PIECES sneers.*)

More shots - MRS DE WITT jumps - the others ignore it.

LOLA

(*To VERA*) No, like I was saying, the mining camp was no place to make a living - mud?! We set up in a pup tent, remember, Pieces?... wind blowing down on top of us...that hurried the boys along.

PIECES

Business was great. (*She glares coldly at MRS DE WITT. Who finds her courage.*)

MRS DE WITT

Miss Pieces - did you...did you never think of giving your soul to Jesus?

PIECES

Jesus? Why woman - what he ever do for me?

MRS DE WITT

We must have faith.

PIECES

Oh I got that - muh belief's in survival, ain't that right, Mac? (*MAC refills their glasses, gives MRS DE WITT coffee. VERA slips a little whisky into the cup, unseen by MRS DE WITT.*)

MRS DE WITT

But this - travail that we're suffering - I believe in God's purpose for us all -

The BARMAN inclines noncommittally.

MRS DE WITT

- and that this territory can give us all a fresh start. If I didn't believe that, why I don't think I could continue.

LOLA

Know what you mean.

MRS DE WITT

Forgive me for saying this, Miss Boolay, but you don't seem like a bad woman. You strike me as being very kind and understanding.

LOLA

(Preening) I guess we've all seen trouble, Mrs de Witt...I know I have. You'd be surprised what we have to put up with -

PIECES

Why don't you just shut up?

LOLA

What? Oh, sorry, didn't mean to offend. Only there wasn't much choice of situation when me and Pieces hit the Plains.

MRS DE WITT

But I gather you mean to change your way of life.

PIECES

Now don't you be too sure about that. Plenty of misses keen enough to make their pile on their backs. Ain't nothing wrong with pleasure.

LOLA

Why don't you lay off that bottle?

PIECES

If a man's prepared to pay for it. Don't SHE get payment? Board and lodgin' and a ring on her finger? Her sort ain't going to give nothing away, leastways, not till the bargain's struck. Same thing, what's the difference?

MRS DE WITT

(Bravely) There is such a thing as hallowed conjugal love, Miss - *(She has forgotten PIECE's name.)*

PIECES

Fontanne. Di Fontanne. Miz di Fontanne.

MRS DE WITT

Believe me, Miss di Fontanne, I don't wish to make comment on your way of life. I've seen so much suffering on the trail that my mind is a good deal more open than when I was teaching music in Arroway Falls. Of course there wasn't the temptation there.

PIECES

Oh now you listen here, preacher lady. There's always temptation when you're a piece of goods that men thinks is available for their purpose. I've seen many a good girl picked off on the way home from chapel before the age of thirteen. Question of how you're favoured, ain't it?

VERA

Hold on, Pieces...

PIECES

Maybe you plain women don't see too much of that aspect of things. Think yourself lucky some fool push a ring on your finger, favour you with a couple of brats...

MRS DE WITT

That is not true. That is just not true.

PIECES

And what would a woman looking like you know about it? Who in hell's ever going to take a second look in your direction?

LOLA

Pieces -

PIECES

Telling us to get back to Jesus - why woman, you ain't got no place else to go! I'm in a position to know how often your husband's likely to pleasure himself under his own roof.

MRS DE WITT

That is not true! My husband is an...an active man. I spend my life worrying that we'll get another child and I'm not over losing my last one yet, that died from starvation on the trail. What do you know about it? You haven't heard your little ones calling out for food you don't have...you avoid all that, and I wish you would tell me how. Not that I - it's a woman's destiny and privilege to bear children, I don't seek to avoid my joy. But I want a roof over my head, and it's not too much to ask! *(She drinks)* A roof, and a piece of grass for the children to play on. And I guess I'd like to be fixed so that I could look at a book now and then.

VERA

A book?

MRS DE WITT

I have a terrible weakness for reading. There's little place for that in a woman's life, it makes me guilty when I steal time that way.

VERA adds whisky to MRS DE WITT's cup. The door bursts open and JIM MCCOURT shoves past PIECES.

JIM

Get your black ass outa my way.

PIECES

(Promptly) Sure thing. *(He goes.)*

NELL enters quickly. She is older, dressed in buckskins, carries a gun.

NELL

Whur de go? *(PIECES lifts her eyes upwards.)*
By golly, Jim...Jim, come down here, now d'you hear me? If you don't come down here this instant I'm acoming up to git you.

VERA

(Sing song) He'll kill you.

MAC

She's right, Nell.

VERA

Shut up and have a drink.

NELL

Who the hell's that?

VERA

This lady's come in out of Jim's way.

NELL

Picked a good spot.

LOLA

We're looking after her.

NELL

(Takes a good look) I reckon you're safe enough, maam, yuh looks too pious fur to be sweet-talked by Lady Black Cat there. Let's have a shot, Mac.

LOLA

Stage is in, then?

NELL

Sure looks like it, don't it? By golly, muh hands is red hot. Muh lead horse went lame on me this side a Cherakee...new feller fair tore the guts outa hisself...never shoulda picked a roan.

VERA

(To MRS DE WITT) She's been out here twenty years. Here, you was married, wasn't you, Nell?

NELL

More'n once. Muh last feller went over a cliff celebrating his birthday. Needed the money, took on the job muhself.

MAC

Where you been, Nell?

NELL

Got muhself in a mite or trouble over to Wyoming. *(Drinks, laughs)* Damnedest thing you ever did see. Like I ses, gits muhself in a little fracas over settlement of a bill. I'm taken up before the Bench...God strike me dead ifn the jedge ain't a little old lady!

PIECES

You're kidding us!

NELL

Kiss a horse's ass if I'm lying. 'Maam' I ses 'Maam, I'm just a poor defenceless woman like yourself...it was them three great hulking critturs like whut you sees asetting over there telling lies against yours truly, five foot three'. Made no danged bit of difference - thirty days.

MAC

A woman judge?

NELL

I ain't telling a lie. Damnedest little old grandmother setting up there on a cushion bawling louder'n a hogcaller. Sure makes you think.

PIECES

Maybe things is looking up.

NELL

Don't git ideas, it was still thirty days in the cooler.

LOLA

Yeah, reckon we'll be paying side money just the same. Still.

MRS DE WITT

(Getting talkative from the whisky) Yes, why not? I've seen women on the trail do anything a man can do, endure any suffering.

NELL

Women gits the wust of it all right. See how them squaws is treated up in the hills. Met a young'un on the trail a week back...by golly if she hadn't been wedded to a white man for seven years and he'd turned her out of doors for a yeller haired Swede from Dakota.

MRS DE WITT

His own wife?

NELL

There was the ring, still on her finger, 'bout all he'd left her with, bar the two pups. Threw her off a sack of flour and a twist of taffy for the littluns, all I had to offer. How much is muh reckoning, Mac? Can't stand around with a bunch of women all day, I got a stage to take out. Good luck to ye. *(She goes.)*

VERA

She'll die on that trail.

PIECES

With her boots on.

JIM bursts in. The WOMEN watch warily as he takes a drink. He passes PIECES.

JIM

Women! *(He spits.)*

As he approaches the exit, MRS DE WITT, who has risen in alarm, is in his way. She holds up her broolly for self-protection. He knocks her out and goes.

LOLA

She's out cold. Mrs de Witt? Out cold.

PIECES

Foolish woman. *(Shrugs, draws on her cigar.)*
Wrong timing.

Sound of fracas. EMMA enters, boxing JIM's ears. He tries to kiss her. She clocks him and throws him out. JOSIAH stands amazed.

EMMA

He broke my eggs!

19. ON THE TRAIL...AND ON AND ON

The WOMEN and MEN are now very gaunt. Their hair is bleached, their clothes denuded of colour.

A WOMAN takes some ragged clothes from a line strung from the waggon.

MRS DOLAN

Sure don't know why I took the trouble, thought it might freshen 'em up a spell, git the stink of living out. (*She turns over the rags, shaking her head.*) Mighta knowed the wind would get to them. (*She sniffs*) Mmmm, smells good...what is it?

MRS CARMODY

Apache scout picked me up a mother porcupine away down the trail, beat its head in for me...my, didn't the little ones howl for their Ma. Pity they was so small. We took 'em anyway.

MRS DOLAN

Nothing like a piece of meat to give you strength. Since we ate the mules there don't seem to be a living thing alive. Muh daughter's getting sore in the vitals...there ain't but a few grits and tack inside us to stop our bones knocking together.

MRS CARMODY

There's an orphan kid down the line has a dog, not but it ain't pure skeleton, God knows how she managed to keep it so long from getting ate up. You could offer her fifty cents for it.

ERIKA enters, her baby on her back.

ERIKA

I wondered where the smell was coming from.

MRS CARMODY

Sorry...I got mouths to feed.

ERIKA

I'd be happy to boil the bones for a little soup for the baby.

MRS CARMODY

Sure wish I could oblige.

She turns away from ERIKA who stands for a while, hoping. Then she goes.

MRS CARMODY

She might as well content herself to losing that child. It ain't never going to see the winter.

MRS DOLAN

I could trade you a hand of citric crystals for the pelt...I knows you don't have none.

They pore over the trade. MRS CARMODY hands over the pelt.

MRS CARMODY

There ain't too much of it.

MRS DOLAN

Better than ought. I mind me of the first deer Mr Jackson took, way back along the trail. My daughter's youngest was watching him skin it, and took to crying over the dead crittur...she seen it twitching under the knife. 'Oh Daddy' she says 'the deer wants her dress back'...you couldn't help but smile. We ate pretty good then. *(She goes.)*

ERIKA returns.

ERIKA

I'd be willing to take the skin off you for a few phosphorus matches.

MRS CARMODY

I'm real sorry...she just took it. There's nought but a quill or two...you're welcome to seek.

ERIKA scrabbles on the ground for scraps.

20. THE SCOUT

TRAILMASTER

What do you make of it?

SCOUT

Pretty small trail. From moccasin print, Cheyenne. Not Sioux.

TRAILMASTER

Good. Hunting party I'd guess. How long ago?

SCOUT

Grass pretty damn dead...two, three days.
Horse dung done dry. Grass in dung say horses
from Catchicou.

TRAILMASTER

They're likely to be headed back south then?

SCOUT

(Sniffing around) Horse piddle back of prints
here. This means mares. War party no ride
mares...hunting party for sure.

TRAILMASTER

Good, that's OK. I reckon we're clear for the
big climb.

He looks up at the mountains.

SCOUT

Snows come early this year.

TRAILMASTER

Yes, dammit. We'll maybe get less trouble
from raiding parties...it'll weaken off their
ponies sooner.

SCOUT

Weaken we too.

TRAILMASTER

Quit that. Don't let me hear that kind of talk.

SCOUT

Silver Heels no come.

TRAILMASTER

You've taken the money. That was the deal.

SCOUT

(Returns bag of dust) Me no come. Snow too
soon.

He slips off. The TRAILMASTER is worried.

21. AT THE FORK

LEWIS

I think we should take the cut-off. Can't be wrong to clip two hundred miles off the trail - tough trail at that.

EMMA

It's risky.

DOLAN

You agin it, Emma?

EMMA

I am.

DOLAN

Then so am I.

LIZZIE

(As the TRAILMASTER enters) What do you say, Mr Ames?

TRAILMASTER

What about?

ANNIE

Should we take the cut-off?

LEWIS

You bet!

EMMA

I say it's too risky - why take chances?

TRAILMASTER

I'm inclined to favour Mrs Weeks.

LEWIS

You said yourself they saved ten days over the pass on the last trail. They took the cut-off!

TRAILMASTER

That's true.

DOLAN

What makes you pause, Jim?

TRAILMASTER

Lot of snow this year. Trail ain't so good on the cut-off, we could git snowed up.

LEWIS

It's worth the risk. Plenty of game up there...*(He pats his rifle)*...we won't go short. Plenty of meat for the children.

ANNIE

But if Jim thinks we shouldn't risk it -

CARMODY

(To LEWIS) We've our families to think of.

LEWIS

We're aiming to shorten the hardship, maam... that can't be a bad decision. Are you with us, Ames?

TRAILMASTER

(Thinks, then, decisive) No I'm not. We stick to the trail.

LEWIS

In that case we split. You go by Fort Hall, we take the cut-off.

TRAILMASTER

I don't advise it.

LEWIS

We'll beat you into Sacramento.

TRAILMASTER

You're talking about people's lives, man!

LIZZIE

Ma?

DOLAN

What do you think, Emma?

EMMA

I think it's foolishness. We've survived this far, no point taking chances now. You've brought us this far Jim...we'll stay with you.

ANNIE

I agree!

JOSIAH

Hold on!

They turn and look at him. He says little now.

JOSIAH

The sooner we quit this harsh and miserable journey the happier we shall be. *(To LEWIS)* I shall join my party to your group, sir.

ANNIE

Pa!

LEWIS

Glad to have you, sir.

TRAILMASTER

(Getting up) Suit yourselves.

EMMA

(As the group breaks up) You're wrong Josiah...dead wrong.

LIZZIE

Ma's right. We should stick to the trail.

JOSIAH

When I require your opinion I'll ask for it. I'm still head of this family.

LIZZIE

'Course you are, Pa.

JOSIAH

I suggest we begin to get our goods together...*(bitterly)*...such as we have left to us.

22. QUIT THE WAGGONS

The light goes. PEOPLE struggle, climbing. The calls and cries begin.

VOICES

Quit the waggons! Abandon the waggons! Quit the waggons!

23. THE INDIANS SURRENDER

A SQUAW sits, mourning.

SQUAW

Cloud come down. Crow, sing song of death.
Mud lies on the eyes of Canatego.

Where are the Arapahoe? Where are the
Pawnee...Chickasaw...Navaho...Apache!
Shoshone...Blackfoot...Cherokeeeeeeeeeeee...

The INDIAN enters quietly, stands beside her, exhausted.

INDIAN

I give myself up to you. Do with me what you
please.

Once I moved like the wind. Now I surrender
to you, and that is all.

We fought you as long as we had rifles. We
have no provisions, no means to live. Your
troops are everywhere, all our springs are
overlooked by you...by your young men.

You have driven us out. We have no more
heart.

I hate all white people.

You have taken away our lands. You have
made us outcasts.

You do not know how to share.

SQUAW

Blood to water, water to stone, stone to ash.

Farewell, Crow country.

24. IN THE SNOW

A

OLAF

(Low to EMMA) She won't let go the baby.

EMMA

Leave her be. Let her carry it.

OLAF

It's frozen to her back. It'll kill her. She won't let me come near her.

EMMA

We'll wait till she's asleep. Ain't nothing more to be done.

B

JOSIAH

I'm cold, I tell you. This morning the ice was so heavy on my face I couldn't speak. Where's your mother?

ANNIE

She went off with the gun.

JOSIAH

I can't even feel my feet.

ANNIE

You was wrong. We shouldn't have taken the cut-off. You should have listened to Ma.

JOSIAH

Where's Emma?

ANNIE

She'll be right along. God knows what we'll do if she comes back empty-handed. There ain't but a handful of cornflour.

JOSIAH

Emma!

Frozen bodies, huddled together. LEWIS enters, gun in hand.

C

LEWIS

Nothing. (*Bends over a MAN.*)

MRS DE WITT

He's gone. Take his clothes. We shall have to bury him.

LEWIS

How are we going to do that?

He bends over the body.

LEWIS
(Dull) This is meat.

MRS DE WITT
No. No.

LEWIS
I want to live.

MRS DE WITT
No.

D
Twilight. Huddled bodies.

CRACKED VOICE
Another dead this morning...pass it along.

VOICE
God forgive us.

E
EMMA
She could of got down if she'd tried.

ANNIE
No Ma...there was big falls during the night.
Lizzie's all right...she's back up with the others.
Lewis is there. He's a strong feller, he'll be
keeping them all together.

EMMA
I'm worried. I've a mind to try...if we don't do
something soon we'll be eating our own shoes.

ANNIE
They'll get down to us when they can. They'll
make it to us. Pa? Pa?

EMMA
He won't last long. He's losing his will.

ANNIE
If there's no more fall during the night, I'll try
and get up to them.

EMMA
No. You stay with Pa. I'll go with the gun.

F
LIZZIE, alone, huddled for warmth. LEWIS enters silently with the gun. He has hunted, rips off a piece and throws it to her. They both eat. He throws it down in disgust. She looks at him.

LEWIS
It don't taste the same.

She gazes at him, frightened.

LEWIS
It don't taste the same!

LIZZIE is very alarmed. He looks mad.

G
EMMA
Tomorrow I'll make it. The snow's right off the big rock. I'll go back for her.

ANNIE
Let me go, Ma.

EMMA
She's my daughter. It's for me to find her. I'll go tomorrow.

JOSIAH
Emma...*(He is very weak.)*

H
LEWIS
(Mutters) It don't taste the same.

LIZZIE
Lewis, you wouldn't harm me, would you? If you harm me, you'll be all alone.

LEWIS
I don't want to harm you. It just don't taste the same.

LIZZIE
Dear Lord, protect me. You wouldn't harm me, Lewis. That would be murder. The others died natural...God will forgive us for what we did. They'd have wanted us to live. Oh dear God!

LEWIS
I don't mean to harm you. I got no quarrel with you.

LIZZIE

You can hunt now. The relief party will be here any time!

Her cry makes him draw off a little. But he watches her. Then he leans over and embraces her, as for warmth.

LIZZIE

(Hope going) Don't harm me, Lewis. Don't harm me. Don't harm me.

LEWIS

I'll hunt tomorrow. I won't harm you.

LIZZIE

(Faint) Oh yes you will. You're going to kill me.

LEWIS

No I ain't.

LIZZIE

(Sighs) Oh yes...you will.

LEWIS

(After a pause) It don't taste the same. *(Clubs her with his rifle butt.)* You see, Lizzie, it don't taste the same.

25. SURVIVORS

EMMA and ANNIE on the trail. They are sitting back to back, resting and eating.

ANNIE

See that squirrel? Real tame. I was talking to the old-timer back on the trail. He said when he was first here the animals was all real tame. Elk and deer'd come right up and take a look in his pockets.

EMMA

They sure don't now.

ANNIE

Reckon they sees us coming. You anyways. Ain't nobody draws a bead like you, Ma.

EMMA

It's the knack of it. Always was far-sighted.

ANNIE

Best shot we had.

EMMA

Well maybe muh fingers was too small for the frost to take...not so far for the blood to travel. I don't know. *(She has no interest in speculation.)*

ANNIE

Funny how it was the women what survived.
(Pause. They enjoy the warmth of the sun.)

The birds have been acting funny.

EMMA

Hey!

ANNIE

Kin you smell smoke?

ANNIE

That's odd...I thought I did. Just now.

EMMA

We can't be so far.

ANNIE

Reckon not.

They get up, get their gear together to move off.

26. CIVILISATION

A belvedere overlooking Sacramento. A WELL-DRESSED MAN enters, accompanied by his WIFE and her FRIEND.

WIFE

How delightful! From here one may witness the whole golden magic of the west!

ARCHER BURNETT

I told you the adventure would be worth the climb, my dear. What do you think of it, Miss Kitty?

FRIEND

Truly splendid. And this is all your land, Mr Burnett?

ARCHER

Indeed, as far as you can see. And this is where the railroad will pass - straight as a barrel through the mountains to Omaha, St Louis and the East.

WIFE

Coast to coast! It's incredible.

ARCHER

A week's travelling, instead of a year.

FRIEND

It will be a mighty fine achievement indeed.

ANNIE and EMMA approach. Neither party sees the other at first.

WIFE

Perhaps we could get the men to haul the picnic up here - could you not command it, Archer?

ARCHER

A sound notion.

WIFE

Why, I do believe I can see the spire of St James church - oh! (*She sees ANNIE.*)

ARCHER

What the devil - ? In Heaven's name what is it? Pawnee, Sioux, wild woman or what? Come away, ladies - I think it would be prudent to move our ground.

They move away.

KITTY

(*Archly*) I read in the Examiner, Mr Burnett, that the ladies of Wyoming are to have the vote.

ARCHER

(Laughs heartily) My dear Miss Kitty, can you imagine the suffrage in the hands of such as we have just witnessed? Poor abandoned creatures unable to fend for themselves? No, my dears. The affairs of government and state must be assigned to those equipped and designed for it.

WIFE

I'm sure I'm well content to leave our welfare in your hands, my dear husband.

ARCHER

And you may be certain of my unceasing care and protection, my love. An arm, ladies? *(They each take an arm.)* A pleasure to escort two such decorative and amiable companions.

They go.

ANNIE

Did I see it, or did I dream it? Ma...Ma... civilisation...

We made it. We made it.

EMMA

(Approaches) Made what?

ANNIE

We made it.

EMMA

My God. We're here. We are arrived.

ANNIE

What happens now?