

BELLS OF SANTA RITA

Original Feature Screenplay

by Tamara Ann Burgh

WGA# 2032578

tburgh65@gmail.com

(479) 721-5008

EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - DAY

A COYOTE chases a RABBIT through the brush. A car horn BLARES.

EXT. WEED INFESTED GAS STATION TARMAC - DAY

ARCHIE, a small matted-haired mutt, lopes across the tarmac toward the building. The horn BLARES again.

INT. GAS STATION

Archie licks unresponsive TR's hand next to several empty beer bottles. The horn BLARES again.

MALE DRIVER (O.S.)
Hey! Hey! Anybody in there?
I need some goddamn service here!

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT - DAY

ELTON, 30s, fit, not necessarily handsome but dreamy-eyed sexy, black hair is in a long braid down his back, he wears a tee-shirt picturing "The Fool" from Waite Rider Tarot cards. He sits on a stool eating an apple. He's reading a book about chivalry.

Elton hears the BLARING HORN from the gas station across the two-lane highway and sees a MALE DRIVER standing behind the open door of his sparkling white luxury car.

ELTON
Elaine, watch the register a minute.

INT. GROCERY AISLE

ELAINE, late 20s, hair in a severe ponytail, wears a store apron over a tee-shirt and jeans, shelves eggs in the cooler. She opens her mouth to protest but Elton's already shot out the door. Irritated, she shuffles to the register leaving a case of eggs in the aisle.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elaine's annoyance morphs into a look that yearns for Elton as she watches him jog to the gas station. His long braid swishes across his back.

INT. SPARKLING WHITE LUXURY CAR - DAY

Male Driver, 40s, smartly dressed, HONKS again while a WOMAN, very attractive, 40s, lots of cleavage, in the front passenger seat ignores her companion's tirade. Elton captures her attention.

Elton arrives, stands next to her window, places the apple in his mouth and removes the nozzle from the pump.

EXT. GAS STATION

Elton enjoys the view of cleavage through the car's open window. The woman turns and looks up at Elton. He winks.

The gas pump doesn't work. Elton leans against the car and gives the pump a swift kick. He winces with the pain that reverberates up his leg to his back. He falls against the car. The pump starts.

MALE DRIVER

What the hell? Get the fuck off
my car!

Elton and the woman calmly gaze at each other via her side view mirror. She reaches out, adjusts the mirror to get a better view of Elton. He hands her his half-eaten apple.

INT. SPARKLING WHITE LUXURY CAR

She accepts Elton's apple and takes a luscious bite.

EXT. GAS STATION

Male Driver reads a map spread on the car's hood.

ELTON

Fill her up?

MALE DRIVER

You better fuckin' believe it. We're in
the middle of fuckin' hellsville here.
(SLAPS the map)
It'll take a full fuckin' tank just to
get to the edge of some goddamn place!

Elton, unperturbed, slides his hand along the edge of the woman's window then puts the pump on lock.

INT. SPARKLING WHITE LUXURY CAR

The Woman's eyes follow Elton as he walks to the building. She focuses on his tight butt and the long dark braid. She takes another bite of apple.

EXT. GAS STATION

Archie runs out to greet Elton who reaches down to pet the dog but the sting from the kick at the pump bothers his back.

INT. GAS STATION

Elton finds TR's tall body, face down and sprawled across an old sofa. He's passed out. Elton kicks a beer bottle aside. It rolls under the sofa and CLINKS against more bottles.

Elton struggles to roll TR onto his back, but can't. TR is shoeless. His socks are shabby with holes in the heels. Archie jumps atop TR's back and licks Elton's face.

ELTON

C'mon, Archie. You're not helping.

The car horn BLARES.

MALE DRIVER (O.S.)

Hey! Hey! Moron! The gas!

EXT. GAS STATION

The gas is overflowing. Elton runs to the pump while Archie lopes behind. Elton scoops up Archie. Elton winces then gently tosses Archie through the open car window to the woman.

ELTON

You mind?

WOMAN

Help yourself.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elaine watches the bizarre scene across the highway. She shakes her head as Elton fusses with the nozzle and lever then kicks the pump again. Male Driver yells something while pointing to the spilled gas accumulating under his car.

HENRY, mid 20s, plain, shy, and ISABEL, 30s, plain, and her sons BOBBY, 5, and BEN, 8, enter the store. Henry shyly nods to Elaine, but she's engrossed with the scene across the street and doesn't notice Henry. He gazes at her affectionately.

EXT. GAS STATION

MALE DRIVER

I'm not payin' for nothin' but what ended up in my tank!

Archie, stimulated by the Male Driver's loud RANTS, stands in the window and BARKS to match. The Woman in the car LAUGHS.

MALE DRIVER

And get that flea bag outta my car!

Elton stands at the car's open window and pats his chest. Archie jumps into his arms. Male Driver digs for his wallet. Elton watches the Woman's reflection in the side view as she slowly applies a thick layer of lipstick.

ELTON

No problem, sir. Free gas day. Sorry for the inconvenience.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elaine and Henry watch the scene across the street: Male Driver pushes and steers behind the open car door while Elton, still holding Archie, pushes from the passenger side as they roll the car away from the spilled gas.

HENRY

TR must be drunk again.

ELAINE

'Dunno.

INT. SPARKLING WHITE LUXERY CAR

Male Driver enters and starts the engine while the Woman replaces the lipstick lid. As they pull away she impulsively hands the tube of lipstick to Elton.

EXT. GAS STATION

As the car drives away Elton uncaps the tube and spreads the color across his lips.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elaine, with a watchful eye on Elton, is startled by a gruff voice.

FASIO (O.S.)

What th'? What're these eggs doin' in the aisle?

FASIO, 60s female, a permanent scowl, tall, husky, intimidating, wears a broom skirt and large turquoise jewelry. An unlit cigarette hangs from her mouth. She appears from behind an aisle.

FASIO

What're you doin' at the register? Where's Elton gone to now? And don't tell me he's in the can again!

ELAINE

Went to check on TR.

FASIO

Dammit! TR don't pay him to check on TR.
I pay him to check out customers. Go get
him!

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT

Just as EDDIE, 50's arrives, Elaine flies out the door and
storms across the well groomed grocery store parking lot.

She unknowingly breezes past a MOTLEY DOG, mangy and scrawny,
in tall grass bordering the lot.

INT. GAS STATION

Elaine enters as Elton covers TR (still face down) with a
blanket. A cloud of dust rises from it. Archie jumps atop the
blanket.

ELAINE

Whew. The smell only a dog could love.

(Betty Davis voice)

Whatta dump.

(normal voice)

Fasio's pissed, as usual, and it's your
fault, as usual, and she's blaming me, as
usual.

ELTON

(to TR)

One of these days, my friend, you won't
wake from your amber consciousness.

ELAINE

Unconscious, you mean. Com'on.

(does a double take)

Are you wearing lipstick?

ELTON

My color?

ELAINE

C'mon, quit shitting around.

ELTON

Tell Fasio I'm dealing with an emergency.

ELAINE

Tell 'er yourself.

Elaine props the "CLOSED" sign in the window and leaves.

Elton notices the empty dog bowls. He looks through cupboards
for food. In one cupboard he finds a set of fancy beaded
leather anklets. He shakes them. The bells RING. He
recognizes their tone. He's surprised and amused.

ELTON

Oh my God. Oh my angel.

INT. GROCERY STORE CHECK-OUT

Fasio is checking Henry and Isabel's "boat-load" of groceries. Fasio tosses aside Elton's chivalry book. Bobby and Ben shove each other. Bobby takes a candy bar from the nearby shelf and pulls on Henry's shirt.

BOBBY

(holds up the candy bar)
Uncle Henry! Uncle Henry!

Henry motions for Bobby to place the candy on the pile of groceries. Ben sneaks another candy bar onto the pile. VIOLET and MINNIE, 50s Navajo, enter the store. Each pick a carry baskets.

Fasio, overwhelms the space between counter, register and Elton's stool. She appears flustered. A smoldering cigarette hangs from her mouth.

... while through the grocery window we see across the road, SHERIFF HOMER, male, 50s pull up to the gas station in a squad car. He parks, exits and talks to Elton who's washing away the spilled gas with a water hose.

Ben and Bobby run down an aisle. Fasio scowls at Isabel who runs after the boys.

... while through the grocery window, we see PASTOR ELI SMITH, 40s, serious, walk to the grocery entrance. MARY ANN, thin, mid 50s, plain, pious, runs to Pastor Eli from across the parking lot. She waylays him.

Fasio puts a bag of Henry's apples on the scale. Henry considers saying something, thinks twice.

HENRY

(reluctant)
Them apples are a dollar nineteen. Hope you're not charging for Granny Smiths. They're a dollar ninety-nine.

FASIO

Quit bothern' me, Henry. I'm concentrate'n. Besides, how would you know?

Fasio immediately regrets her words.

FASIO

Look, I've been runnin' this store since before you were born. I'll add it in my head if I have to.

Isabel returns with the boys. Henry looks humiliated then becomes pissed off.

HENRY
 (to Fasio)
 Isn't it against the law to smoke in a grocery store?

Surprised by Henry's boldness, Isabel puts her hand on his arm. Elaine arrives just as Fasio blasts at Henry.

FASIO
 It's my store!

Fasio returns to checking but has lost track. Elaine tries to go unnoticed and ducks behind some shelving.

FASIO
 Dammit, Henry. Would you just keep it buttoned 'til I'm through here?

Isabel pulls her boys close to protect them from Fasio. Violet and Minnie get in line with full baskets. Then Eddie arrives in line with a basket of groceries.

EDDIE
 Looks like Mary Ann's cornered the pastor. Lecturing him again. Big mistake making her an elder.

(NOTE: All instances of the Navajo language shall be indicated by being enclosed in brackets. On screen this text will appear in English subtitles.)

MINNIE
 (to Violet)
 [She's probably telling him he's not converting enough of us savage Indians.]

HENRY
 She's probably telling pastor he's not preachin' 'nough hell and damnation.

VIOLET
 [The new red church door reminds her of the devil.]

EDDIE
 Or he's not singing all one hundred verses of "Just As I Am."

... while through the grocery window we see Elton pass and nod to Pastor Eli Smith and Mary Ann. MALE CUSTOMER, 20s, follows behind ELton. He also nods to Pastor Eli Smith but shakes his head as if to say, "Sorry, dude" to the pastor.

... still seen through the window, CARL, mid 50s, nice looking, walks up to Mary Ann and forcefully grabs her arm and pulls her away. She objects, but sees Fasio at the register. She scowls then piously follows Carl to their truck.

Elaine reappears.

FASIO
(barking to Elaine)
Where you been?

Before Elaine can answer...

FASIO
Finish up with know-it-all Henry here.
And as soon as Elton remembers who's
payin' for his time, send him to me.

Fasio moves out from behind the counter, while Elaine slides around Fasio. Ben and Bobby huddle close to their mother as Fasio passes. Elaine waves away Fasio's lingering cigarette smoke.

HENRY
Hi, Elaine.

Elaine doesn't hear. She's engrossed with the register to review what Fasio checked or didn't check.

BOBBY
(to Elaine)
She shouldn't talk to Uncle Henry that way.

Henry waves at Bobby that it's okay. Elaine can't make heads or tails of what's been checked or not.

ELAINE
Damn you, Elton.

Elaine shoves the groceries back behind the code window to void the whole mess and start over. The line of customers GROAN.

HENRY
(to customers in line)
Hey, it's not her fault. Blame Elton.
(to Elaine)
It's okay. Take your time.

Elton enters, everyone SCOWLS at him. Elaine jerks her head that he's wanted in the office.

Pastor Eli Smith enters.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

Wow. Busy place. Good morning everyone.

MINNIE

Don't worry 'bout us. Me and my sister are Catholic.

VIOLET

I like the new red door. It's cheerful.

EDDIE

We only need two verses. We're all hungry and want to go home for lunch.

INT. FASIO'S CRAMPED OFFICE

Elton stands before the seated Fasio. Fasio TAPS out the stub of her cigarette longer than necessary to control her temper. She takes another and slips it in her mouth where it remains unlit. A large round wall clock is mounted behind her.

FASIO

(stern)

You're almost fired, Elton.

ELTON

Almost?

FASIO

(blurts out)

For God's sake, Elton, what're you wearing?!

ELTON

Tee-shirt and jeans. Is there a dress code now?

FASIO

On your mouth!

Elton takes the lipstick tube from his pocket and reads the label.

ELTON

Persimmon.

FASIO

Get back to work. I'm not paying you to help that drunken fool! Next time you'll be fired.

ELTON

Excuse me, but, you and I both know he's no fool, and in light of what I've just learned--

FASIO

Back to work, Elton! And wipe that crap off! I don't want no customers thinking I'd hire a queer! What the hell's wrong with you?

INT. GROCERY

Elton saunters out of Fasio's office and past the line of people. They SNICKER at the lipstick on his lips. Elton and Elaine curtsey around each other behind the check-out counter.

ELTON

You smell like smoke.

ELAINE

(points to his lips)
That's unsanitary.

ELTON

Maybe so. Worshipping sometimes has its risks.

She's had enough and gives him a shove.

ELAINE

Ohhhhhh... shut up.

Elton falls back into the register. It DINGS and CLANGS, spits out the cash drawer then RINGS up "0".

ELTON

(rubbing his back)
Whoops. Sorry, folks, but I have to start again.

The line of customers GROAN.

MALE CUSTOMER

What a freak.

BOBBY

Aw, mom, can we just go?

Elton slides all the groceries back across the code window.

ISABEL

(to Henry)
Can you take care of this? I'll walk home with the boys.

Henry nods "yes" while he looks around for Elaine.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT - DAY - LATER

Elton checks groceries for Violet and Minnie. They're snickering over his lipstick. Elaine bags their groceries.

ELTON
 (to Violet and Minnie)
 What'r you laughing at? Your own men have
 a history of wearing face paint.

VIOLET
 For ceremony. You in ceremony?

ELTON
 (thinking)
 Well, I suppose I am.

Elaine rolls her eyes. She hands Violet and Minnie their bagged groceries.

VIOLET
 (to Elton)
 We miss seeing you at rodeo.

ELTON
 I know. Same here.

EXT. NEW MEXICO COUNTRY HIGHWAY - SAME DAY.

A Ryder Truck with a small pick-up in tow is parked on the side of an isolated highway.

INT. RYDER TRUCK

Worried MONARCH, early 30s, slightly overweight, casually but fashionably dressed, studies a map. She slides her finger with nail chewed to the quick along a blue line on the map. Her finger settles on Santa Rita.

She checks the GAS GUAGE which registers just under a quarter tank. She looks out and around at the uncivilized landscape while chewing on an already butchered nail.

An embroidered cover drapes a bird cage on the seat next to her. She lifts the cover a bit and talks to the hidden occupant.

MONARCH
 You doing okay, Sebastian? Don't worry,
 I'll get you home safe... wherever "home"
 is.

EXT. NEW MEXICO COUNTRY HIGHWAY

Ryder truck and tow pulls out onto the highway.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY - LATER

Monarch's Ryder truck and tow coast into the lot to a pump.

INT. RYDER TRUCK

Monarch falls forward onto her hands on the wheel. The GAS GAUGE is just right of empty. SEBASTIAN, an African Grey parrot, wolf WHISTLES from under the cloth. Monarch sits up, takes a deep breath. She sees the "CLOSED" sign. She GROANS.

MONARCH

It's okay, it's okay. It's okay. Go with the flow... the flow... the flow.

Sebastian GARBLES. Monarch sees two NAVAJO MEN in the grocery parking lot. They stand and converse by their pick-ups. She rolls down her window.

MONARCH

(call to Navajo men)

Excuse me, sirs, but do you know when this station will be open again?

They shrug and shake their heads "no". She pauses.

MONARCH

Sorry to bother again, but, uh, is there another station around here?

Pointing further down the highway one of them says,

NAVAJO MAN

About 65 miles.

EXT. GAS STATION

Archie scoots out through the doggy door from inside the station, runs to Monarch's truck.

INT. RYDER TRUCK

Monarch slips on her red heels, rolls up the window, grabs the bird cage and her purse and slides out of the truck.

EXT. GAS STATION

Archie sniffs behind Monarch at her heels. Archie wags his tail. Monarch doesn't notice him.

Monarch looks up and down the highway. She locks the Ryder cab door, checks the handle, walks around to the back, checks the handle to confirm it's locked. She walks across the rough tarmac which is difficult in high heels.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elton, is reading his chivalry book then spots Monarch across the road. She's a sight: wearing red heels, carrying a covered bird cage and Archie following. Elton watches her as she crosses the highway to Main Street.

INT. BEAUTY SALON - SAME DAY

DELORES, 40s, bleached blonde and teased hair, long nails painted blue with glitter, wearing a plain dress and slip-on tennis shoes is cutting BERNIE's, mid 40s, cowboy type, melancholy; hair. The salon is otherwise sparse and people empty.

DELORES
 (sees Monarch)
 Who could that be, do you wonder?

Bernie quickly turns his head to look which causes Delores to nip the nape of his neck with her scissors. There's a trickle of blood.

BERNIE
 (rubs, finds blood)
 Ouch! Oh, baby, look what you did!

DELORES
 Oh dear. Sorry, sorry, never hurt
 a customer before.

BERNIE
 (sarcasm mixed with
 frustration)
 Baby, you're killing me.

Delores tissues the small wound.

DELORES
 Oh, it can't hurt that much.
 'Said I was sorry.

BERNIE
 Hurts like hell.

DELORES
 (referring to Monarch)
 Looks lost.

Bernie's not interested. He wants Delores' attention.

BERNIE
 Looks like we're going to have lots of
 calves this year.

DELORES
 Hmmmm.

BERNIE
You be home early tonight?

DELORES
I dunno. Why?

BERNIE
Thought we'd have dinner. Spend time
together for once.

DELORES
(walks to window)
Maybe, but I've lots to do here.

BERNIE
Like what?

DELORES
Like sweeping. Ordering supplies.

BERNIE
Like that'll take all of five minutes!

EXT. SANTA RITA MAIN STREET

Monarch approaches a store front with a "FOR RENT" sign. She studies the building, then her surroundings. She ponders, looks around, thinks again.

MONARCH
What do you think, Sebastian? Are you as
tired of traveling as I am?

INT. BEAUTY SALON

Delores, rips the neck of Bernie's apron open and flings the apron off and around. He reaches for her waist to pull her towards him but she backs away holding the apron between them like a matador. Despair veils over Bernie's face.

BERNIE
Why don't you want to be with me? I'm
your husband for chrissakes.

Delores escapes behind the counter.

DELORES
Aw, com'on, Bernie.

Bernie slowly stands, puts on his cowboy hat and leaves for the door just as Monarch passes the salon window. He doesn't notice Monarch, but Delores does, peering past Bernie's pain.

BERNIE
I'll be camping out on the range
tonight. Don't wait for supper.

Monarch arrives back at the salon door as Bernie exits. He glides around Monarch who enters the beauty salon. Delores, aware of Monarch's stylish way is suddenly equally aware and self-conscious of her own plain dress.

DELORES

Can I help you?

MONARCH

Yes. The building across the street, for rent. Do you know how I can get in touch with the owner?

DELORES

That'd be Fasio. Owns most buildings 'round here. Owns this one. You interested?

MONARCH

Yeah, yes. I think so.

DELORES

Well, we could use a little more style. Actually, a lot more.

Delores focuses in on Monarch's red heels.

MONARCH

(self-conscious laugh)

Not too practical, huh? Right now I'd trade them for a pair of tennis shoes.

Archie watches Monarch through the glass door. He lies down and waits.

Delores unashamedly, pulls off her tennis shoes and, hopeful, holds them out for Monarch's inspection.

DELORES

You serious about trading?

She glides her tennis shoes closer to Monarch who is amazed with Delores' boldness, but graciously agrees to the trade.

MONARCH

If you don't mind, I'd be grateful.

Monarch sets the bird cage on the floor. After exchanging shoes, Delores gleefully skips to and sits in a parlor chair. While Monarch easily slips into the too big tennis shoes, Delores struggles but manages to squeeze into the heels.

DELORES

Perfect!

MONARCH

Yes, perfect. So, where can I find this Fasio person?

DELORES

At the grocery, back on the highway, up a block. Can't miss it. You're not plan'n on open'n a beauty salon? A dress shop, maybe?

MONARCH

Oh, no. A bookstore. Used books.

DELORES

Books? Well, I don't think you're gonna find too many customers 'round here. 'Less they got pictures o' cows in 'em.

MONARCH

(polite laugh)
I can always adjust my inventory.

DELORES

(polite laugh)
Me too. The way of a storekeeper, right?

Delores stands and stumbles a bit as the shoes are too tight but her determination exceeds her discomfort.

DELORES

Rent isn't cheap. Main street an' all. Prime location.

MONARCH

That's okay. I'm sure it's worth it. I can just ask for him at the grocery store? This Fasio person?

DELORES

Her. You can ask for her, but don't let her cheat ya. Hold to your price, or, I'll swear, she'll stick you. No mercy that woman.

MONARCH

(picks up the bird cage)
Well, thank you and maybe we'll be neighbors.

DELORES

What's in the cage?

MONARCH

This here is Sebastian.

Monarch slops in her "new" shoes towards the door, adjusts her purse strap on her shoulder then stops.

MONARCH

Do you have a bag? Any bag?

Delores hobbles over to and behind the counter where she retrieves a small paper bag. She holds it up.

MONARCH

That will do just fine, thank you.

Monarch slops over to the counter, removes her purse from her shoulder and proceeds to dump its contents into the paper bag. She then hands the empty red purse to Delores.

MONARCH

Here. Goes with the shoes.

DELORES

(really wants the purse)
Oh, I couldn't. You can't mean...

Monarch pushes the purse towards her. Delores SQUEALS. Sebastian SQUEALS.

DELORES

Well, I just can't believe my good fortune today. Thank you! I'll be the envy of Santa Rita!

MONARCH

You're welcome.

DELORES

My name's Delores.

MONARCH

Monarch.

DELORES

Monarch?

Monarch nods and shrugs, as if she's used to the surprise reactions to her name. She grabs the bird cage, paper bag purse and turns to leave. Outside the door Archie rises to attention.

DELORES

It's been a pleasure, Monarch. If you stop biting those nails, I'll give you a manicure. On the house, okay? Hell, ten manicures!

Monarch quickly covers her hands, embarrassed.

MONARCH

Nice meeting you too, Delores.

EXT. SANTA RITA MAIN STREET

Monarch walks down the street. She steps out of a tennis shoe, stops, slips back into it then walks on while Archie trots behind, yet unnoticed by Monarch.

INT. BEAUTY SALON

Delores retrieves her oversized old purse and empties the mostly useless contents onto the counter. She picks out a tube of lipstick and a compact and drops them into the red purse.

She places the purse strap across her shoulder and struts around the room in front of the mirror. She's delighted, child-like and womanly at the same time... then is disappointed with her plain house dress so takes a pile of style magazines, plops in a chair and loses herself in the pictures.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elton studies a picture of a twelfth century troubadour in his chivalry book. Elaine shelves candy bars nearby.

EXT. GROCERY PARKING LOT

We follow behind Monarch's too large tennis shoes, Archie level, as he paces up to the tall grass bordering the parking lot. Motley Dog emerges. The two dogs meet and greet. Monarch continues to and through the grocery door. Archie hurries to the door, and sits with an eye on Monarch.

INT. GROCERY STORE

Monarch stands just inside the door. She briefly acknowledges Elton and Elaine then looks around.

ELAINE

Ma'am, do you need help or something?

MONARCH

I'm looking for a Ms. Fasio. Im thinking of renting one of her buildings.

Elaine checks Elton's attention to this fairly attractive strange woman and is reluctant to leave to get Fasio but Elton does not make a move.

ELAINE

(sighs)

I'll get her.

Elton smiles at Monarch. She smiles back. Is he wearing lipstick? She looks away, then at him again.

ELTON
 (referring to Archie)
 Looks like you have an admirer.

Monarch thinks he means himself and stares at him; and, yes, that is lipstick. Elton nods towards the door and Archie beyond. Monarch looks behind her and sees Archie for the first time.

MONARCH
 Not mine.

Elton smiles. She begins to bite a nail then stops remembering Delores' comment.

FRANK, late 20s with a black eye, approaches the door from the outside. He gives Archie a familiar pat on the head. Monarch blocks the door so Frank RAPS on the glass. Monarch jumps aside.

Frank enters and gives Monarch a long once over.

FRANK
 Hi, Elton.

ELTON
 Frank.

Frank does a double take at Elton's lipstick.

FRANK
 Shit, Elton. What're you up to now?

ELTON
 Research.

FRANK
 What, how not to attract strange women?

Phone RINGS in Fasio's office.

SEBASTIAN
 Someone answer the god'm phone!

FRANK
 What the hell? Who's in there?

MONARCH
 Sebastian! Hush! Bad boy!

She removes the cloth. Sebastian hangs upside down.

SEBASTIAN
 Help! Help! M'n'ark! M'n'ark!

MONARCH
 Sebastian! Stop!

SEBASTIAN

'Baston stop!

Elton is delighted. Monarch encourages the bird upright, then covers the cage again.

FASIO (O.S.)

(loudly)

What building? And who's asking? What's goin' on out there?!

Monarch is struck by Fasio's gruff voice and reconsiders this whole impromptu business. She begins to leave.

ELTON

No, wait. Her bark's bigger. Harmless, really.

With the back of his hand, Elton wipes the lipstick from his mouth but some of it smears and remains. Fasio enters with Elaine.

FASIO

(to Monarch)

Who are you?

MONARCH

I uh, was told to see you about renting a space, uh,
(searching for words)
Uh, downtown.

FASIO

You want to rent one o' my buildings?

MONARCH

Yes, mam, Ms. Fasio. I have books, used books... and...

She bites on a nail then stops herself.

FASIO

You want someplace to store your books?

Monarch looks to Elton. He winks with encouragement. Elaine glares at them both.

MONARCH

A bookstore.

Fasio looks skeptical.

ELTON

I could use a bookstore. I'm desperate for books. Especially used books. New books are too... too... new.

FASIO
 For chrissakes, Elton.
 I don't pay you for lip service.
 Especially smeared with... what'd you
 call it?

ELTON
 Persimmon.

He smiles at Monarch who can't help but smile back. Elaine
 can't take it and disappears.

FASIO
 I don't see how you expect to make money
 on books. 'Specially used ones. I need a
 hundred thirty-five dollars a month.

Monarch holds back a sputter.

FASIO
 Up front. Prime downtown and all.
 And you're responsible for your own heat
 and utilities.

MONARCH
 That's fair.

Frank approaches the check-out with a few groceries.

FRANK
 Pack of Marlboros.

While Elton gets keys for the cigarette cabinet, Frank stares
 at Monarch. Elaine comes back with another box of candy. She
 opens and begins to shelve while she scrutinizes Monarch.

Monarch digs into her paper bag, fumbles a bit until a wad of
 rolled bills drops to the floor. The group freezes and stares
 at the cash. Monarch quickly picks it up.

ELAINE
 What'd you do? Rob a bank?

MONARCH
 Oh, no, no...
 (second thought with sarcasm)
 Well, maybe.

FRANK
 (laughing)
 Yeah, with your bird there doin' all the
 talkin': "Stick 'em up! Squawk! Or I'll
 shoot! Squawk!"

MONARCH
 No, really, it's mine. The money's
 legitimately mine.

FASIO

It better be. I don't support fugitives.

Frank eyes the roll of money as Monarch puts it back in the paper bag. Fasio addresses Monarch then glares at Frank.

FASIO

You're going directly to the bank and deposit that, right?

MONARCH

Yes, yes, of course.

Fasio motions Monarch to follow her to her office. Monarch lifts the cage to take with.

ELTON

I'll watch that for you.

Monarch, reluctant at first agrees and places it on the counter by Elton. She then follows Fasio. Elton RINGS up Frank's cigarettes.

FRANK

You selling Mary fuckin' Kay now? Gonna earn yourself a pink ca-dee-lac?

ELTON

And I have some lovely green glitter eye shadow to go with that black eye.

Frank shrugs and laughs. Elaine is frustrated with everybody and everything.

ELAINE

(to Frank)

What's wrong with you? You go to work, then go drinking with your buddies every night, get beat up then go home to beat your idiot girlfriends, then fuck 'em leaving them to take care of your babies. What's that all about anyway, Frank?

SEBASTIAN

What the hell?????!!!

Elton peaks under the cage's cover.

FRANK

(paying)

Go fuck yourself, Elaine. If you don't like the pickin's go someplace else.

(exiting the grocery)

Obviously no one wants you either.

Elaine throws the box of candy at the door as it shuts behind Frank.

Frank throws Elaine the finger and walks away laughing. Elton stiffly crawls on the floor to gather scattered candy. He rubs his back.

ELTON

You need to be careful about picking your battles. There's a reason he always has a black eye.

ELAINE

(hand to her head)

Sorry, I had no idea that was in me.

ELTON

You should probably apologize to him.

She thinks a moment, stares at Elton then abruptly turns her back, wipes away tears and disappears into the aisles.

ELTON

(calls after her)

It's a good thing you weren't shelving cans of corn.

ELAINE (O.S.)

Fuck you.

Monarch returns. She finds Elton on the floor gathering candy bars. She starts to ask what happened then decides not to.

MONARCH

Can you recommend a good place to stay?

ELTON

Santa Rita Lodge. It's historic, you'll like it. Maybe you can write your own book about Santa Rita. It was an important cattle town. Once.

She tips around strewn candy bars to get the bird cage then on her way to the door.

MONARCH

We'll see. I hope you two stop by the bookstore sometime.

Elton, on the floor, notices Monarch's oversize tennis shoes.

ELTON

You bet. Name please?

MONARCH

Monarch.

ELAIN (O.S.)

Like the butterfly? Are you kidding?

ELTON
It's a nice name.

Monarch gives him a half smile and exits. From Elton's low vantage point he watches Monarch walk across the grocery parking lot with Archie right behind her.

ELTON
I wonder why Archie's following her.

ELAINE
(reenters)
Maybe for the same reason you are.

ELTON
Maybe it's her smell.

ELAINE
(resentful)
Smell?

ELTON
I like the scent of women, yes.

ELAINE
Don't be crude.

ELTON
Not at all the way I meant it.

EXT. OUTSIDE SANTA RITA - DUSK - SAME DAY

A black truck races down a road, a whirl of dust in its wake

INT. BLACK TRUCK

Distraught Bernie, a rifle and a paper bag beside him, eventually slows and veers off the road into a wide dry arroyo bed. He parks beneath a bluff among brush and rock.

Bernie turns off the engine and looks around. He evaluates his surroundings.

BERNIE
As good 'a place as any.

He takes a bottle of booze from the paper bag, cracks the seal and drinks. He strokes the rifle then sits back.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Most of the store lights are off but for one above the register where Elton counts money, then bags the bills.

ELTON
You locking up tonight?

INT. GROCERY

Elaine cleans the meat counter. She's been silently crying.

ELAINE
Yeah, I'll get it.

ELTON (O.S.)
See you Monday then.

ELAINE
Monday.

EXT. GROCERY

Elton exits the store with a small bag of groceries and his book. Motley Dog lopes out from the grass towards Elton but keeps a cautious distance.

ELTON
Hey, buddy. Looking for someone?

Elton kneels down and the dog cowers towards him then sniffs Elton's hand. Elton strokes the dog's matted head then quickly pulls his hand away. He smells his hand and flinches.

ELTON
Whew, what'd you get into?

Elton checks his pocket with the clean hand for a kerchief. Finding one, he shakes it out which frightens the dog back into the tall grass.

ELTON
Sorry, buddy.

He wipes his hand with the kerchief, smells his palm, then walks on holding the foul hand out and away from his body.

He walks down Main Street to the beauty shop where Delores can be seen sitting in the salon chair, legs crossed. She swings her foot up and down while the high heel dangles from her toes.

INT. BEAUTY SALON

Delores thumbs through a "Vogue" magazine. She's unbuttoned the top two buttons of her dress revealing a bit of cleavage. Elton enters the salon.

ELTON
Hey, Delores.

Rifle SHOT. Delores is startled and jumps in her chair.

DELORES

My God, Elton. You scared me. I was all the way to Paris shopping.

ELTON

Looks like you bought a pair of shoes while you were there.

She reaches down to shove the high heels back on and absent minded-ly reveals more cleavage. She struggles with the shoes but manages to squeeze them on.

DELORES

My feet are a bit swollen.

(stands and poses)

Gives me a certain je ne sais quoi, don't you think? Whatever that means. I'm sure it's something good.

ELTON

It means "an indescribable something."

DELORES

Trying to look like the magazines. I guess I'm a bit old... whew, what's that smell?

ELTON

Dog rolling in dead animal I think. Can I wash up?

DELORES

Please do.

(buttons her dress)

ELTON

C'mon, Del. Since when are you shy? Leave it unbuttoned. You look good.

DELORES

Really?

Elton nods, sets his groceries and chivalry book aside, then retreats to the rest room. She re-undoes the buttons and checks herself in the mirror. WATER RUNS in restroom.

ELTON (O.S.)

You open for business?

DELORES

Bernie's out with his cows for the night. I can stay open as long as I very well please.

ELTON (O.S.)

Say, what's wrong with Bernie lately?

DELORES
I don't know. What do you mean?

Elton re-enters the room drying his hands with a paper towel.

ELTON
He seems distracted. Not himself.

DELORES
Can't say I've noticed.

Elton tosses the towel in a wastebasket, retrieves his book then plops into the salon chair. He opens the book to a picture of a twelfth century troubadour with a short page boy type hairdo.

DELORES
(undoing his braid)
So, we just trimming up your loose ends?

ELTON
(TAPS the picture)
No, cutting it off to look like that.

DELORES
No, you can't be serious.

ELTON
Living by a new code.

DELORES
Another one of your things? What happened to all that spiritual gobble-ty gook? The chalk talk?

ELTON
Chakras. I learned. I experienced. Became more aware.
(reciting from the book)
"Knights of the Round Table forged their own noble paths in search of the Holy Grail." I'm on my path. Did you know knights wore spurs?

She picks up the book, thumbs pages, then looks at the cover.

DELORES
Chivalry? Really? Still trying to win her back?

EXT. GROCERY BACK DOOR - SAME NIGHT

Fasio exits the door with a small sack of groceries. Motley Dog crawls into the ambient light which scares Fasio.

FASIO

What th'!... Oh, you mangy thing. Someone
shudda drown you as a puppy.

INT. BRONCO

Fasio sets the grocery bag in the passenger seat, starts the car, pushes in the lighter, sits back and waits. She lights a cigarette. The dog watches her, a real hangdog. She puts the car in gear and drives off.

INT. BERNIE'S TRUCK -- SAME NIGHT

Bernie is slumped over the steering wheel, his hat askew revealing the nip on the back of his head. Coyotes HOWL.

EXT. GROCERY FRONT DOOR - SAME NIGHT

Elaine shuts off the last of the lights then exits with a small bag of groceries. She locks the door behind her. Motley Dog sulks up towards her. She shoos him away and walks on. The dog retreats into the tall grass.

INT. FASIO'S KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Fasio enters through the kitchen's sliding glass doors. The TV NEWS plays LOUDLY in another room. Fasio begins a routine dinner prep.

She lights a cigarette, un-bags groceries, checks the clock, puts two TV dinners in the microwave, opens two cans of "cokes", checks mail, checks the clock, etc. -- all a minute by minute old routine.

INT. FASIO'S LIVING ROOM

RODGER, 60s, overweight, stares at the tv screen. Fasio sets the dinners next to the "cokes" on the table between their side-by-side matching lazy-boys.

They don't exchange words, not for animosity, but for the unconscious routine of it all. She plops in her chair, picks up the remote and changes the channel from the NEWS to JEOPARDY. She places her spent cigarette in the dirty ashtray next to her chair.

FASIO

You didn't clean the ashtrays today.

TIME PASSES - NIGHT

Rodger, with an empty TV dinner plate on his lap has dozed off. Fasio checks her watch then takes a final drag of her cigarette and SNUFFS it out.

She MUTES the TV and waits, looks down at her hands in her lap, waits, checks her long polished nails, waits -- until the sound of BELLS passes outside their window. She looks to heaven, UN-MUTES the TV and lights another cigarette.

EXT. SANTA RITA LODGE - SAME NIGHT.

Monarch opens the back of the Ryder truck while Archie sits close by. The truck is packed to brim with same size boxes neatly stacked and marked: "fiction", "non-fiction", "bio's", "classics", "history", "western", "mysteries", etc..

She pulls out a small suitcase. She steps but slips out of a tennis shoe and her barefoot hits the ground.

MONARCH

Eeech! Ow, ow, ow!

Her foot reflexes upward. Several "goatheads" are embedded in her heel. She pulls them out then hobbles around for the shoe. Without her notice Archie suddenly races off. Monarch closes the truck and takes her suitcase and bags.

INT. MONARCH'S MOTEL ROOM

Monarch locks the door behind her, then the security latch. The empty birdcage is on a chair. Sebastian is on the bed.

Monarch prepares a picnic from a wicker basket atop the bed. She removes fine linen, silver and crystal, wine and food.

MONARCH

You hungry, Sebastian? I promise. When we get settled, I'll set you up in the finest and biggest. No more prisons. Okay?

INT. ELAINE'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Elaine has a couple of hot dogs, a bowl of popcorn and a beer next to her chair. The ambient light reveals a cluttered living room. She removes a video tape from a well worn cover and shoves it into a VCR player. She plops into the chair.

The 1998 movie "The Matchmaker" starring Jeneane Garofalo begins. Elaine adjusts the VOLUME then tosses the remote aside. She shoves a handful of popcorn in her mouth, then gulps some beer.

EXT. ELTON'S HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Elton, carrying his book and two paper bags, approaches his fenced yard where his overweight pug dog, CHEEZER, waits for him. The dog rolls onto his back.

ELTON

Aw don't make me bend over, Cheezer.
C'mon. I brought you something.

INT. ELTON'S ENTRANCE HALLWAY

Just inside the front door Elton strikes a match and lights a candle on a hallway table. The candle-light illuminates bronco and bull-riding trophies, ribbons, clown kachina, and photo of he and a girl. He takes a candle and one of the paper bags with.

INT. ELTON'S BATHROOM

In the flickering light we see Elton's new hair-do is just like the picture in his chivalry book. He shakes his head to feel the hair hit his face.

From the paper bag he takes out a curling iron and his long cut-off braid. He retrieves the tube of Persimmon lipstick from his pocket and draws a decorative border on the mirror above the sink. Pleased, he moves to an altar hanging on the opposite wall.

The altar has a doll wrapped in white hankie. Small twigs are glued to her head like antlers and her chin is painted with black stripes a la Eskimo woman's tattoo. A dried cholla flower wreath drapes around the altar.

Elton lights a candle encased in a Madonna of Guadeloupe glass jar. The candlelight reveals more of the altar: jewelry pieces and a plastic figure of a nun. He places the tube of lipstick next to the nun.

Elton takes off his shirt and tee-shirt. His back has a thick scar along his spine from neck to waist.

He gazes at himself in the mirror, then the reflection of the doll altar behind him, then at himself, he combs his hair with his fingers... tears well up in his eyes... then he drops to the toilet, head in hands.

ELTON

(whimpering)

Oh, Holly, I miss you so much...

EXT. SANTA RITA DARKENED PATHWAY - SAME NIGHT

Archie trots alongside belled ankles strapped above shoeless feet. The feet wear the same shabby socks seen earlier worn by TR. JINGLE.

EXT. DELORES'HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Delores hobbles up to and into her fenced yard. Six dogs yap and nip at each other to get to Delores.

DELORES

Hi, kids. Y'all been good today?

The dogs jump and knock her off her heels. She TUMBLES to the ground and the dogs are all over her.

DELORES

Stop, stop, stop... ohhhhh, my ankle.

(calling)

Bernie! Bernie!... ohhh shit. Okay, okay, boys and girls, quit. Help mamma into the house.

The dogs scatter, chase and run amongst themselves.

DELORES

Damn't, I'm gonna miss my blessing!

(beat) Oh, what the hell.

She takes off the heels, rubs her ankle and struggles to her feet. She limps to the porch and through the unlocked door.

INT. DELORES' LIVING ROOM

Delores flops into a chair. She turns on a floor lamp, glances at the time on a mantle clock while she rubs her ankle. She then sees that one of the guns is missing in the open gun cabinet.

INT. ELTON'S KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Shirtless Elton sets a lit candle in a holder on the table. He takes a box of crackers and cheese whiz out of a grocery bag and sits at the table with his back to an open window. He proceeds to fix crackers whizzed with cheese. He eats one, feeds one to the dog, eats one...

He stops for a moment, listens, eats a cracker, stops, listens, then leans back in the chair.

EXT. CHURCH WALL - SAME NIGHT

Archie trots alongside TR's belled ankles. TR staggers.
JINGLE.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

Pastor Eli Smith is at his desk studying his Bible. A plate of half eaten dinner is nearby. He hears the BELLS outside his office's high small window. He flops back in his chair.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

Damned Bells. Utter foolishness.

EXT. ISABEL'S BACKYARD - SAME NIGHT

Bobby and Ben jump on a trampoline by porch light. Their dog runs around the trampoline. Isabel calls to them from inside.

ISABEL (O.S.)
Hey kids, it's almost time. Get
in here now.

They ignore her plea, reluctant to end the fun.

BEN
(jumping on trampoline)
Mom, how does the angel know when it's
daylight savings?

ISABEL (O.S.)
Angles know everything. Please! Stop!
Right now! I don't want it to hear me
yelling at you.

The boys slowly obey.

INT. ISABEL'S KITCHEN

Isabel looks at the clock on the kitchen wall, checks it against the clock on the micro, against the clock on the stove, against her wristwatch. Panicky, she races out the door for the kids and shoos them into the house. The screen door SLAMS behind her.

She scoots Bobby to the living area.

ISABEL
Ben, turn off the porch light and
join us. Don't dally.

Ben is obedient but is tired of this routine.

INT. SHERIFF HOMER'S WORKSHOP - SAME NIGHT

Sheriff Homer is at his carpenter's table. He sands a wood box with horseshoe handles. He checks his watch, turns off the electric sander, sets his stool by the window, sits with back to window and waits.

INT. ELTON'S KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Elton has dozed off in his chair. The bells JINGLE outside the open window behind him. Cheezer sits up and cocks his ears. Elton wakes. The bells JINGLE, STUMBLE then JINGLE on.

INT. ISABEL'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Isabel and her two boys are piled on the sofa, their backs to the picture window.

Ben fumbles with a rubber band around and through his fingers. The dog lays at their feet. Henry sits in an adjacent chair. Henry suddenly rises and leaves.

BOBBY

Uncle Henry, where you going? It's almost time.

HENRY

To my room.

BEN

Mom, Henry can't leave, can he?

ISABEL

Henry? Are you okay?

Henry doesn't answer but continues to his room.

BOBBY

Can I go to my room?

ISABEL

No. Hush and listen.

Bobby flops back against the sofa and pouts. The rubber band shoots from his fingers and hits the dog who looks around startled. The boys stifle GIGGLES. Isabel has her eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM

Henry slides his window open. He moves the bed stand and pulls the bed just to the window's edge. He nervously sits on the bed just in time for the bells to JINGLE outside. He covers his eyes, leans into the open window and...

HENRY

(stage whisper)

Make Elaine like me. No! No! Love me!
Love me!

The bells stop short and Henry flops back and away from the window. The bells begin to JINGLE away and he realizes something. Averting his eyes he leaps back to the window.

HENRY

It's me, Henry!

INT. ISABEL'S LIVING ROOM

A shadow passes by the window behind Isabel, Bobby and Ben on the sofa. They hear the bells JINGLE and she genuflects. The dog prances to the window, leans up on the sill, tail wagging. Ben turns to sneak a peek out the window but Isabel slaps the back of his head.

INT. ELAINE'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Elaine watches the movie and mouths the dialogue of character voice #1.

ELAINE

"Is being an idiot like being high all the time?"

She mouths the dialogue of character voice #2.

ELAINE

"No, it's like being constantly right."

BELLS are heard outside. She turns up the movie VOLUME.

INT. MARY ANN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Mary Ann sits in a straight backed chair, hands folded in her lap. A crocheted piece is on the table next to her. Carl sits in a soft chair and cleans his rifle. The TICKING of a grandfather clock dominates the sterile room.

CARL

Homer and I are sharing an elk tag this year. A whole elk is too much for us anymore.

Mary Ann checks the clock, then her watch.

MARY ANN

Uh, huh.

CARL

Hear there's lots of elk this--

MARY ANN

Hush!

Bells JINGLE outside -- and stumble. THUD.

MARY ANN

For heaven's sake.

For Carl, it's as if he doesn't hear or care anymore. The Bells JINGLE, STAGGER, and move on. Mary Ann gathers her crochet and smugly sinks into her chair.

MARY ANN

But, dear. We usually tithe a quarter elk to the church.

CARL

We'll just tithe less.

MARY ANN

I think we'd best have a whole elk.

CARL

This is the last year. I'm getting too old. You understand? Last time.

She crochets ignoring him as if to say, "You'll get a whole elk this year, and the next, and the next..."

INT. MONARCH'S MOTEL ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Monarch has finished her meal and watches the WEATHER CHANNEL while biting a nail. She hears BELLS outside the small alley window above her bed. She MUTES the TV and steps up onto the bed to peer outside but it's too dark.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE UP: INT. CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY.

The sparse CONGREGATION limply sings the end of "How Great Thou Art". MYRTLE plays the organ. Delores sits next to Mary Ann who's next to Carl. Pastor Eli Smith approaches the pulpit with serious resolve. Myrtle ends the hymn and goes to her seat in the front row.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

Thank you, Myrtle. That was some inspiring music.

(to congregation)

Good Morning.

No response.

Delores flips through her oversized picture Bible.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

Ahem. This morning's sermon is on a subject fundamental to the Christian life. Faith. The kind of faith that challenged all the great men... and women of the Bible. Men... and women who are our cherished examples. Job, for instance, who's friends told him to curse God and die while he was in the most horrible of circumstances; lost his entire family and his wealth. And more than these tragic losses, he suffered from bleeding, oozing, puss-filled open sores all over his body. He can't sit, lie down, walk...

CHURCH WOMAN

(whispering)

We get the point.

PASTOR ELI SMITH (O.S.)
 Well, you get the point.
 (can't resist)
 And he must of smelled pretty bad.

Some in the congregation GROAN, some fan their noses with their bulletins.

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 Once a rich man he's left with
 nothing. Just a tree to sit under
 and a potsherd to scrape the sores that
 completely cover his body. And what gets
 him through this trouble?

He looks out at his flock with expectation but they are unresponsive. With uncharacteristic aggression, he POUNDS the pulpit...

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 Faith!

The congregation JUMP in their seats. Delores' Bible THUDS to the floor.

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 (regretting his outburst)
 I'm sorry, excuse me... faith, yes, faith
 in the unseen... and... dare I say...
 unheard.

The congregation shifts with discomfort.

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 (clearing throat)
 If you would, please, turn in your Bibles
 to Romans 3:22.

He flips to his chosen scripture. Mary Ann quickly finds the referenced scripture in her black bible.

Delores thumbs through her large Bible and lands on an illustration of an Egyptian Nobel-woman.

Pastor Eli Smith perceives Delores' attention to her Bible as being engaged with his sermon and he is encouraged.

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 "This righteousness from God comes
 through faith in Jesus Christ to all who
 believe... "

DELORES
 (to herself)
 With the right material, I could
 make that into a stunning evening
 gown.

Delores, crosses her leg with her red shoes in Mary Ann's view. Mary Ann SCOFFS. Delores, however, is oblivious to Mary Ann's disapproval. Delores takes an offering envelope and pencil from the pew's pocket. She begins to draw.

PASTOR ELI SMITH (O.S.)
 Matthew 8:23 reads: "And when He", he
 being Jesus,"entered into a ship, his
 disciples followed him. And, behold,
 there arose a great tempest in the
 sea..."

Delores wants to erase her drawing but the short pencil has a blunt end.

PASTOR ELI SMITH (O.S.)
 (getting worked up)
 "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"
 And what did Jesus say?

Delores' pencil lead breaks.

DELORES
 Oh shit.

Mary Ann rolls her eyes. Carl LAUGHS softly then receives a sharp elbow in his side from Mary Ann.

Pastor Eli Smith looks around for a response but the people are bewildered by his moment of theater. He takes a DEEP BREATH, CLEARS his throat...

PASTOR ELI SMITH
 I'll tell you what he didn't say.
 He didn't say, "Listen for the Bells!"
 Oh, you of little faith!

INT. BOOKSTORE - SAME DAY

Monarch moves boxes from the Ryder truck into the store. Sebastian is in his cage atop a box. Elton KNOCKS on the open door. He wears a cowboy hat and his tee-shirt is printed with Our Lady of Guadalupe.

SEBASTIAN
 Damn it! No interruptions!

ELTON
 Sorry. Can I come in?

MONARCH
 It's a store. No need to knock.

ELTON
 (enters, removes his hat)
 I'd wonder if the bird speaks for you but
 that's a man's voice.
 (MORE)

There are plenty of men in town who'd move your boxes. I know you're good for the cash.

MONARCH

I'm working it out as I go. I'll need someone to build me some shelves, though. What did you do to your hair?

ELTON

A new quest.

MONARCH

What?

ELTON

Some search through experience...
(waving arm over her books)
Some through books. Some, like me, through both.

MONARCH

You mean like the Holy Grail? With a hair-do? I saw that you're reading a book on chivalry.

ELTON

That's right. Chivalry.

He gazes into her eyes for more input. She looks away. Sebastian wolf WHISTLES.

MONARCH

Then you must write poetry, sing, and play the lute?

ELTON

No, I just think about poetry and singing. Can't hold a tune. But I play the ukulele. Sort of.

He sits on some boxes. Monarch bites a nail.

MONARCH

I'm sorry, but could you not sit on the books?

He jumps up. Awkward silent moment.

ELTON

The haircut is meant to keep my attention on the idea. It's been my experience that when you ask a question of the Universe it's best to pay attention. If you get the answer and you're not paying attention, you could get hurt.

MONARCH

Maybe it's safest to just not ask.

ELTON

Maybe we don't know we're asking. Maybe that's how you ended up here.

MONARCH

I lo..., er, liked the braid. So what's your question? The chivalry question?

Elton strolls around, perusing the piles of books.

ELTON

Recent circumstances, well, not so recent, have forced me to ask about my views on love, the masculine honoring the feminine.

MONARCH

Recent circumstances?
(referring to his hair)
Do you have to curl it to do that?

ELTON

Delores sold me a curling iron.
(holds back his bangs)
Burned my forehead.

Monarch can't help but LAUGH.

SEBASTIAN

Damn it to hell!

ELTON

Did you get that parrot from Blue Beard?

MONARCH

That, kind sir, is the voice of my father.

SEBASTIAN

'Bastard!

MONARCH

St. Sebastian is fifteen years old and has heard my father's frustrations all that time. Maybe he recognized a fellow jail bird.

They turn in unison towards the street; to the sight and sound of a GALLOPING horse and COWBOY rider. They hurry to the door to watch as the horse and rider speed to the Sheriff's office. The rider passes Frank across the street.

The cowboy leaps off the horse and into the building. A moment later Sheriff Homer hurries out and into his squad car. He drives away even as the cowboy points directions.

Elton runs out and up to the Cowboy who's remounted his horse. Monarch watches the cowboy explain to Elton. The two men clasp forearms and the rider pulls Elton expertly up and behind him onto the horse. The horse and riders race off.

Monarch is struck by Elton's masculinity. She doesn't notice Frank walking towards the shop's door. He KNOCKS. His black eye has faded but he now has a cut lip.

SABASTION

Com'in!

MONARCH

Oh, hi. Frank, isn't it?

FRANK

(referring to horse and rider)
Something's going on there, huh?

MONARCH

Looks like it. Is there something I can do for you? Fiction, non-fiction? If I don't have it, I'm sure I can find it for you.

FRANK

(slinks in on her)
Oh, I'm sure you have what I want.

Sebastian wolf WHISTLES which scares Frank as the bird is out of his cage walking around.

FRANK

Uh, that's not an attack bird, is it?

MONARCH

Oh, no... his bark's bigger. Harmless, really.

Frank regains his bravado and moves closer to Monarch making her nervous. She backs up.

MONARCH

(looks at her watch)
Uh, I, uh, was just about to close.
Actually, I expect to be closed Sundays.
You'll have to come back some other time.

Frank sidles even closer to her. Just then Elaine walks by, sees Frank's move on Monarch and barges into the store.

ELAINE

Since when did you read books, Frank?

FRANK

Since when did you start minding you're own business?

ELAINE

Leave her alone.

MONARCH

Yes, Frank, you better leave.

It's two against one so Frank saunters out. He bumps up against Elaine on the way out but she acts unperturbed.

MONARCH

Thank's.

(she extends her hand)

My name is Monarch.

ELAINE

(lamely shakes her hand)

I know. I'm Elaine. Frank's a creep but if you stand up to him, he'll back off.

(pauses, then turns to leave)

Well, you're okay now.

As she exits the store, she sees Archie by the door. Elaine is confused with Archie's continued interest in Monarch.

MONARCH

(calls after Elaine)

Thanks. I owe you a book.

INT. CHRIST CHURCH - SAME DAY

The Congregation lazily SINGS the closing hymn "Just As I Am". Sheriff Homer enters the atrium and motions for Pastor. Pastor Eli motions to organist Myrtle to continue while he walks down the center aisle to Sheriff Homer.

The congregation follows Pastor Eli with their eyes and eventually abandon the song. Sheriff Homer WHISPERS to Pastor Eli who drops his head for the apparent sad report. He leads the sheriff up the aisle to Delores.

She peers into Sheriff's eyes. She intuitively knows then GASPS placing her hand with long red painted nails to her mouth. Sheriff holds his hand out for Delores.

Delores tosses her offering envelope drawings into her Bible, shoulders her red bag, replaces the pencil and stands with as much grace as shock. Sheriff leads her down the isle into the atrium. Part way out she stops...

DELORES

Pastor, you need to sharpen those damned pencils... and get some with erasers on 'em.

Pastor Eli Smith returns to the pulpit. Delores, in the atrium with Sheriff Homer, HOWLS out. The congregation SIGHS with compassion -- except for Mary Ann.

MARY ANN

(whispering to Carl)

For goodness sake. Sounds like one 'o her dogs.

Carl scowls at Mary Ann. He turns and looks over his shoulder for Delores.

EXT. HILLSIDE CEMETERY - DAY

Trucks, truck with horse trailer and cars are parked nearby. Pastor Eli Smith, Delores and OTHERS, hold small bundles of flowers. They are gathered around a plain pine box as it's lowered into the grave.

Elton stands near Elaine. He's wearing a black embroidered cowboy shirt with bolo tie, black jeans, black belt with turquoise buckle, fancy cowboy boots and black cowboy hat.

Monarch stands alone and apart with flowers in hand. She stares at Elton's handsome dignity.

FUNERAL ATTENDEES line around the grave and toss, one by one, flowers and a fist of dirt into the grave.

Fasio and Rodger pass the grave then give Delores a hug who is barely aware of who's hugging her. Fasio passes behind Elton and sees the curled hair beneath his cowboy hat. She SCOWLS.

Mary Ann and Carl toss dirt and flowers then hug Delores. Mary Ann's hug is a motion without affection. Carl, however, gives Delores a hug that lingers with compassion which raises Delores from her deep sorrowful place.

Mary Ann tugs at Carl's sleeve but he ignores her.

Delores finally recognizes Carl's arms around her and hugs him back. She SNIFFLES. Within Elton's hearing and Mary Ann's jealous ears...

DELORES

He won't go to heaven 'cause he shot himself.

CARL

Don't be silly, of course he will. He was a good man. I loved him. I loved how he cared for you.

DELORES

Suicides don't knock on heaven's door.

MARY ANN

Well, dear, I'm afraid you're right but I'll pray for his soul anyway.

Delores CRIES harder. Carl shoots Mary Ann a deadly scowl then holds Delores tighter.

CARL

Please, please let me know if you need help... with the house... anything. We're right next door. Anytime...

He lets go of her then tightly grips unrepentant Mary Ann's arm and leads her away.

EXT. CEMETERY

The back of TR is seen as he leans against one of the few trees in the cemetery. Archie sits at his feet. Fasio, with Rodger in tow, walks up to TR.

FASIO

For chrissakes, man, I haven't seen you sober for weeks. What the hell's wrong with you?

TR

Bless you.

EXT. CEMETERY - GRAVESIDE

Elton hugs Delores and rocks her while she cries.

ELTON

Did you know? It's a fact, that a man's body weighs less immediately after death than immediately before?

DELORES

Are you trying to console me?

ELTON

Really.

DELORES

Okay, thank you for your sympathy.

Instead of throwing his flowers on the grave, he gives them to her. She takes them, smiles, then SOBS quietly. He puts his arm around her shoulders.

ELTON

It proves his soul weighs something.

DELORES

I don't get it. The dead guy's toupee
coulda' fallen off or something.

They LAUGH mixed with tears.

ELTON

I don't know what it means but I couldn't
think of anything else.

EXT. CEMETERY - CARL'S TRUCK

Mary Ann GLOWERS at Elton and Delores as Carl opens the truck
door for his wife.

EXT. CEMETERY - GRAVESIDE

ELTON

C'mon, Del, like Carl said, Bernie was a
good man. One drunken pull of the trigger
doesn't wipe out forty years of goodness.

EXT. CEMETERY

Monarch watches Elton and Delores. She's jealous. She looks
at her flowers and decides to set them atop a rock then
leaves but stops to converse and introduce herself to a
Navajo couple.

EXT. SANTA RITA LODGE - LATER - DUSK

Monarch exits her small pick-up. She heads to her room, then
hesitates, looks around then decides to take a walk.

EXT. DELORES' STREET - DUSK

Elton and Delores stroll together. Elton's boot heels STRIKE
the concrete as he walks.

ELTON

That was a real nice funeral for Bernie.
He was loved.

DELORES

He took good care'o me. I wanted
more and settled for less but he
still took good care of me. He wanted me
the other day. He killed himself 'cause
he was mad at me. I only knew he was
angry when he'd, for no reason, do
something he knew would really piss me
off. Just out of the blue... when I
wasn't looking. He played dirty like that
and it wasn't fair.

ELTON

I think this time he was angry at himself.

DELORES

All he had to do was yell at me 'nstead of blowin' his heart out.

ELTON

He did it to himself. Not to you.

They walk on in silence. Elton's fancy boot heels STRIKE the concrete.

DELORES

Elton, you're wearing boots.

ELTON

First time since the accident.

DELORES

You sure clean up purty. If I weren't a grieving widow... Oh, God, I'm a widow. I'm too young to be a widow. Oh, God, everyone in town's going to call me "Bernie's Widow." "The Suicide Widow." I suppose they expect me to wear black for months.

Dogs BARK

DELORES

Someone's at the house. Oh, God, I hope not "oh, you poor thing" church women.

Dogs BARK

DELORES

Elton, stay with me. Please?

ELTON

I don't think so, Del. I'm sure someone's already talking.

DELORES

Oh, com'on, please. I don't care what people say.

Dogs BARK

ELTON

You just said you do care.

Dogs adamantly BARK.

ELTON

C'mon. Let's go see who your dogs
are mauling.

EXT. DELORES' HOUSE

Monarch stands outside Delores' gate several feet between her and the six dogs inside hugging the fence. Delores and Elton approach. The dogs quiet and redirect attention to Delores.

MONARCH

(to Delores)

I just wanted to say how sorry I was
about Bernie.

DELORES

If we just scoot inside the gate, the
dogs'll calm down.

Delores passes through the gate then holds it open for Monarch. With hands tucked under her chin, Monarch slides through the gate and around dogs. Elton is amused with Monarch's caution of the dogs. Elton stays on the sidewalk and closes the gate behind Monarch.

DELORES

(to Elton)

You're not coming in?

Monarch suddenly looks uncomfortable, like she's a third wheel.

ELTON

No, I need to take care of Cheezer and
relax my back before blessing time.

(tips his hat)

Good Night, ladies.

Elton leaves. The STRIKING of his boots against sidewalk fades. The two admiring women watch him walk away.

MONARCH

(to Delores)

I won't stay long either. You probably
want to be left alone for awhile.

DELORES

No, not at all. Not at all.

MONARCH

I just wanted to offer you a trip
to Albuquerque... shopping.

DELORES

Shopping? Really? You and me?

MONARCH

Well, I should have brought a casserole or flowers, but I thought you might like a day away from here instead.

DELORES

I... I...

MONARCH

My treat. I'm really sorry about Bernie. I can't imagine.

DELORES

I don't know what to say.

MONARCH

"Yes" will do. Besides, as much as I appreciate the tennis shoes, they don't fit as well as I'd like. And I left L.A. in such a hurry--

DELORES

You left L.A.?

MONARCH

Yes, and I neglected to--

DELORES

Hollywood L.A.? Or the other L.A.?

MONARCH

Bel Air, actually.

DELORES

You left Bel Air? For here? Nowhere Santa Rita?

MONARCH

You'd be surprised how nowhere Bel Air can be.

DELORES

You in some kinda trouble?

MONARCH

Just needed some different scenery. That's all. Anyway, I really hate shopping and really need help getting around Albuquerque. I figured, you know... it's actually very selfish of me, especially now.

DELORES

Oh, honey, I'd love to. Tomorrow?

MONARCH

You sure? So soon? Okay. Tomorrow morning. 9:00.

(turns to leave)

DELORES

Don't go. You want to come in for a drink? I have plenty of food for dinner.

Just then Monarch sees the dogs on the porch beyond Delores' shoulder. The dogs have their noses in casserole dishes set on a porch swing.

MONARCH

(points to the porch)

So much for your dinner.

Delores runs to the porch and shoos the dogs away. Monarch joins her and begins to replace casserole lids. Delores LAUGHS at the mess then she begins to SNIFFLE. Monarch tosses between consoling Delores or tending to dishes.

MONARCH

What a shame.

DELORES

No matter. It was inevitable.

MONARCH

Inevitable?

DELORES

I'm not that well liked around here. Never really fit in, not since Bernie brought me here. Couldn't give him kids neither.

MONARCH

I'm sorry.

DELORES

They don't like all my dogs. You may want to reconsider being my friend.

MONARCH

Oh, please!

DELORES

(tears up then smiles)

We need some paper towels.

Delores goes into the house. Monarch picks up a lid, turns it over and finds a note taped to it.

"Shame on you and Elton!
Making out at Bernie's grave!"

Monarch hears Delores' FOOTSTEPS and rips off the note then shoves it into her shoe. Delores returns with paper towels and a tray.

DELORES

Mexican casseroles. I'm so sick of Mexican. Bernie loved it. I long for Chicken cor-don blue, lobster, truffles. You ever have fo-is-grass in Bel Air?

MONARCH

Foie gras. A few times. Fattened goose liver. Very rich. Actually, it's a very cruel process.

INT. DELORES' KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER

Delores and Monarch have finished their dinner. Delores picks food from her plate and feeds bits to the dogs.

DELORES

That's the secret word, rich. Means security.

Delores puts her head in her hands and CRIES. The dogs look at her, heads cocked. Monarch gingerly steps around dogs for a paper towel and hands a square to Delores.

MONARCH

Maybe, but it doesn't equal emotional security. You'll do fine. You're stronger than you think. We all are.

Delores wipes her nose and eyes, then sees the time on the wall mounted cat clock.

DELORES

Oh, God, it's almost time.

MONARCH

Time for what?

DELORES

The blessing. The bells. The blessing every night. This time every night.

MONARCH

Oh, so that... He comes past my window. I thought it was a night watchman or something.

DELORES

Sit.

Monarch sits in her chair with her back to an open window.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

The clock on the wall reads 7:10. Pastor Eli Smith studies a book titled "Exposition of the book of Hebrews". He looks up, YAWNS, scratches then sees the time. He's surprised. Checks his watch and smiles.

PASTOR ELI SMITH
No bells. Praise God.

EXT. BACK OF GROCERY - SAME NIGHT

Fasio drives up. There's a sign on the door.

"CLOSED FOR BERNIE'S FUNERAL"

Fasio gets out of the Bronco. Motley Dog trots up to her.

FASIO
Shoo! Mangy thing.

She unlocks the grocery door and disappears inside. The door SLAMS shut. Motley dog waits by the door. Fasio soon returns with a case of "cokes" and cigarettes then locks the door behind her.

FASIO
(to dog)
Go on! Get outta here! You're bad
fer business.

The dog cowers. She gets in the Bronco and drives away.

INT. ELTON'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Elton, is asleep on the sofa. His fancy boots and fancy shirt have landed nearby. Cheezer SNORES on Elton's chest. A couple of candles on the coffee table are nearly spent.

BELLS. THUD. Cheezer WHINES and wakes Elton.

ELTON
Aw, Cheezer, not now.

Cheezer jumps down and stands at the front door. He WHINES. Elton struggles awake then gets up and WINCES for a sharp pain in his back. He opens the door, Cheezer bolts out and BARKS. Elton slips on a pair of worn slippers by the door.

EXT. ELTON'S BACKYARD

Elton walks around until he eventually finds TR face down on the ground. Archie is curled up next to him. Elton shakes TR but to no effect.

Elton disappears into the house while Cheezer and Archie greet one another. Elton returns with a blanket and pillow. He drapes the blanket over TR then shoves the pillow beneath TR's face/head.

Elton removes the bells from TR's ankles and straps them on his own ankles. He stands with a GROAN holding his back.

ELTON
Just this one night, TR.

He looks up at the placement of the stars and moon.

ELTON
Shit, Cheezer. We're going to have to run.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

Pastor Eli Smith is deep in study. BELLS flash by outside his window. Disgusted, he SLAMS his study book on the desk.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

Henry sits on his bed which he's moved again close to the window's edge. He glances at his bed-side clock then, defeated, falls back on his bed. Suddenly BELLS race past his window. Henry leans into the window, covers his eyes...

HENRY
It's me again! Henry! Make Elaine love me! Love me!

He flops back onto the bed and wipes sweat from his forehead.

ELTON (O.S.)
(disguising his voice)
I'll do what I can.

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN SANTA RITA - SAME NIGHT

Elton runs in the dark while Cheezer lopes behind panting heavily. Archie runs past Cheezer and nips at Elton's heels tripping Elton.

INT. DELORES' KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Delores pours more wine into Monarch's half-full glass. Delores is weepy and tipsy.

DELORES
No blessing. I'm curs'd. Casa-rrole ladies'r right 'bout me...

Faint BELLS sound in the distance, approach, linger momentarily outside their window. The bells FADE. Delores slumps with relief, then CRIES.

Monarch peeks through the window and sees Cheezer and Archie and the shadowy figure of Elton.

DELORES
 (recovering)
 Ha, ha I've been absolute...
 no that's a drink. Abolishhhd...

MONARCH
 Absolved?

DELORES
 I'll drink to that.

INT. ELAINE'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Elaine watches the "Matchmaker." She hears the BELLS dancing about outside. JINGLE. JINGLE. JINGLE. Confused, Elaine turns down the VOLUME and listens. JINGLE. JINGLE. JINGLE. Irritated she goes to the window.

ELAINE
 Knock it off! Enough already!
 Whatever, whoever you are, I'm sick of
 your twinkle toes religion. Show me a
 miracle! Otherwise stay the fuck away
 from my window!

Cheezer and Archie run into the light, stimulated by Elaine's yelling, and BARK back at her.

ELAINE
 Elton? You? Is that you?

EXT. ELAINE'S YARD

In the shadows Elton brushes the goat-heads from the bottom of his thin soled slippers then walks into the dark. Archie and Cheezer follow.

INT. ELAINE'S LIVING ROOM

ELAINE
 So the Santa Rita saint is really
 just another crazy dude.

INT. FASIO'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Rodger is asleep in his Lazy-Boy. TV is on the late NEWS. Fasio turns off the television then drapes an afghan over Rodger.

INT. FASIO'S BEDROOM

Fasio turns on a light and stands before her dresser where she removes her jewelry, placing each in their proper large jewelry box places.

BELLS speed past outside.

FASIO

What? Again? What'd I do?

EXT. DIMLY LIT ALLEY - SAME NIGHT

Elton, breathless, bends forward with his hands on his knees. He stiffly lowers himself to sit on the curb. Cheezer joins him, panting heavily. Archie runs off.

ELTON

Not the athletes we used to be, huh
Cheezer?

(removing the bells)

Wish these bells were spurs. Better ring
to them.

Cheezer puts his head on Elton's knee.

ELTON

If we stay here much longer, Cheezer,
I won't be able to get up. Help me home,
dog.

EXT. ELTON'S YARD - SAME NIGHT

The shadowy figure of TR struggles to stand as the blanket falls away. He stumbles, then stands wobbly kneed. He staggers to a bike leaning against the house. With considerable effort and deliberation he walks the bike through the gate to the gravel road.

He mounts the too small bike, knees out like wings. He peddles but road rocks push the front tire side to side. TR rides off into the moonset. Archie lays down on the blanket and watches TR leave. Coyote HOWLS.

EXT. DELORES' HOUSE - DAY

Delores exits her house and gets into Monarch's pick-up curbside.

MONARCH

Are you sure you're up for this?

DELORES

Hell, yes. Albuquerque here we come!

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT - SAME DAY

Elton sits on his stool, sleepy. The tee-shirt under his open cowboy shirt is printed with Medusa's severed head. He wears a back brace.

Three mid-teen girls: NICOLE, MEGAN and EMMA arrive at the counter with soda and chips. Fasio passes.

FASIO

For God's sake, Elton, put a cap over your hair before customers start complaining.

ELTON

Nicole, you're a customer. Are you complaining?

NICOLE

(flirty)

No, Elton. I ain't complainin'.

FASIO

Put a hat on before our more mature customers start complainin'. You hear me?

Fasio walks away.

NICOLE

I'm fifteen. We're fifteen.

MEGAN

I just turned sixteen.

EMMA

Who does she think she is? Just 'cause we're not old and dried up like her.

ELTON

Don't be mean.

Elton reaches under the counter for his cap. He puts it on and tucks in his hair causing the cap to bulge awkwardly.

Emma takes a drink of soda with flirty eyes towards Elton. Competing for Elton's attention, Nicole pushes into Megan to pay for her open soda and chips.

NICOLE

(too flirty for her age)

Hi, Elton.

ELTON

Next time, girls, wait until I run the soda past the register before opening.

NICOLE

Okay, Elton. Whatever you say, Elton.

EMMA

I like your hair, Elton.

MEGAN

You look like a rock star or somethin'.

ELTON

Troubadour a la the twelfth, thirteen,
century.

EMMA

Trooper what?

ELTON

Troubadour. Musician. Love poet.
Love captured through the eyes.

The girls GIGGLE.

EXT. GROCERY BACK DOOR

Fasio lights a cigarette, she's deep in thought. Motley Dog sits at a safe distance and watches, ever hopeful.

Fasio stomps out her cigarette and cruises back inside. The door SLAMS behind her. Motley dog prances to where she stood, SNIFFS.

Fasio charges back outside with a packet of doggy treats and a bowl of water. The door SLAMS behind her. Motley dog is startled and backs away.

FASIO

Oh, don't be such a wiener.

She opens the packet of treats and spills them onto the ground. The dog hesitates.

FASIO

Suit yourself.

She abandons her impromptu mission and retreats back into the store. The door SLAMS behind her. The dog devours the treats, drinks water then lays down on the spot where Fasio stood.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elton and the three Girls: he has their absolute attention but not their understanding.

ELTON

Love is a fairly new concept in
the history of man.

MEGAN

What was it called before?

ELTON

It wasn't called anything before.
If I wanted any one of you as my
property...

(The girls GIGGLE)

(MORE)

I would pay your father a herd of goats
or money.

MEGAN
(shoving Nicole)
Eeeeeeee.

Elaine walks by wearing a bloody apron. She observes the
flirtatious girls, rolls her eyes and walks on.

ELTON
...and take you home regardless of your
wishes.

MEGAN
How do you know? How do you know
I wouldn't want to go with you.

ELTON
Let's presume.

Bold and direct, Emma steps in front of the others. She leans
forward in her scoop necked tee, and attempts to seduce with
undeveloped cleavage. Elaine pops out from behind an aisle.

EMMA
I would.

ELAINE
C'mon girls. You know Fasio
doesn't like you hanging out
here. Go loiter someplace else.

Emma throws Elaine a dirty look, the other two push Emma out
the door.

EMMA, MEGAN, NICOLE
By-e-e-e-e, Elton.

ELTON
That was scary.

ELAINE
Duh. What were you trying to do,
anyway? Are you at all conscious?

ELTON
Trying to introduce immature minds to a
little history.

ELAINE
They've been nursed on raunchy music
videos. What do they care about history?

Elton notices Sheriff Homer drive up in his squad car to the
gas station. The Sheriff gets out of the car, walks around
and peers into the station windows.

ELTON
Have you seen TR this morning?

ELAINE
No. But I saw something last night.

ELTON
Oh?

Seen through the grocery window: Sheriff Homer crosses the road towards the girls and tips his hat to them. He proceeds to the grocery then enters the store.

SHERIFF HOMER
You folks seen TR?

ELTON
Found him passed out in my yard last night.

SHERIFF HOMER
In your yard? What was he doing there?

ELAINE
Seems there were lots of strays out last night.

ELTON
He was pretty gone. I left him there with a blanket and pillow.

ELAINE
And then what'd you do?

ELTON
Found the blanket, pillow and Archie this morning. No TR. And my bike was gone. I was bringing him coffee. Archie stayed with the blanket.

SHERIFF HOMER
Hmmm, usually don't see one without the other.

ELAINE
He's been following that new girl.

SHERIFF HOMER
TR?

ELAINE
No. Archie.

SHERIFF HOMER
Peculiar.

ELAINE

(to Elton)

You found TR last night? You were out?
Coming home from somewhere? Everywhere?

SHERIFF HOMER

Something I need to know? If so, maybe
you could fill me in.

ELAINE

TR's a drunk. Anything coulda' happened.

ELTON

And he's a genius.

ELAINE

Yeah, lotta good that did him.

SHERIFF HOMER

(leaving)

I'm going hunting for TR. You two take
care.

Elton tips his hat to Sheriff. Elton's hair falls around his
face.

ELTON

What? His genius IQ, required, requires
him to create world peace?

ELAINE

He wasted and pickled his IQ in booze.

ELTON

For his own 170+ IQ reason he became a
drunk and he's been brilliant at it.

ELAINE

He had... has a responsibility.

ELTON

And you're Santa Rita's grand judge? You
don't know his burden anymore than I know
yours.

Tears well up in her eyes.

ELAINE

(softening)

We've been working together forever. Why
don't you know my burden?

ELTON

I do know. I know... and I'm sorry.
Really, I'm so, so very sorry.

His eyes tell her he truly feels bad. She turns to hide her tears then leaves to a back room.

Henry approaches the entrance.

INT. GROCERY STORAGE ROOM

Elaine sits among boxes of goods. She tries to muffle SOBS but the tears flow. She checks her bloody apron pockets for a tissue but comes up empty. She opens a nearby case of paper towels. She wipes and BLOWS. RING. RING. RING.

ELAINE
Shit. Shit. Shit.

She wipes her eyes, BLOWS, undoes her pony tail and brushes her hair forward with her fingers.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Henry unloads items from his basket. Elton drinks from a bottle of water and places it on the counter.

Elaine arrives.

ELAINE
(to Elton)
Why did you ring me? You could have bagged this yourself.

ELTON
Sorry, but when I rang someone else was needing help. She was looking for... kippers. I couldn't leave poor Henry.

Henry is confused. He looks around. There were/are no other customers.

ELTON
Henry, do you know what kippers are?

Henry shakes his head "no". Elaine bags Henry's things including Elton's bottle of water. She hands the bag to Henry who sees Elaine's red eyes.

HENRY
Are you okay?

ELAINE
Just cleaning the onion bin.

Elton reaches for his water and it's gone. He realizes Elaine has bagged it for Henry. Elton starts to say something then stops.

Elton sees Sheriff Homer at the gas station. Sheriff is in his squad car behind the wheel, door open, talking on the radio.

ELTON
I think we have another village
emergency.

Elton steps out from the counter, intercepts Elaine by the shoulders and leads her back to the check-out.

ELTON
I'm going to show the sheriff where the
pump key is. I'll be right back.

ELAINE
Again? I hate it when you do this!

Elton runs out. Henry lingers.

HENRY
I like your hair like that.

ELAINE
What?

HENRY
I, I, I've only seen it in a ponytail. A
nice ponytail... but I like it down like
that. It's... it's long.

ELAINE
Really?

Henry nods. She strokes her hair while she glances towards Elton. Henry's stumped for more words.

HENRY
Well, gotta go. Bye, Elaine.

Henry leaves, mad at himself.

EXT. GAS STATION

Elton pumps gas into Sheriff Homer's squad car. Henry passes across the street MUMBLING, reprimanding himself.

ELTON
Hey, Henry! What's in the bag?

HENRY
You know what I have in the bag.

ELTON
C'mon over. Let me see. Sheriff
wants to see also.

SHERIFF

I don't care what he has in the bag.

HENRY

Don't feel like playing, Elton.

ELTON

Please. Just tell me. Remember, most times prayer is answered in the ordinary.

Henry stops, suspicious. He recites from memory,

HENRY

Cheese, mustard, lunch meat...

ELTON

Henry, please, just look in the bag.

Henry opens the bag to find the half-empty bottle of water.

HENRY

I didn't buy this. And it's been opened.

ELTON

Better go back and tell Elaine. I think she made a mistake.

Henry is quick to agree and paces back to the store.

SHERIFF HOMER

I'm starting to worry.

ELTON

What should we do?

SHERIFF HOMER

I'm treating him as a missing person.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Elaine fusses with her hair as Fasio passes. Henry crosses the parking lot to the entrance.

FASIO

Elaine, you know better than to have your hair down. Would you rather wear a net?

Just then Henry bursts through the door and holds up the bottle of water.

HENRY

(to Elaine)

You must have bagged this by mistake.

ELAINE

(to Fasio)

That would be Elton.

Henry places the water bottle on the counter. Fasio sees Elton at the gas station.

FASIO
Damn it to hell. Why's he over there again?! Where's TR?

ELAINE
Missing.

Henry gives up and leaves. He passes Elton on the way out but ignores him.

FASIO
Send him to me. I'll be in the storeroom.

ELAINE
Gladly.

Elton enters the store and Elaine scowls and opens her mouth to send him to the "principle's office"--

ELTON
What'd you do to Henry?

ELAINE
Fasio wants to talk to you. Now.

ELTON
You're torturing that poor guy.

ELAINE
Takes one to know one. She's in the store room.

ELTON
He's a good guy. Give him a break.

She glares at him.

INT. GROCERY STORE ROOM

Fasio checks a delivery against an invoice. Elton enters.

ELTON
You wanted to see me?

She holds up a finger, finishes a count.

FASIO
You know about religious things.

He expects a reprimand and is surprised, then intrigued.

ELTON
I've read a lot, yes.

FASIO
I have, I guess you'd say, a religious question.

ELTON
(still expecting a reprimand)
Okay.

FASIO
What do you know about angels?

ELTON
Well, I know, or think I know, a bit.

FASIO
Well?

Intrigued, he relaxes and sits on a flat of boxes.

FASIO
I said I have a question. Not a conversation. I'm not paying you to sit on my boxes. Get off my boxes.

ELTON
(rises)
Are these the invisible angels or humans who do angelic deeds?

FASIO
Don't know.

ELTON
Well, Psalms says we're created a little lower than the angels. And then there's the age old question: "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?"

FASIO
What? What're you talking about? What does that have to do with anything?

ELTON
Maybe you should ask the Pastor.

FASIO
Aw, hell. He don't know. He'd just start preachn' to me about 'tendin' church.

ELTON
So, what is it you need to know?

FASIO
(finally blurting)
Can they run?

ELTON
 (shocked then amused)
 I suppose, if they're in a hurry.

FASIO
 Aw shit. Don't you know anything?

ELTON
 The more I study, the more I think not.

FASIO
 (impatiently)
 Okay. You answered the question. The question is lost on you. You can go back to work now.

ELTON
 Yes, ma'am.

FASIO
 And I don't care if TR is missing. He'll show up in good time. Always does. And put a hat on!

ELTON
 Yes, ma'am.

EXT. SANTA RITA LODGE - SAME DAY, SETTING SUN

Archie trots to Monarch's door, circles in place then settles down for the night.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - SAME

Motley Dog circles, makes a bed in the weeds outside the grocery back door. He plops down.

EXT. DELORES' YARD - SAME

Delores' Dogs play, run and chase each other.

EXT. ELTON'S YARD - SAME

Cheezer digs in the yard to bury one of his toys.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NEXT DAY - DAY

Monarch arranges books on makeshift shelves constructed from book boxes. Sebastian wanders freely. Monarch takes a Kleenex from her pocket and wipes up Sebastian's poop on a box. Henry appears at the screen door. He bends down, pets Archie then KNOCKS.

SEBASTIAN
 Com'in, go'dam't

HENRY

Hello. Hello.

MONARCH

Hush, Sebastian. Yes, come in. No need to knock. It's a store. Anything special you're looking to read?

HENRY

No. No, I don't--

MONARCH

My first customer! I should have prepared for this. A certificate or something. Any book. You can pick any book as a very first customer gift. What do you like to read? Fiction? Non-fiction?

HENRY

No, I can't... Save it for your first real customer. I heard you need some bookshelves.

MONARCH

I mentioned it in passing to Elton. He must have gotten in touch with you for me.

(flattered)

How thoughtful.

HENRY

Actually, word spreads 'till the right person gets the message. This time it was me.

Monarch looks disappointed.

MONARCH

Oh. Well, yes, I do need bookshelves. When can you start?

HENRY

Right now, if that's okay.

MONARCH

Perfect.

HENRY

Don't you want to know how much?

MONARCH

I'm sure it's reasonable. You can keep me posted as we go along. Do you need some up-front money?

HENRY
Show me what you need.

She finds paper, pencil, calculator and tape measure.

HENRY
It's nice of you to be taking care of
Archie since TR's gone missing.

MONARCH
TR's missing? Archie? No, I'm not... I
need lots of shelves. Can you build a
bird cage for me over in that corner?

EXT. SOMEWHERE UP AN ARROYO - DAY

Sheriff Homer rides a horse packed with gear. He scans the horizon through binoculars.

EXT. SOMEWHERE OFF A HIGHWAY - DAY

Sheriff Homer stands outside his squad car and scans the horizon through binoculars.

EXT. AT THE BASE OF A CANYON - DAY

Sheriff Homer has dismounted his horse and stands over Elton's abandoned bike. He looks up the trail that leads further into the canyon. He appears disheartened.

INT. BOOKSTORE - ANOTHER DAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Monarch tries to calligraphy signs: "fiction", "non-fiction", "biography", etc. Several rejects scatter the floor. Henry is far along on the construction of bookshelves.

Elton KNOCKS on the other side of the screen door. He carries a bag of groceries. He pets Archie.

SEBASTIAN
Wha'th fuck? Wha'th SQUAWK, com'n!

MONARCH
(not looking up)
Hush Sebastian. No need to knock. It's a store.

Elton enters. He wears a tee-shirt with a picture of the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi. Archie scoots inside the door and settles in a corner. Monarch looks happy to see Elton.

MONARCH
Can I help you find something?

ELTON

I was on my way home to fix dinner.
Thought you'd like to join me. Hi, Henry.

HENRY

Elton.

ELTON

(to Monarch)
You must be tired of the local fare.

MONARCH

A change would be nice, I suppose. What time?

ELTON

Now? Keep me company while I cook.

MONARCH

I suppose... sure.
(to Henry)
You mind?

HENRY

No, no. I'm done for the day.

Henry gathers his things and leaves.

Monarch orders the work around her, adds food and water to Sebastian's bowls as Elton watches and studies her.

Tasks complete, Monarch joins Elton and they exit. Archie scoots out the door and follows them.

INT. ISABEL'S KITCHEN - SAME

Isabel fixes dinner for the boys and Henry who sit at the table. Bobby and Ben look worried as they watch Isabel's nervous and distracted movements. Henry is sullen and quiet. The boys kick each other under the table.

BOBBY

Ouch! Stop it!

BEN

You kicked me first.

BOBBY

It was an accident.

Bobby reaches across the table to punch Ben but knocks over his milk.

BEN

Now, look what you did!

BOBBY

Did not.

BEN

You did! You know you did!

ISABEL

Stop it now! I'm tempted to send both of you to bed without supper. Give me some peace, please. Ben, help me clean this up.

BEN

But--

ISABEL

Don't argue with me.
(calmer)
Please don't argue with me.

Bobby watches them clean as he contemplates something.

BOBBY

How come we're not blessed anymore? Did we do something wrong?

Henry jumps up from the table and leaves the room.

ISABEL

I don't know Bobby. Maybe our faith is being tested.

She goes to him and gives him a hug.

ISABEL

Believe me, you didn't do anything wrong. You're perfect in my eyes.

BEN

Maybe you should ask somebody else. Maybe it ain't just us.

Isabel takes Ben by the shoulders,

ISABEL

Ben, don't you dare tell another soul. Promise me you won't tell anyone. Not even your friends.

Confused, he nods okay.

BOBBY

I promise too, mommy.

ISABEL

You're a good boy, Bobby.

BOBBY
I think his sled is broken.

ISABEL
Who?

BEN
What'r you talking about?

BOBBY
The angel. He has bells just like Santa Claus and comes from the sky to our house. And his sled is broken.

ISABEL
(nervous laugh)
Ben, go see if Henry wants dinner.

INT. HENRY'S ROOM

Ben KNOCKS at Henry's open door.

BEN
Momma said to come for dinner.

HENRY
I'm not hungry.

Ben enters and joins Henry on the bed.

BEN
You scared too?

HENRY
Scared of what?

BEN
The blessing. It's gone.

Henry shrugs.

BEN
Maybe Bobby's right. And don't you dare tell him I said so.

HENRY
Right about what?

BEN
Santa Clause. I don't expect anything from Santa anymore. If I want something, I save my allowance and buy it or I beg Momma for it 'till she gives in.

HENRY
But there was the blessing. There never was no Santa.

BEN

Yeah, but we thought there was. Maybe we're meant to just angel-bless our own lives.

(beat)

Promise you won't tell Momma.

HENRY

Tell her what?

BEN

I never believed in the angel. I just treat people nice. Except for Bobby 'cause he don't deserve it.

HENRY

Well, maybe, but it's tradition. The bells make people feel safe. Or that they're doing good.

BEN

I always do good, angel or not.

Henry thinks for a minute. He nods with understanding, smiles, then puts Ben's neck in the crook of his arm and rubs the top of his head. They LAUGH and wrestle.

INT. SHERIFF'S WORKSHOP - SAME NIGHT

The Sheriff tinkers but is unable to concentrate. He looks at the clock. He is worried.

INT. MARY ANN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

The Grandfather clock's TICK-TOCK overwhelms the otherwise silent room where Mary Ann has an open Bible in her lap. She looks at the Grandfather clock then at her wristwatch. She is nervous and tense. She taps her silk-slippered foot on the floor. Carl reads a novel.

MARY ANN

Maybe I shouldn't have left that note.

CARL

What's that?

MARY ANN

Nothing. Did you hear the bells tonight?

CARL

What's that?

MARY ANN

Nothing.

EXT. ELTON'S HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Cheezer greets Monarch and Elton at the gate.

ELTON
Hey, buddy boy. Brought you some
company.

Elton refers to Archie. Monarch thinks Elton refers to her.

MONARCH
(to Cheezer)
Buddy Boy.

Elton opens and holds the gate for Monarch. She moves into the yard but holds her hand out, palm down to ensure Cheezer doesn't jump. Elton allows Archie inside. The dogs greet.

INT. ELTON'S ENTRANCE HALLWAY

Elton lights the candles on the hallway mantle. Archie and Cheezer CLATTER down the hall, Monarch stands while her eyes adjust to the low light.

ELTON
(walking down the hall)
I'll get some food for the dogs.
What have you been feeding Archie?

MONARCH
I haven't. He's TR's dog.

She studies the candle-lit rodeo awards and pictures.

ELTON (O.S. FROM KITCHEN)
Archie didn't follow TR to wherever he is
and he seems to have chosen you in his
stead.

MONARCH
I can't have a dog at the motel.

ELTON (O.S.)
They'll let you have TR's dog.

MONARCH
Forget to pay your electric bill?

She continues to study the rodeo awards, et al.

ELTON (O.S.)
I rarely use the lights anymore. I've
gotten used to the candles. I developed a
sensitivity to light after I broke my
back.

MONARCH

You broke your back? Doing this? Rodeo?

On the wall hangs an oversize picture of a pretty rodeo girl, a champion, dressed in all black. It is inscribed

"Elton, Love you always, Your Girl, Holly"

Monarch begins to ask about the girl in the picture but changes her mind.

ELTON (O.S.)

Can't wear cowboy boots, anything with a high heel. At least I shouldn't.

(chuckles)

Can't rodeo without the boots.

MONARCH

I'm sorry.

Elton returns with two glasses of wine.

ELTON

No need. It's my path. It took awhile. A while in traction and despair which lead to me believing the accident may have been the best thing that ever happened to me. Maybe you've experienced something similar. Tragedy turned blessing?

MONARCH

(harboring something)

Not really.

The dogs can be heard GOBBLING food.

MONARCH

When do you think TR'll be back?

ELTON

Don't know.

MONARCH

Has this happened before?

ELTON

Don't know when he'll be back, but for some magical mysterious reason, Archie has chosen you while TR's gone.

He hands her a glass of wine then CLINKS his to hers.

ELTON

Receive the gift.

INT. FASIO'S BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

The bedside clock reads 1:00 A.M. Fasio is wide awake. The ashtray is full of ashes, a butt still smolders. She looks at the clock then throws the covers aside. She finds a sweater and puts it on over her pajamas.

INT. FASIO'S KITCHEN

Fasio grabs some meat from the refrigerator, a pack of cigarettes and keys from the counter then leaves.

EXT. BACK OF GROCERY

Fasio drives up in her Bronco, parks then exits with a flashlight and piece of meat. She scans amongst weeds with the flashlight beam and waves the meat in front of her.

FASIO

Okay, where are you?

Motley Dog appears from out of the weeds.

FASIO

There you are, dammit. Well, get over here. I ain't gonna hurt ya.

The dog saunters up then falls over on his back, legs in the air. The dog rolls upright and sits up expectantly. She opens the tail door of the Bronco.

FASIO

Good boy, even though you're ruinin' my life. C'mon, I'm takin' you home.

She tosses bits of meat inside the Bronco. The dog jumps in after it and she shuts the door.

INT. BRONCO

Fasio climbs in behind the wheel, puts a cigarette in her mouth and presses the lighter.

FASIO

(opening the window)

Aw, shit, you been rolling with the dead?
What's that angel trying to do to me?

INT. ELTON'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

In the candle-lit room Monarch lies on her back on the sofa with Archie next to her. Elton is in an overstuffed chair. He rubs Chezzer's tummy with his foot. They've finished dinner and an empty bottle of wine is on the table.

MONARCH

(downing last gulp)
It's late. I should be home with
Sebastian.

ELTON

Can I get personal?

MONARCH

Oka-a-a-ay.

ELTON

You seem a secretive kind of person.

MONARCH

I don't think I'm secretive.

ELTON

Maybe guarded is a better word.

MONARCH

Was I suppose to walk in the store and
say, "Hi, I'm Monarch Grady from Bel Air.
My fiancé dumped me and I've run out of
gas, going no where in particular, but I
want to open a book-store, somewhere,
anywhere, because I just love books and
crave conversations that don't include
botox and Blahniks.

(turns over to look at him)
Is that what you expected?

ELTON

Well, don't know what Blahniks is but I
would have been impressed. I'm happy to
finally know a bit about you and I'm glad
you came tonight. Sorry about the fiancé.
I get it..

MONARCH

Well, maybe you're right about receiving
it as a blessing. I don't like feeling
bitter. Like Fasio. Why is she so grumpy?

ELTON

Fasio?

MONARCH

And how do you get away with being so
cheeky with her? She's your boss.

ELTON

She puts up with me 'cause she needs me;
someone to keep her from drowning in her
grief.

MONARCH

From what?

ELTON

They lost a son, just a boy. He accidentally shot himself. Her husband was so angry he shot the boy's dog. Couldn't stand the sight of it.

MONARCH

How awful.

ELTON

What about you? The name Monarch?

MONARCH

My parents were part of the real Woodstock late 60's hippie movement. They took a reminisce trip to San Francisco in '87. They say I "was conceived in a field of flowers...

(gesturing over her head)
while Monarch butterflies danced around our naked bodies". Okay for them but not the image one wants to see every time one hears one's name.

She rolls onto her side, stirring Archie who jumps off the sofa. She's tipsy and emotional.

MONARCH

I had a dog.

ELTON

Really?

MONARCH

Yes, I did. Me and my sister. My sister and I? It was really mine, though. It liked me best. Soooooo cute. A real Bel Air kinda dog. She was old and peed on a very expensive rug one night. Dad threw her outside.

(tightens her mouth)
I heard her crying for hours and hours but dad refused to allow her back in the house. She was hit by a car. Dad never apologized or said a word. I still hear her crying. Dad broke my heart... over and over. A nasty controlling bastard. Definitely abandoned his "hey, dude, peace" persona.

(she flops back into the sofa)
I really shouldn't talk about him like that. He abandoned his peace and love hippie principles cause he had to.

(MORE)

Lawyers need a war of some kind.
Sebastian imitates him.

ELTON
And that cash?

MONARCH
My trust fund.

ELTON
So you cashed in and took off?

MONARCH
Had thought about it for awhile. The
fiancé dumping me, I guess was the final
impetus. I need to use the rest room.

He points to the bathroom. She gets up, a bit wobbly for
drink.

INT. ELTON'S BATHROOM

Monarch feels for and turns on the light inside the door. She
blanches for the bright glare. When her eyes adjust she sees
the lipstick drawing on the mirror and the doll altar
reflected in it.

MONARCH
Oh, dear me. I've fallen in love with a
very strange man.
(quietly imitating Sebastian)
Help, M'n'ark, help.

INT. ELTON'S LIVING ROOM

Monarch returns and Archie runs up to her. Elton has put on
the cowboy hat that was perched on a table nearby. Monarch
interrupts his focus on the rodeo queen photo of Holly.

MONARCH
It's really, really late and I need to
take care of Sebastian.

She walks to the door and Elton follows. They stand face to
face in the hallway framing the picture on the wall of Holly.
There is obvious chemistry between Monarch and Elton. They
hesitate to say a final goodbye. Elton tips his hat.

ELTON
I had a lovely time.

MONARCH
Same here, good night.

She leaves with Archie. Elton closes the door then turns to
Holly and SIGHS.

EXT. ELTON'S HOUSE

Monarch SIGHs, looks around. She glances upwards and gasps at the night sky; constellations markedly obvious, the milky way presentable.

MONARCH

Archie, look. There's Orion, Canis Major, and that's you, Perseus. I used to call it Percy as a girl. Made daddy laugh.

She smiles.

INT. GROCERY - NEXT MORNING

Elaine is mad. She helps Violet at the meat department while Eddie and OTHER CUSTOMERS shop and wait at the check-out. Elaine flings the meat package to Violet.

VIOLET

I'd say you got up on the wrong side this morning.

ELAINE

Apparently I'm the only one who got up this morning.

VIOLET

I need a pork roast. You getting any more?

ELAINE

Fuck if I know.

Elaine races to the check out.

INT. GOCERY CHECK-OUT

EDDIE

Where is Elton?

ELAINE

Fuck if I know.

EXT. GROCERY BACK DOOR - SAME MORNING

A groggy Fasio drives up just as a groggy Elton arrives walking. He wears a tee-shirt with a mermaid printed on the front. He holds the door for Fasio.

ELTON

Morning.

FASIO

You're late.

ELTON
So are you.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

EDDIE
No need to talk to me that way. I have a
mind to tell Fasio.

ELAINE
Sorry, but I don't get paid to manage the
whole store all by myself.

Just then Fasio and Elton enter the store together.

ELAINE
While others sleep in.

All eyes are on Elton and Fasio who arrive together, mutually
dogged. Elaine steps out from behind the register with
exaggerated gesture for Elton to take over.

FASIO
Elton, I need a large bag of dog food.
The good kind. Put it in my car.

Fasio goes to her office with all eyes on her, their mouths
agape. Elton leaves to do Fasio's bidding. Elaine storms back
to the check-out. Just then groggy Monarch enters the store.
She greets Elaine with a fatigued nod and YAWN.

MONARCH
Dog food?

ELAINE
Last aisle, against the wall.

Monarch YAWNS again with a "thank-you" wave. She saunters
back toward the last aisle.

INT. BACK GROCERY ISLE

Monarch meets Elton. He has a large (brand) dog food bag over
his shoulder. He smiles upon seeing Monarch.

MONARCH
I need dog food. A small bag.

ELTON
It's cheaper buying a large bag.
In the long run.

MONARCH
For now I'm buying for the short run.

ELTON
 (re large bag on his shoulder)
 This here's what Archie's used to.

They tarry a moment.

ELTON (CONT'D)
 I have a delivery.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT

Delores enters the store. She wears a new pair of stiletto heels, tight cleavage-showing sweater and straight skirt. Monarch arrives at the register with a very small bag of (brand) dog food.

MONARCH
 Hi, Delores. You look great.

DELORES
 Many thanks to you.

Delores looks around. Monarch YAWNS.

ELAINE
 (to Monarch, suspicious)
 You tired this morning?

MONARCH
 Very.

ELAINE
 Seems everybody's tired this morning.

DELORES
 I'm looking for Elton. Is he here?

ELAINE
 Yes. He's tired too.

DELORES
 I need dog food and I need him to carry
 it to the truck for me.

ELAINE
 You too?

Monarch waits in line to pay. Elton arrives and Delores takes his arm and spins him around and leads him to the back.

INT. GROCERY BACK ISLE

DELORES
 Elton, I need a couple very large bags of
(dog food brand).
 (whispering)
 We've been friends a long time, right?

ELTON

Is this a rhetorical question like, can angels run?

DELORES

What? Friends long enough for me to ask you a favor, right? Friend to friend? Can I, as a friend, ask you, my very good friend, a favor?

Elaine appears at the end of the aisle.

ELAINE

Sorry, Delores, but I've been running this place all by my lonesome for more than an hour. I could use Elton's cooperation.

ELTON

Promise. I'll be right there. Sorry Del, but I should get to work.

DELORES

(to Elaine)

I'll return him to you momentarily. Elton, thank you for your help. Two bags of (dog food brand), please. And if you would put them on my credit, Elaine?

EXT. GROCERY PARKING LOT

Elton carries Delores' bags of dog food as he follows her womanly body sway under the influence of stilettos. At the truck she stands close to Elton.

Monarch, leaves the store but strains momentarily to watch Elton and Delores' interaction.

CLOSE:

Delores runs a long polished nail across Elton's bicep.

DELORES

Elton, good friend, I would like to fix you dinner and indulge in your company tonight.

ELTON

Oh, oh. I see... friend.

He winces under the strain of the heavy bags.

ELTON

If you're asking what I think you're asking, we shouldn't.

He drops the bags into the bed of Delores' truck. He bends over and leans on the truck and grabs his lower back.

DELORES

(embarrassed)

Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, gosh, I shouldn't 've asked. I, I don't know what's wrong with me. What kinda widow am I?

(she starts to sniffle)

ELTON

(unable to straighten)

Please, Del, I understand. Grief and fear can hit us in strange ways. I know. Believe me, I know.

DELORES

I'm losing my mind. The damned blessing's gone, so I figured, what the hell.

He struggles to stand upright.

DELORES

(she rubs his back)

Oh, now look what I've done.

ELTON

I'll be fine. You'll be fine.

(impromptu save to her dignity)

I was actually thinking of asking if I could come over sometime for, you know, a mutual comfort session.

DELORES

I'm sorry. I've been so preoccupied with my own self, I haven't thought about how you're doing.

ELTON

I understand. It's okay. I'm sure everyone's sick of hearing about it... watching me try to find a new life.

He proceeds to walk like an old man back to the store.

ELTON

I'll be over after closing.

Delores starts to get into the truck then...

DELORES

(calls to Elton)

After the time!

(to herself)

Just in case.

Mary Ann, in a pick-up, drives into the grocery lot. She parks just as she hears Delores call, "After the time." A SCOWL of resentment towards Delores clouds Mary Ann's face.

INT. DELORES' TRUCK

Delores checks her lipstick and hair in the mirror. She backs out of the lot and spots Mary Ann. She waves happily to Mary Ann who just manages an obliging wave in return.

EXT. GROCERY PARKING LOT

Mary Ann sulks toward the grocery entrance.

MARY ANN
Hussy. Hussy widow.

Mary Ann enters the store.

MARY ANN (O.S.)
Hi, Elton. Always nice seeing you. How's your back?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME DAY

Sheriff Homer sits at his desk. A RANCHER enters.

RANCHER
(somber)
Otero found what looks to be TR's body up the canyon. Musta' been walking for days.

Sheriff Homer falls back in his chair, tries to be stoic but then puts his head in his hands. After a time he regains composure. He wipes his eyes.

SHERIFF HOMER
Found the bike but I was still hoping. Really miss the guy. I'll call the coroner. Can you pack him down?

RANCHER
Sure, I can do that. He was my friend too.

SHERIFF HOMER
I'll help.

RANCHER
No need. I can take care of it.

SHERIFF HOMER
I want to help.

INT. BEAUTY SALON - SAME DAY

Delores HUMS while she paints her nails cherry apple red. Mary Ann, her hair as neat as a pin, enters, hesitates, then forces a bright attitude.

DELORES

Mary Ann, what are you doing here?

MARY ANN

I came to get my hair done.

She looks around the empty salon.

MARY ANN

Do you have time for me?

DELORES

Sure, sure I do. Have a seat while my nails dry.

MARY ANN

Here?

Delores nods "yes" and LAUGHS as if "where else?" Mary Ann slides into the chair like it was wired for shock.

MARY ANN

You seem chipper for being a recent widow.

DELORES

Please, please don't call me a widow. Just 'cuz my husband died, it don't make me a widow.

This riles Mary Ann's sensible sensibilities. She begins to object but changes her mind. She decides to remain friendly. Then she goes fishing.

MARY ANN

I hope the casserole I left wasn't too much, or you were at least able to freeze some of it.

DELORES

Oh, sure, sure. It went to good use.

MARY ANN

It's been awhile, and, I don't mean to rush you, while you're grieving and all, but, that was one of my best casserole dishes.

DELORES

I'm sorry, I should'a returned them long ago, but there were no names or notes, who's was who's.

MARY ANN

No notes?

DELORES

None.

MARY ANN

That's funny. I should have known better. Difficult time 'an all.

DELORES

Oh, nooooo, I'm doing fine.

Delores wraps the apron around Mary Ann who stiffens with apprehension.

DELORES

Now, what can I do for you?

MARY ANN

My hair's an awful mess. I really need a cut and curl.

DELORES

I'll be glad to fix you right up 'though it looks like you just had it done. You don't like it?

MARY ANN

Just thought I'd patronize the local business for once.

DELORES

I can't argue with that. As long as you're patronizing, how about a manicure too?

MARY ANN

No thank you. Painted hands are ungodly.

Delores waves her nails to dry. Mary Ann back-pedals.

MARY ANN

Except on you, of course, you have the right personality. Well, shoot, as long as I'm patronizing.

Mary Ann holds out her hand as if she were getting a shot.

MARY ANN

Go ahead.

INT. FASIO'S OFFICE - SAME DAY

Fasio concentrates on paperwork. Rodger's voice BOOMS outside her office...

RODGER (O.S.)
What's that dog doin' in our yard?!

FASIO
(calls out)
You're back.

Rodger charges into the office red-faced and angry.

RODGER
What'd you mean, I'm back? What's that dog doin' in our yard?

FASIO
That dog's there 'cause he's suppose to be there.

INT. GROCERY

Elton and Elaine listen outside Fasio's office.

INT. FASIO'S OFFICE

FASIO
Elton, Elaine and anyone else listening, are we completely out of groceries? Is the store burning down?

INT. GROCERY

Elton and Elaine spread, but still within earshot.

FASIO'S OFFICE

Fasio calms her voice, serious but quiet.

FASIO
We need that dog, Rodger. We've been dead long enough. And you're going to be dead with another heart attack if we don't take care'o that dog. I can't explain any better than that.

RODGER
What's gottn' into you? You're talking like a lunatic.

FASIO
Maybe so. But look, he got you outta that chair, didn't he?

RODGER

I can get outta that chair anytime I damn well please. It don't take no damned dog. He smells like hell!

FASIO

His name's Wiener.

Elton and Elaine GIGGLE outside her office.

FASIO

(yelling)

You all got a problem with that?

(to Rodger)

You're responsible for night walks. I'll take care of mornings.

Fed up, he starts to leave but she motions him to come close.

FASIO

(whispering)

Our Angel left.

RODGER

What angel?

FASIO

(normal voice)

Aw hell, see what I mean? You died to everything.

(whispering)

The angel stopped blessing us, 'cause we have dead hearts.

RODGER

And just how do you know that?

FASIO

(normal voice)

Aw, Rodger connect the dots!

RODGER

(exasperated)

What dots?

FASIO

As long as you're finally up and outta that chair, you can give him a bath. He's gonna be an indoor dog. Go home, I have work to do.

INT. GROCERY

Elaine and Elton scramble away from the office door. They watch Rodger who is too flustered to find the back door. Elton and Elaine point the way out.

INT. FASIO'S OFFICE

Fasio puts a new cigarette in her mouth, sits back satisfied and, behold, a smile.

INT. BOOKSTORE - SAME DAY

Henry wipes sawdust from the finished bookshelves, Sebastian is on his shoulder. Monarch shelves books. Henry's nervous, wants to say something. He hesitates. Finally...

HENRY

I can't read.

Monarch looks up startled.

HENRY

And I was wondering if you could teach me.

MONARCH

Oh, gee, Henry, I don't know. I've never taught anyone to read.

Just then they see Mary Ann coming out of the beauty salon with an updated stylish hairdo. Mary Ann looks around, cowers, afraid of being seen. She scurries to her truck for cover and drives off.

MONARCH

She's acting very strange.

HENRY

I know you could teach me.

MONARCH

I don't know, Henry, I'm not sure I can.

HENRY

Please.

MONARCH

If you keep your expectations of me as a teacher very low... very low... I'll try.

Just then they see Delores exiting her shop. Delores gives Henry and Monarch a wave. She's happy and in a hurry.

MONARCH

She's leaving early.

INT. MARY ANN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Mary Ann, at her vanity, vigorously brushes out her hair. Carl appears at the bedroom door.

CARL

What are you doing? It looked nice.

MARY ANN

Don't be ridiculous! I hated her touching my hair and found out nothing!

CARL

And what is it you're trying to find out?

MARY ANN

How can you be so dense? Why would the angel keep blessing her of all people, and not us? If it weren't for me and the dedicated church work I do, we'd have had no blessing at all all these years. It's because of me you haven't gone off and shot yourself like Bernie.

CARL

Have you gone mad? What do you have against that poor woman?

MARY ANN

The blessing! Carl! It's not right! Go to the store and get me some polish remover. I have to get this ungodliness off my nails.

Carl looks at her stunned then leaves in disgust. She continues to claw at her hair with the brush. She then sees Elton reflected in her mirror as he walks up to Delores' house. He has a small bouquet of wild flowers. Mary Ann jumps to her window, shuts the drapes then peeks between them.

INT. MONARCH'S MOTEL ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Monarch absentmindedly feeds Sebastian. Archie, groomed and with a new collar, is asleep on the bed. Monarch is restless.

MONARCH

Hey, Archie. Want to go for a walk?

Archie looks up then lays back down, uninterested.

MONARCH

(more excited)

Hey, Archie. Let's go for a walk. Walky walky?

Archie jumps off the bed without much enthusiasm. She attaches a new matching leash to Archie's collar and the two exit the motel.

INT. MARY ANN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Mary Ann has newly washed hair with curlers. She checks the time then peeks again through drapes at Delores' house while a blind vileness towards Delores rises in her eyes.

INT. MARY ANN'S LIVING ROOM

Mary Ann plops down in her chair while Carl reads a book. He tries to ignore her. She picks up her crochet, sans nail polish, and works the needle and yarn furiously. She checks the grandfather clock. Its TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK grows louder and louder until it pounds in her ears.

She can't stand it!

MARY ANN
Carl! Do something!

He SLAMS his book shut, stands up and leaves.

CARL
I'm going for a beer.

MARY ANN
(calling after)
It's your fault we've got no blessing.
I'm sure of that now!

Beside herself with anxiety she peers out the window at Delores' house. It looks peaceful, somehow illuminated, not with lights, for only a small lamp glows from within.

She looks around her living room; lit well enough, but is cold, flat and dull. She's afraid and runs out of the house after Carl.

EXT. MARY ANN'S YARD

Carl drives away. Monarch approaches with Archie.

MONARCH
Hello, Mary Ann. Are you okay?

MARY ANN
Yes, yes, yes! What're you doing with TR's dog? He's dead you know. Found him in the canyon. And why are you walking around during the blessing? It's not right.

MONARCH
TR is dead? Oh, gosh, that's too bad.
(off the cuff)
Uh, I've already had my blessing and thought it must be all right.

These words push Mary Ann to the edge of tears. She patters across her lawn (the only grass and manicured lawn we've seen in Santa Rita) to snoop into Delores' house. Monarch reluctantly walks on.

Mary Ann steps on something soft and squishy in her satiny house slippers. She looks down to see she's stepped in a dog pile. Now she's furious.

Delores' Dogs run up along the fence to greet Mary Ann. She glares at them then burns a hole through Delores' house with a contemptuous stare but the house seems, to her, to glow with a heavenly aura.

Mary Ann walks on one foot and heel to an out-building where, in the dark, she fumbles with the latch and opens the door.

MARY ANN

Any rattlesnakes in here, you best get outta my way!

INT. MARY ANN'S OUT-BUILDING

Mary Ann stumbles and KNOCKS things over. She CURSES. She finds and turns on a light. Half crazed she proceeds to gather board material, house paint, post, etc.

EXT. STREET CORNER BY ELTON'S HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Monarch stops. Archie sniffs around. She looks up and down the street. Archie leads Monarch and she obliges.

EXT. ELTON'S HOUSE

Cheezer meets Monarch and Archie at the gate and the two dogs say hello. Monarch looks for signs of Elton but his house is dark. She reaches over the gate to pat Cheezer.

MONARCH

Hi, Cheezer. You alone tonight?
(hesitates, sighs)
Well, Archie. Back home we go.

INT. DELORES' LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Delores and Elton are wrapped in a throw next to each other on the sofa.

ELTON

Thanks for dinner. It was good.

DELORES

You're very welcome. That was one of Bernie's favorites. Uh, Elton...

ELTON

Hmmmm.

DELORES

I know I'm a little older than you but do you think we could, you know, be together?

ELTON

Maybe under different circumstances, another time. And you being a little older has nothing to do with it. You're a very desirable woman.

Delores becomes introspective.

DELORES

I just don't feel I'm grieving as much as I should. At first I did feel guilty about Bernie's suicide. I guess cuz I thought I was suppose to.

ELTON

Duty guilt.

DELORES

But I don't really feel guilty at all. I was angry but now I feel relieved. I didn't even like him all that much anymore and was too afraid to admit it. Afraid of hurting him. Afraid to be alone.

ELTON

I can understand that.

DELORES

My angel doesn't come around anymore. And you wanna know the truth?

ELTON

My favorite subject, truth.

DELORES

I'm glad for that too. No angel outside my window reminding me to be a good girl. I'm not a good girl. I'm not a bad girl.

ELTON

You're a goddess, the moon, the earth, sex and death. Not the Virgin Mary, the one who made up for Eve. I, for one, don't believe Eve did anything wrong. She ate the apple of awareness and lost her innocence. Then she told Adam. He needed to know the truth too.

DELORES

Whatever... but as long as we're telling the truth, I really don't like your hair.

ELTON

Maybe it's time to cut it again. I thought if, maybe, I had been more attentive to her, more respectful, she wouldn't have left. If she came back, I'd--

DELORES

Truth?

ELTON

Go ahead.

DELORES

She'll never come back. She left 'cause you were crippled. She left 'cause she's a selfish girl. A bad girl. She definitely ain't no Virgin Mary and she's never had a blessing in her life.

ELTON

Don't say that.

DELORES

Truth.

ELTON

I can't stop missing her.

DELORES

You will.

They put their heads together.

EXT. MARY ANN'S YARD - MORNING - NEXT DAY

Ground level, three-legged dog jogs along the edge of Mary Ann's lawn then lopes up to a post grounded just behind a smeared dog pile in the grass. He sniffs then lifts a leg and pees on the sign. It's a clumsy sign with the painted words:

"DELORES KEEP YOUR DOGS OUT OF MY YARD!!!"

EXT. CANYON TRAIL - SAME MORNING

Sheriff Homer and Rancher trail on horseback down a canyon. They're packing camping gear and the Rancher's horse drags a travois with TR's wrapped body. Sheriff is sad and contemplative.

RANCHER

You all right, Sheriff?

SHERIFF HOMER

I'm okay.

RANCHER
You and him were friends.

SHERIFF HOMER
We were good friends, yes.

RANCHER
You think he went up there 'specially to die?

SHERIFF HOMER
Seems that way. Been thinking 'bout a coffin. I'm gonna make him a coffin. The best damned coffin.

RANCHER
Maybe it will help, you know, help you not to feel so sad.

SHERIFF HOMER
It shows that much? It ain't all about TR. I'm glad for TR. He was cursed. Cursed with somethin' he didn't want. I'm also sad 'cause year after year ya' live yer life doin' what you're suppose to until one day things aren't normal. It gets you to wonderin'. I didn't do nothin' to change it, but, somehow, I feel like I'm suppose to fix it.

RANCHER
Fix what? And how?

SHERIFF HOMER
(sigh)
I don't know.

Rancher nods. Silence.

EXT. DELORES' HOUSE - SAME MORNING

Delores exits her house while the Dogs run out the door with her. She moves through the gate, gets in her truck and starts the engine.

INT. DELORES' TRUCK

Delores checks her hair and makeup in the review then sees Mary Ann's sign, but can't quite make out what it says.

EXT. DELORES' HOUSE

Delores gets out of her truck and goes up to the sign. She's dumbstruck. She looks up to Mary Ann's house and sees someone quickly let the curtain fall shut. Delores returns to her truck and drives away.

INT. BOOK SHOP - SAME MORNING

Henry works on constructing a bird cage. Monarch unpacks books onto shelves then sees Delores pull up. Delores exits her truck and walks slowly to her salon. Her head is down.

INT. BEAUTY SALON

MONARCH

(entering)

Delores. What's wrong?

DELORES

She was here. Yesterday. We talked and laughed like old friends. Old friends and neighbors. She had me do her hair for the first time ever. And her nails! Why would she do that?

Henry arrives.

MONARCH

Do you mean Mary Ann? What did she do?

DELORES

She posted a hateful sign about me. For everyone to see. I think she's lost her mind.

HENRY

What'd the sign say?

DELORES

Something about me and the dogs... to stay out.

HENRY

I'll go over there myself and throw that sign through her window.

DELORES

That's sweet, Henry, but no. Oh, Lord, I need to talk to Elton.

EXT. BEAUTY SALON

Monarch and Henry follow Delores to her truck. Monarch jogs to the passenger side while Henry jumps into the bed.

INT. DELORES' TRUCK

MONARCH

Do you mind if we tag along?
Maybe we can help. I can take a picture of the sign, to document, just in case.

DELORES

Thank you.
 (sniff)
 I just don't know why...

Delores drives them away in the truck.

INT. GROCERY CHECK-OUT - SAME MORNING

Elton is tired and YAWNS. He wears a back brace and sits on the stool. His tee-shirt reads:

"It may not look like it but I'm in the Vortex."

His chivalry book is on the counter. Elaine shelves goods nearby.

Fasio enters HUMMING, and proceeds to her office.

ELTON

(to Fasio)
 You're in good spirits today.

FASIO

I am, thank you. I notice you are not wearing your hat.

ELTON

You notice correctly. Soon you will notice I don't need one.

FASIO

Hat, Elton!

Elton pulls the stand-by hat out from under the counter and puts it on not bothering to shove his hair into it. Fasio retreats to her office.

Monarch, Delores and Henry enter the store. Delores moves into Elton's space with comfortable familiarity which makes Monarch step back, self-conscious.

Henry is happy to see Elaine. Elton tries to acknowledge Monarch but Delores dominates his attention.

DELORES

Elton, I, uh, Mary Ann put a sign in her yard. An ugly sign.

She stops, distracted by Fasio's HUMMING. They all turn to listen then look to Elton and Elaine.

ELTON

(mouthing silently)
 She's happy.

ELAINE

(mouthing silently)
 She's happy.

Henry moves closer to Elaine. Elaine doesn't notice but just wants to know what's going on. Elton holds out the chivalry book for Monarch.

ELTON
For your store.

Monarch takes the book and holds it to her chest.

MONARCH
Uh, I saw Mary Ann last night in her yard. She acted half-crazed.

ELTON
Last night? You were out?

MONARCH
I, huh, was walking Archie. I'm responsible for him. Now that TR's dead.

DELORES & ELAINE & HENRY & ELTON
TR's dead?

MONARCH
Found him in the canyon.

Everyone stares at her dumfounded. She shrugs, a little proud, as if she is now a member of the community.

ELTON
Damn. I figured but hate to hear it's true.

MONARCH
I'm very sorry, Elton.

DELORES
Gee, Elton, you don't need that now. I'm so sorry you've lost another loved one.

ELTON
Well, maybe he's happy now. He had a tough life.

HENRY
Hi, Elaine.

ELAINE
Hi, Henry.

HENRY
I'm making shelves and tables and a cage for Monarch. Uh, for Sebastian.

ELAINE
That's nice.

HENRY
She's teaching me to read.

ELAINE
(almost impressed)
Really?

HENRY
(proud)
Really. She says I'm a fast learner.

Elaine gives him notice for the first time then reverts her attention back to Elton and the two women.

ELTON
What does the sign say?

DELORES
Telling me to keep my dogs outta her yard. My dogs ain't been in her yard. Ever.

MONARCH
I think she should sue. Defamation of character.

ELTON
Well, Mary Ann's piety does get the best of her, but that's going a bit too far.

MONARCH
Sorry, raised by a lawyer. Knee-jerk reaction.

HENRY
I saw a TV program once about a prison; where the inmates held their own court. Ostrich court I think they called it.

ELAINE
I think you mean kangaroo. Right country though.

ELTON
What do you hope to accomplish? Why come to me?

DELORES
Talking it out in a neighborly fashion won't work. She seems to hate me. Maybe it's the hairdo. But she looked so nice. Even though you stopped going to church, Elton, she respects you.

ELTON

Maybe, Henry, you have the right idea. We can make a game of it, diffuse the situation.

Elaine, gives Henry a longer gaze of consideration. Henry notices and smiles.

FASIO (O.S.)

Meeting adjourned. Let's just all get back to work.

ELTON

We'll meet tonight and work out the details.

ELAINE

(glances at Henry)
Me too?

ELTON

(winks at Henry)
Henry's going to need your assistance.

INT. CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

Sheriff Homer sits at a table in front of and below the pulpit. Pastor Eli Smith sits in a choir chair along with several TOWNSPEOPLE positioned as jury, Eddie, Violet and Minnie included.

Monarch, Delores, and Elton (with new regular short haircut and a plain tee-shirt) sit on one side of the aisle.

Mary Ann, her lawyer PAUL BRADLEY, 50s in an expensive suit, and Carl sit on the other side of the aisle. TOWNSPEOPLE are scattered throughout the pews.

Frank, with a very swollen black eye in the opposite eye from before, sits in a pew with his arms outstretched behind Nicole, Megan and Emma.

Henry and Elaine enter and walk up the aisle carrying books, poster and papers. Elaine stops at the pew with Frank and the girls.

ELAINE

Use up all the girls your own age, Frank?

The girls give Elaine a dirty look. Frank flips her the bird.

HENRY

Ever hear of statutory rape?

FRANK

And what would you know about that?

ELAINE

Unlike you, Frank, he reads.

FRANK

Fuck you, Elaine, I can read.

ELAINE

Well, if you ever had two good eyes at the same time, I'd believe it.

HENRY

You best go sit with your parents, girls.

NICOLE

We don't have to do what you say.

HENRY

The sheriff is right there.

FRANK

Okay, okay, I'm leavin'.

(getting up)

You're getting too damned smart for you're own good.

HENRY

I am getting smart enough to know what's good for me. Something you can't seem to learn.

Henry and Elaine proceed up the aisle to the front and sit with Elton and Delores. Sheriff Homer looks through some papers until he picks up a carpenter's hammer and POUNDS a piece of wood.

SHERIFF HOMER

I want, uh, meeting... uh, court in session. Whatever. Uh, does anyone have anything to say before we get started?

PASTOR ELI SMITH

(standing)

I'd like to say a prayer, if I may, before we begin.

SHERIFF HOMER

I don't see why not. It's your building after all.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we adjure your presence during this difficult time between friends and your two faithful servants, Mary Ann and Delores. Give us the wisdom and courage to face this problem with love and understanding. Amen.

SHERIFF HOMER

Thank you, pastor. Anyone else?

Pastor Eli Smith, looking satisfied as if he's set the tone, sits.

PAUL BRADLEY

(stands)

Yes, I'm Paul Bradley. Don't know what happened to the jurisprudential concept of separation of church and state, but, so be it. Mrs. Everett here has hired me to represent her.

SHERIFF HOMER

Nice to meet you, Mr. Bradley. Welcome to Santa Rita, although I'm not sure your professional services are necessary. You'll find the people of Santa Rita are good folk... well,

(looks at Frank)

Most of us are, anyway.

Frank looks around, like "who me?" Then smirks.

PAUL BRADLEY

I'm sorry your hon... sheriff, but I'm here on Mrs. Everett's behalf to assure the proceedings are fair.

SHERIFF HOMER

Okay, well then, uh, welcome, once again, Mr. Bradley. Ahem. How do we begin? Elton, do you--

PASTOR ELI SMITH

(stands)

Just a minute. First, because we're in God's house, we'll assume everyone will tell the truth and nothing but the truth. All agreed?

Delores' team nods. Paul Bradley nods in reluctant agreement. What else can he do? Carl behind them doesn't like any of this. Satisfied, Pastor Eli sits back down. Elton stands

SHERIFF HOMER

Elton.

ELTON

Thank you, Sheriff, your honor. First I'd like us to take a moment of silence to remember TR. He blessed us for years in ways we'll never know or understand.

(bows his head)

The people bow and remain SILENT for a moment. Paul Bradley throws up his arms. Sheriff Homer wipes away tears.

ELTON

Thanks everyone. Okay, my team and I would like to present some evidence carefully gathered and documented over the last two weeks.

Elton mounts a poster on an easel.

ELTON

Here we have a rather nice map, thanks to Monarch,
(smiles at Monarch)
of Mary Ann and Delores' neighborhood.

The people turn to Monarch, she blushes, the people see the possible romantic connection between them and give a nod of approval. Eddie gives Elton a thumbs up. Delores teasingly nudges Monarch.

ELTON

But first, I'd like to remind the jury that, as citizens of Santa Rita, you might put aside any prejudices you might have against either woman.

Mary Ann is amazed by the thought of anyone begrudging her.

ELTON

And I hope, Mary Ann, that after this, we can remain friends.

PAUL BRADLEY

I object. The prosecution must not address my client unless she's on the stand.

SHERIFF

Well, uh, okay, Elton. I guess you can't do that. Thank god you got your haircut.

Everyone enthusiastically CLAPS in agreement. Sheriff Homer wonders if he should use the hammer.

ELTON

Thank you, Sheriff. And I'm sorry, Mary Ann.

PAUL BRADLEY

Objection!

Sheriff Homer shrugs at Elton. Elton points to the map of squares and lines representing houses, streets and such. One square is labeled "Mary Ann" the other "Delores".

ELTON

Here we have a map of Delores and Mary Ann's street. Now we all know what a real nice fence Bernie made for the dogs. And we all know none of her dogs are fence jumpers.

PAUL BRADLEY

Objection. We don't all know that.

SHERIFF HOMER

Yeah, we do.

Paul Bradley rolls his eyes.

ELTON

Do your dogs ever roam freely, Delores?

DELORES

One time, a couple years ago, maybe, Sweetie Pie dug a hole and escaped. I think a rabbit got into the yard.

(laughs)

Six dogs runnin' 'round that yard after a poor 'ol bunny rabbit.

(turning to Mary Ann)

You remember?

PAUL BRADLEY

Objection!

MARY ANN

Eight dogs! She must have eight dogs, at least!

Paul Bradley puts his hand on Mary Ann's arm to calm her.

CARL

(in a stage whisper)

Mary Ann! Stop it!

Mary Ann turns and glares at him.

PAUL BRADLEY

(pats her hand)

Let me take care of this.

Elton sees Mary Ann is not in her right mind and hesitates.

ELTON

Maybe we should stop. This was meant to be fun, a lark, but Mary Ann obviously is not feeling herself. I think maybe we've gone too far. Carl?

Elaine and Henry begin to object.

PAUL BRADLEY

Don't worry about Mary Ann. Continue.

ELTON

(reluctant)

Well, then, I, uh, was going to introduce more evidence like Delores' dog walking routine, but I'll just skip ahead to the main evidence gathered by Henry and Elaine. We call them the, uhh, Poopy Papers.

The people LAUGH. Delores, Monarch and Elaine are serious. Mary Ann is stoic. Paul Bradley is disgusted.

ELTON

I'll sit down now and let Henry explain the evidence he and Elaine so carefully gathered over the last several days. Henry.

Henry proudly rises and stands front and center and displays a poster with several pictures of dog feces marked with numbers and arrows and an outline labeled "Rodeo Grounds".

HENRY

Thank you, Elton. Uh, it was our, Elaine's and mine, intention to prove the pile in Mary Ann's yard could not possibly be from any one of Delores' dogs.

(points to poster)

Here is a picture of Mary Ann's poop.

The people LAUGH.

HENRY

And though it's been smashed and smeared somewhat, it's easy to see that it was, in its fresh state, two logs side by side.

The people GIGGLE, but Henry is dead serious.

HENRY

Now, here we see, on this poster, piles from Delores' six dogs. You'll notice that each one is distinct.

PAUL BRADLEY

Objection. These are pictures of one specimen per dog, which proves nothing.

HENRY

On the contrary. Elaine and I followed these dogs for two weeks, two times a day. That's fourteen days times six dogs.

(MORE)

We took eighty-four photographs.

(excited)

These arrows on the map show where each dog pooped over the two week period. The color of the arrow represents each dog. And the pile pictures in this poster are color coded per each of Delores' dogs with this one being Mary Ann's poop.

The people LAUGH.

PAUL BRADLEY

Objection. My client and I would appreciate it if Henry, it is Henry?, would cease from referring to the excrement found in her yard, as "Mary Ann's Poop."

SHERIFF HOMER

Henry, can you call it something else?

HENRY

I'll try. Sorry, Mary Ann. Like I was trying to explain, Elaine and I discovered that a dog will drop
(picks up on P. Bradley's word)
excrement, the same way every time. No shit, it's true.

The people LAUGH. Carl gets up. He's distressed and goes to the back of the chapel.

INT. CHURCH ATRIUM

Carl paces. The proceedings continue in the sanctuary.

HENRY (O.S.)

Here, in this picture you'll see Daisy's droppings are spread out. Daisy walks forward as she, uh...

ELAINE (O.S.)

Defecates.

Carl leaves the building.

INT. CHURCH OF CHRIST

HENRY

Defecates. She walks forward or even in a circle. But there's never a pile. Not like Caesar. Here in this picture of Caesar's pile, there is a pile. But in a crisscross. Not like Mary Ann's, sorry, uh...

ELAINE

Exhibit A.

HENRY

Exhibit A is definitely, in it's original state, two logs side by side. Caesar's pile was a crisscross, every time; and, I swear to God, a swirl on the top log.

LAUGHTER. Mary Ann looks to the back for Carl.

PASTOR ELI SMITH

(stands)

We've already established that only the truth be told. There's no need to swear to God again.

SHERIFF HOMER

Don't swear anymore, Henry. Go on.

Pastor Eli Smith scowls then sits back down. Mary Ann whispers something to Paul Bradley.

PAUL BRADLEY

Excuse me... Henry? Are you sure you have sufficient credentials to present such elaborate evidence to this court?

HENRY

What do you mean?

PAUL BRADLEY

You can't read, can you, Henry?

HENRY

(initially ashamed)

Monarch, is teaching me to read.

(regained confidence)

I do pretty good.

ELAINE

Excuse me, uh, Mr. Bradley, is it? That wasn't necessary, for one. And second, it doesn't alter the evidence. They're pictures for chrissakes.

Pastor Eli Smith stands and tries to object to Elaine cursing, but he's ignored.

ELAINE

I think Henry should continue with his findings. Our findings.

SHERIFF HOMER

Agreed. You okay with that Mr. Bradley?

Paul Bradley throws up his arms.

EXT. MARY ANN'S HOUSE - SAME DAY

Mary Ann's truck is parked in front of the house. The bed is piled with household items, one being the grandfather clock from the living room.

HENRY (O.S.)(FADING OUT)
Dog #3, Pasole, only poops at a junction,
and never on anything less than three
inches off the ground. Very
interesting...

Carl exits the house with a couple suitcases. He throws them into the bed with the other stuff.

INT. MARY ANN'S LIVING ROOM

Carl grabs the crochet from Mary Ann's chair-side table, pulls needlepoint and various decorative things off walls.

EXT. MARY ANN'S YARD

Carl takes the load he's gathered and dumps them in the truck bed. He walks over to the sign, yanks it out then tosses it onto the collection of goods in the truck bed.

While he goes in and out of the house with suitcases and items, Henry's testimony continues.

HENRY (O.S.)
...and that's why we believe, dog number
six, Genie, could not have deposited
Exhibit A, as Exhibit A, from our careful
study, contained no grass. Thank you.

SHERIFF HOMER (O.S.)
Mr. Bradley, do you have any questions or
comments regarding Henry's testimony?

PAUL BRADLEY (O.S.)
I can't wait to walk my dog.

Carl tosses a final load into the cab then climbs behind the wheel and drives away.

INT. CHURCH OF CHRIST

SHERIFF HOMER
Elton, do you have anything to add?

Elton stands and starts to speak but is interrupted by Carl who strides to the front and up to Mr. Bradley.

CARL
This nonsense is over.

MARY ANN
Nonsense?

PAUL BRADLEY
Excuse me, but--

CARL
(to Mary Ann)
Your truck is out front with your things
in it.

MARY ANN
What are you talking about? Where are we
going?

CARL
I'm leaving you. Rather you're leaving
me.

PAUL BRADLEY
Please, the jury's about to convene. You
don't want to influence--

MARY ANN
Please, Carl. What are you doing?

CARL
Your sister is expecting you. I'll make
sure you're financially taken care of. I
will, however, deduct this fool's fees
from your settlement.

PAUL BRADLEY
I beg your pardon.

Mary Ann slumps into the pew, white with shock. Paul Bradley
attempts to comfort her. Pastor Eli Smith goes to Carl to
dissuade him. Carl ignores him and approaches Delores. Pastor
Eli Smith goes to Mary Ann.

CARL
(to jury)
This fiasco is over.
(to Delores)
I would like to apologize on behalf of
my, huh, Mary Ann. I'm sorry for the hurt
she must have caused you.

Mary Ann begins to object but is quieted by Paul Bradley and
the Pastor Eli flanking. They hold onto her.

DELORES
I'm very sorry, Mary Ann. I know how
proud you are of your yard.
(emotional)
Why didn't you just ask?
(MORE)

I would'a cleaned it up for you even though it weren't any of my dogs. I would'a.

CARL

Mr. Bradley, Pastor, would you please help my wi..., Mary Ann to her truck?

The two men escort dazed Mary Ann down the aisle. Carl goes to Delores.

DELORES

Thank you, Carl.

CARL

Im going to make sure she gets to her sister's okay but when I return I'd like to make this up to you. Dinner, perhaps?

DELORES

Dinner would be nice.

Carl leaves. Townspeople are a-gawk.

VIOLET

[Crazy town.]

MINNIE

[A peace pipe would have been a lot easier]

Violet and Minnie laugh at their own jokes.

Sheriff Homer is upset and weepy, he wipes his eyes not wanting anyone to notice. Elton and Monarch go to him.

ELTON

You all right, Sheriff?

SHERIFF HOMER

Watchin' those two...

MONARCH

Mary Ann and Carl or Delores and Carl?

SHERIFF

Both. Either. And Henry there.

Henry and Elaine discuss the case with jurors.

SHERIFF HOMER

It's all changing. It's like...
I don't know... something happened. The bells, people dying... people changin'.

(quietly)

I don't get the blessing anymore.
Haven't heard the bells for weeks.

(MORE)

Obviously everyone but me is getting blessed. I don't understand. All I know is that I'm... I don't know... I became sheriff to help people but all I do is break up fights between the same people year after year, write speeding tickets to the same people year after year...

ELTON

I'm going to share a blessing with you, Sheriff.

EXT. SANTA RITA STREET - NIGHT

Elton, with Monarch by his side, hands TR's belled anklets to Sheriff Homer.

INT. FASIO'S KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Fasio and Rodger are playing cards, having fun. Motley Dog/Weiner, lays at their feet.

Fasio plays a card and Rodger throws his hand of cards onto the table.

RODGER

(good natured)

Damnit, woman! That's three times in a row.

FASIO

You accusing me of cheating?

RODGER

If we were playing for money, I'd--

FASIO

Shush!

BELLS jingle outside their home. Weiner BARKS.

RODGER

Quiet, Wiener. It's okay.

He reaches down to pet Wiener. Fasio gazes at a dog sculpture mantle clock. It's 7:10.

RODGER (CONT'D)

What's that? The blessing?

FASIO

That's the blessing, you idiot.
Now deal.

INT. ISABEL'S LIVING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Isabel sits on the sofa, despondent. Bobby and Ben lie on the floor and watch television. Isabel, ever hopeful checks the clock then she hears the BELLS. She puts her hands to her mouth with joy and relief.

INT. HENRY'S ROOM

Henry and Elaine sit on his bed.

ELAINE

You were very good at the trial.

HENRY

Only because we worked together. As a team.

ELAINE

Maybe, but I think you have a knack.

HENRY

For what?

ELAINE

I think you should go to school. Study forensic science. Something like that.

They hear the BELLS. Henry smiles. His prayer has been answered.

HENRY

I like your hair down like that.

EXT. BACK STREET IN SANTA RITA - SAME NIGHT

BELLS. With TR's Bells strapped to his ankles, Sheriff Homer dances down the street to his own music in his head. It's as if he's been born again.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - SAME

Sheriff Homer picks up a few small stones and throws them at a window until Frank opens it.

FRANK

What the fuck?!

SHERIFF HOMER

Come with me.

FRANK

What? I didn't do nothin'

SHERIFF HOMER

Get out here or you're under arrest. I'm sure you did something I could charge you for.

Frank comes outside and Sheriff Homer removes one of the anklets and hands it to Frank.

FRANK

Shit, what's this all about?

SHERIFF HOMER

We're partners now.

Confused Frank holds the belled anklet while Sheriff Homer, with a hop and skip, puts his arm around Frank and leads him into the dark. BELLS

SHERIFF HOMER

Bless you. Bless you. God bless us everyone.

FRANK

What th' fuck?

EXT. SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE DESERT - SAME NIGHT

Elton and Monarch lounge on a small sofa set up against the cab in the bed of an old truck. A small table is set with Monarch's picnic things and wine. Elton wears a tee-shirt with a Libra symbol.

MONARCH

I feel so sorry for Mary Ann but it seems things turned out for the best. What's your next quest?

ELTON

I'm thinking this town's too small for my quests. Can't seem to involve only me.

MONARCH

What about the altar, chivalry, devotion to all women?

ELTON

Took it all down. I'm limiting my quest to only one woman.

MONARCH

What about Holly?

ELTON

She and her picture are gone too.

From under the sofa cushion he pulls out a belt made with his braided hair and tooled leather.

ELTON
I made this for you.

MONARCH
Really? It's your braid!

ELTON
Here, stand up.

He drapes the braid belt around her hips. She raises it to around her waist.

MONARCH
Does this mean we're going steady?

He re-adjusts the belt back down around her hips.

ELTON
No, it belongs here, around the relationship chakra. Yes, we're going steady.

He holds onto her hips then pulls her to his lap. She puts her arms around his neck.

MONARCH
I don't know what you're talking about, but it feels right.

She kisses him then she looks up at the night sky which is incredibly dark but dense with stars.

MONARCH
(lifts her wine to the sky)
To Orion.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)
Help! Help! M'n'ark, M'n'ark.

INT. OLD TRUCK CAB

Cheezer and Archie lay, ears cocked, either side the bird cage. They watch Sebastian inside who's hanging upside down.

ELTON (O.S.)
Do you have any books on Astrology?

EXT. IN THE DESERT - NIGHT

A pack of coyotes scramble and play.

FADE OUT.

THE END