

Six Months or Longer
Episode 1 - Young and Innocent

written by

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FADE IN:

INT: RENO, NEVADA COURTHOUSE - MORNING, JULY 1926

A gavel bangs.

JUDGE RAMSES

Divorced!

NORMA STEWART (28) jumps up and grabs her newly signed DIVORCE PAPERS from JUDGE RAMSES' (67) bench. She presses them to her chest.

NORMA

(teary)

Thank you, Judge.

INT. RENO COURTHOUSE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

She runs from the courtroom and into the lobby, where she meets a line of other divorce-seekers.

Norma embraces the women--her close friends of the last six months. They cheer for her as she skips down the line and out through the front doors.

EXT. VIRGINIA STREET - CONTINUOUS

Norma stuffs the papers into her BAG and makes her way down the courthouse stairs. She wades through the crowded street towards the Virginia Street Bridge, working her WEDDING RING off of her finger.

EXT. VIRGINIA STREET BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Norma stops midway across the bridge. Without ceremony, she rears back and throws her wedding ring into the Truckee River and turns back into town.

The ring arcs, spinning through clear desert air down into the rushing waters of the Truckee, sinking and settling in the silt. Immediately, WALT (10, town urchin) swims up to the ring and grabs it with his free hand--the other is plugging his nose. He surfaces and swims ashore, where his colleagues OLMO (11, constantly around, always a problem) and DORIAN (7, Walt's younger brother, always tailing the older boys) wait, each holding a few rings of their own.

The boys sprint through town to RENO PAWN. An entry bell jingles as they burst in.

INT. RENO PAWN - CONTINUOUS

HARLAN PAWN (mid-40s, pawn shop proprietor, greasy) sits behind a COUNTER, sawing off the end of a beat-up SHOTGUN. A sign on the wall behind him reads "ALL RINGS FIXED PRICE: \$1 SELL, \$10 BUY." The room is dusty and overcrowded, but the boys know their way around it. Used WEDDING DRESSES are displayed in the window. The boys slam their collection of rings onto the counter.

Harlan sighs and puts down the gun. He counts the rings -- there are five. He opens up a CASH REGISTER and counts out FIVE DOLLARS, which he hands to Walt. The boys salute him, perform a collective heel turn, and run full speed to the TOYS and MAGAZINES in the corner.

The same shop bell rings again as a YOUNG MAN AND WOMAN (early 20s) enter the store arm in arm and beaming. They walk up to Harlan, who has just picked up his shotgun and, annoyed, now puts it down again. He pushes two of the new wedding rings towards the young people and they excitedly examine them. The rings are still wet. The young man pulls a TWENTY-DOLLAR BILL out of his pocket and hands it to Harlan. The couple kiss and run out of the store. Harlan wearily picks up his saw and gun.

CUT TO BLACK AND TITLES EMERGE:

SIX MONTHS OR LONGER

EXT. OXBOW DIVORCE RANCH ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

The couple from the pawn shop drives past the ranch entrance on their way out of Reno. Norma is heading into the main ranch office, trailed by other women. A large SIGN hanging from a wooden arch reads "OXBOW RANCH."

CUT TO:

INT. OXBOW RANCH OFFICE - LATER

Norma is surrounded by SUITCASES and crying friends. A sea of "congratulations" and "we'll miss you" etc. She, too, is teary. She hugs her friends and walks towards the door, where the ranchers--JEAN SPROUT (late 60s), ALVIN SPROUT (late 60s, husband to Jean), MARIAN LANE (late 60s), and MARION LANE (late 60s, husband to Marian)--all stand, looking at her with reserved love and pride. She shakes hands with each, saying their names.

NORMA

Jean. Alvin. Marian. Marion.

Marion alone gives her a hug. During this teary goodbye, IRENE (28, self-possessed, in a good mood), BEA (19, shy, jumpy, nervous), and ROGER (34, self-consciously out of place) enter holding LUGGAGE and, realizing it's a bad moment, slink to the back corner of the room.

NORMA (CONT'D)

You know, coming here was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. It was the first thing I really did for myself. But after the last six months...now I really got a taste for it.

The women cheer and holler. The ranchers laugh.

NORMA (CONT'D)

This has meant the world to me.

JEAN

Good luck, Norma.

ALVIN

And keep safe.

NORMA

(smiling)

Maybe I'll get married again and blow it up just so I can come back and see you all again.

The women laugh. Marion smiles, shakes his head, then faux-salutes Norma.

MARION

Reno's newest legal resident, I say unto you with love: go now. And never come back.

The women clap. Norma departs and the other women follow her out--the newcomers are left alone with the ranchers. Marion smiles at them and nods hello while the other three stare, standoffish. A beat. Then,

MARION (CONT'D)

Getting divorced, I take it?

All nod, Roger and Bea with embarrassment, Irene unfazed.

MARION (CONT'D)

Well, there's no finer place to be a separée than Oxbow. Alvin, Marian, you mind fetching some bedding?

Alvin and Marian exit.

IRENE
Did you say "separée"?

MARION
Just a joke we have around here.
You're not yet divorcées, so,
separées.

Marion gestures for the newcomers to approach a DESK, upon which lies a VERY LARGE LEDGER. Bea steps forward.

BEA
(nervous)
My name is Beatrice Monaghan, I
sent a letter, did it reach you? I
hope so. I don't know how this
works, but I'm here. To check in.

Marion finds her name in his ledger, nodding.

MARION
Beatrice Monaghan. You'll have bed
eight.

Roger quickly approaches the desk, hand outstretched. Marion takes it, amused.

ROGER
Roger, pleased to meet you.

MARION
Marion.

ROGER
I also have a room booked. It
should be under my wife's name.
Anselm. Victoria Anselm.

BEA
(shocked)
You're divorcing *Victoria Anselm*?

ROGER
(sheepish)
We are getting divorced, yes.

BEA
(to herself)
Wow.

Silence as Marion searches the book.

MARION

Anselm. Bed six. Now, we don't typically get *husbands*...I--it's fine, of course, but...

He thinks for a moment, gets an idea, and smiles.

MARION (CONT'D)

I think we can figure something out.

Marion turns to Irene expectantly.

MARION (CONT'D)

And your name?

IRENE

Irene Rochelle. I was hoping I could make a reservation with you now, actually.

JEAN

You're supposed to book in advance.

Alvin and Marian reenter, carrying BEDDING.

IRENE

(unfazed)

It was last-minute. Do you have a free bed?

JEAN

No such thing as a free bed, hon.

MARION

(admonishing)

Jean.

(to Irene)

We'll find something.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXBOW RANCH MAIN YARD - MOMENTS LATER

The four ranchers hold the new guests' luggage. Bea and Roger do their best to keep their clothes clean as they wade through the yard, to no avail. Irene doesn't bother. They head for the *separées*' sleeping quarters, a long barn across the central yard from the ranch house and office.

At TABLES outside of the barn, women are playing cards, writing letters, talking, for the most part enjoying themselves.

The ranch is busy--our newcomers take in the little enclosed ecosystem. RANCH HANDS stack hay, lead cattle into the stockyard, and wink at the sitting women. CLIFF BRINK (ranch hand, young, hot) waves at Bea. Some wave back, all blush. Horses whinny and drink long from large tubs. Someone feeds a few stray calves from a bottle. Cattle are visible far in the distance grazing wherever they can find shade. The ranch seems to extend endlessly.

Alvin spots THREE MEN wearing suits far in the distance, setting up a THEODOLITE and carrying LEATHER BAGS--they are land surveyors, and they're trespassing. Alvin alerts Marian, gesturing to the trio. Marian squints.

ALVIN
(bothered)
Surveyors.

Our group reaches the barn and the women at the tables eye them as they enter. Irene catches the eye of CHANNERY FLECK (31, two months into her stay, devoted mother, pent-up), who smiles, surprised. Irene gives a small wave. Channery waves back.

INT. OXBOW SEPARÉE SLEEPING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Irene, Bea, and Roger follow the ranchers into the barn and take in the scene inside. One long room with BEDS on each side, personal belongings arranged on NIGHTSTANDS. A few women lounge about. A hayloft overhangs the back third of the room.

MARION
Here's where you'll be sleeping for
the next six months.

Roger looks around nervously, clearly uncomfortable with the arrangement.

ROGER
There's no way to do it...faster?

JEAN
The county won't hear your case
under Nevada "law" until you're
recognized as a resident. Six
months minimum.

MARION
Don't worry. You folks'll get the
good weather--you'll see winter.

Roger nods, unsatisfied.

MARIAN

Ann? Still up there?

A muffled grunt from the hayloft. ANN CETERA (46, no children, getting her second divorce, makes beautiful modernist quilts) is up there.

MARIAN (CONT'D)

You have to move your things back down here.

ANN

No, what? No! You promised: I get the hayloft.

MARIAN

Situation's changed. We have someone who needs the privacy.

ANN

Are you serious?

Ann's head peeks over the side of the loft and she spies Roger. She raises her eyebrows.

MARIAN

He's already paid.

Ann laughs.

ANN

(teasing)

Well, come on up! There's room enough for both of us, you know.

ROGER

(flustered)

Oh, no, I don't think--

ANN

Why isn't your wife here? You didn't trust her to go through with it?

ROGER

She's a busy woman.

BEA

(in awe)

She's Victoria Anselm.

ANN

The heiress?

ROGER
And pilot.

BEA
The first to cross the Alps.

MARIAN
Get down, Ann.

ANN
He can have the bed, but I'm not
moving my supplies.

ROGER
Supplies?

MARIAN
(exasperated)
Fine.

Ann climbs down a LADDER from the hayloft with an armload of CLOTHES, which she deposits on her new bed. She holds her right hand out to Roger expectantly. When she doesn't say anything, Roger quickly takes her hand.

ROGER
Roger.

Ann does not let go of his handshake. She extends her left hand out to Irene, crossing over her right while still holding on to Roger.

IRENE
Irene.

She turns to Bea, still holding her double handshakes.

BEA
Bea.

ANN
Ann Cetera.

Ann curtsies before finally releasing her handshakes. Roger takes his suitcase and heads for the hayloft. Bea silently grabs her own and heads to her bed to unpack.

MARION
(to Irene)
So, you'll take Roger's bed down
here.

Jean points towards a corner of the room.

JEAN
Bathroom over there. Clean yourself
when you smell.

ALVIN
Meals at 6, 1, and 6. Come as you
please.

JEAN
And if you see a cow messing with a
float, let us know.

ROGER
A float?

The ranchers ignore him. Marian turns towards the other three
ranchers.

MARIAN
(quietly)
Let's go see about our trespassers.

MARION
(smiling at the separées)
We're glad you're here.

The ranchers turn to exit.

ANN
(nosy)
Who's trespassing?

Ann runs after the ranchers, following them out. The new trio
takes in their surroundings and unpacks.

As they unload their belongings, we get a sense of who they
are outside of the ranch. Bea places a WELL-LOVED STUFFED
ANIMAL on her bed. Roger props up a FRAMED PICTURE of his
wife, waving from a plane wearing a pearl necklace, against a
HAY BALE next to his bed. Irene takes a LOCKET out from a
sock and puts it on, tucking the medallion beneath her shirt.

Bea looks out the door and breathes deeply.

BEA
I've never been to the desert
before. Feels funny in my nose.

ROGER
It's the absence of smell, Victoria
says. It's like that high up, too.
Something about the...dryness.

Irene takes a deep breath and grins.

IRENE

I love that smell. Smells *clean*.
And the heat--even your sweat
disappears. Vaporizes. I feel so
fresh. Starting over.

Her optimism fits strangely in this atmosphere. Roger and Bea look at her, slightly puzzled. Another woman in the barn absentmindedly strokes a PICTURE of a child. Silence as they continue unpacking. Bea's clothes are threadbare but precious to her; she treats them delicately.

ROGER

Have either of you found a lawyer
already?

Bea does not look up.

IRENE

I don't really know how this works.

ROGER

As I understand--

A loud commotion outside. Shrieks. Everyone jumps. Irene exits and Roger tumbles down the ladder to follow suit. Bea stays where she is.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXBOW TABLES - MOMENTS LATER

The card games and letter-writing have stopped, aside from one table of scowling women, including DOLORES (32, perennially frowning), still trying to play their game. The other women are crowded around TWYLA (mid-20s, charming, a natural performer), who reads a LETTER aloud. Two women, URSULIN (28, believer in the supernatural realm, impulsive) and MINNIE (25, Ursulin's closest friend on the ranch, a talented artist) stare up at Twyla, captivated. One woman in the crowd, FRITA (early 30s, well-read, slightly out of place), isn't paying attention. She looks out towards where the cattle graze and watches the ranchers, on horseback, approach the surveyors.

TWYLA

(reading)

And then, my delicious vegetable, I
will begin to put your clothes BACK
ON.

Shrieks of laughter. Dolores stares daggers at Twyla.

TWYLA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Piece by piece, as slowly as the night will allow. I'll begin with your sock. Left, let's say, the one with the hole in it.

Frita notices something: the ranchers have split up and are flanking the group of surveyors, trying to drive them back towards the main yard. Irene, noticing Frita, walks closer to her and follows her gaze.

TWYLA (CONT'D)

(reading)

You beg me: no more, please, you'll just have to take them off again. But I'll know you don't really mean it. I can hear it in the way you beg that you want me to put the other sock on. No hole in that one.

Roger blushes. He leaves to look at the horses. When he reaches the enclosure, the ranch hands leave.

IRENE

(quiet, to Frita)

Who are those men in the suits?

FRITA

No idea.

IRENE

I heard them call them surveyors.

FRITA

Hmm.

The surveyors shoot the gap between two of the ranchers, who then return to formation and renew their flanking.

IRENE

Wow.

Bea appears in the barn doorframe. She listens to Twyla.

TWYLA

(reading)

My love, oh, I can hardly contain myself. Moving on to the next item, which is still in my mouth from earlier, I remove and wring it out. Slowly, I drag it across your skin like an eraser.

Frita follows the action on the hill. The trespassers are chased into a dead end. They look around wildly, but there's nowhere to go. They seem to surrender. Irene and Frita are rapt.

IRENE
(louder)
They caught them!

The other women turn their heads towards the rancher/surveyor battle, too. Twyla, noticing that she is losing her audience, starts to perform louder.

TWYLA
(reading)
Now that your coat is back on, I
ask you to hand me the gloves from
inside the pockets. Oh, can't find
them? Did you check *both* pockets?
Aha! Here in the inside pocket, you
tease.

The ranchers drive the surveyors down the slope towards the ranch's main yard now. The surveyors, defeated, go willingly.

URSULIN
I think they're bringing them here!

TWYLA
(reading)
I step back and admire your clothed
figure. My imagination runs wild
thinking about the underneath.

The ranchers and surveyors approach. The three cornered men-- DEAN JORALEMON (early 30s, strong, well-dressed, a leader), GORN (impossible to tell age, bean pole, eely), and BRUISE (early 40s, eyepatch, rough)--walk defeated through camp, trying not to make eye contact with the onlookers. They have a lot of equipment with them: LEATHER CASES and BAGS, a TRIPOD, some kind of CAMERA around Bruise's neck.

DEAN
(to the ranchers)
No, we didn't take anything. We're
just interested in the goings on
you got going on around here.

Bruise drops a heavy leather case and scrambles to pick it up. Some instruments clink about inside.

The women stare. Ann gasps.

ANN
(to the surveyors)
Peeping Toms?

GORN
No, ma'am! Just looking around,
that's all.

BRUISE
Lotta good land you've got here,
ladies.

GORN
Great land.

DEAN
I apologize for the trouble, gents.
Really. No harm meant, you know how
easy it is to get lost out here.
There aren't any good *maps*.

JEAN
That's what the fences are for.

BRUISE
True enough, ma'am.

GORN
It won't happen again. I take *full*
responsibility.

Alvin and Marion escort the surveyors to the front gate.
Marian and Jean walk over to the staring women. Twyla tries
to regain her audience.

TWYLA
(reading)
And once you undress I will let you
touch me. Through my layers, of
course. For--

ANN
(to the ranchers)
What the hell?

URSULIN
(to the ranchers)
Who was that?

MARIAN
Trespassers.

ANN
Cattle rustlers?

JEAN
Land surveyors, by the looks of it.

MINNIE
(trying to whisper to
Ursulin but ultimately
speaking full-volume)
What does that mean?

Everyone looks at her.

JEAN
(curt)
Measurers, map men. Folks who like
to enter Oxbow uninvited.

DOLORES
I saw them last night when we were
counting.

MARIAN
They've been prowling around the
last few days. Let us know if you
see them around here again.

URSULIN
(excited, jumping up,
grabbing Minnie)
Let's follow them, see where they
go!

JEAN
(don't get ahead of
yourself)
No. Just get to your tasks. And
show the new folks the ropes.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXBOW CATTLE FIELD - SOON AFTER

The women are spread across the vast ranch in small groups,
counting cattle before the sun goes down. Channery, Frita,
and Irene work as a trio. Channery keeps track of the numbers
in a NOTEPAD.

CHANNERY
(remembering)
Whatever happened with the theater?

IRENE
They shut it down a couple weeks
back.

CHANNERY
And was it termites?

IRENE
Rats. Completely overrun.
(to Frita)
Town story of the last few months.

FRITA
It's nice that you have each other
here. I don't know anyone.

Channery notices a cow and points.

CHANNERY
Cow.

IRENE
Where?

CHANNERY
In the shade there.

Channery adds a tally mark.

IRENE
(to Frita)
We don't really know each other.

CHANNERY
Just live in the same town.

A beat.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)
(anxious)
No chance you've heard how my kids
are doing? Cow.

FRITA
Cow.

IRENE
I didn't know you had kids.

CHANNERY
(nodding)
Joey and Gracie.

IRENE
Cute. Wonder if I'll have kids
someday.

FRITA
(pointing)
Cow, cow, cow, cow, cow. I don't
think I'll ever have kids.

IRENE
Never?

FRITA
(very serious)
I love having fun too much.

Irene laughs. She likes Frita.

CHANNERY
I can't imagine life without my
kids. Now that I have them, at
least. They're everything to me.

FRITA
Did you already work out custody
with your husband?

CHANNERY
There's no working anything out
with my husband. Cow.

A beat.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)
What about you, Irene? Would I know
your husband?

IRENE
Probably not. "Tank." Stephen,
Stephen Rochelle. You know him?

CHANNERY
Doesn't ring a bell.

IRENE
Yeah, he doesn't make a strong
impression. Sweet though, in a way.

FRITA
In what way?

Irene takes this as a joke and laughs.

CHANNERY
What happened?

IRENE

We just didn't get to the next step, you know? We just didn't have it. Whatever thing--the perfect thing. Which is fine. I don't regret it, the marriage, I mean the wedding was beautiful. We just sort of fizzled and then he met someone else and then I did too. Or the other way around I guess--

She cuts herself off. Channery doesn't seem to buy this story of mild amicability but doesn't pry.

IRENE (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Cow.

FRITA

Where?

IRENE

Over...oh. Just a shape.

(trying to move on)

You have a story, Frita?

FRITA

(cagey)

Not really, no. Just, you know, not a fit. Didn't want to bother him, so I came here to get it done myself.

There is a finality to her tone. Other groups of séparées roam in the distance, laughing and counting. Over the ridge, Ann and Roger work together. Ann seems to be lecturing him about something. Irene spies them.

IRENE

(to Channery and Frita)

Watch this.

She picks up a ROCK and throws it at Roger. It misses him but he yells and clings to Ann. Ann raises a pair of BINOCULARS and turns towards the trio, who duck and hide, laughing.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWN THE SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

Ann and Roger look around for the source of the rock.

ANN
 (to Roger, grimly)
 Probably a rogue cow.

CUT TO:

EXT. CATTLE FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Irene, Frita, and Channery stand up and continue walking to their final lookout point. They reach the top and stare out at the landscape. It's a miracle anything can survive here. Patchy grassland cut up by wood and barbed wire fences and rocks, the scene dotted with large metal tubs of water--drinkers for the cattle.

IRENE
 Six months. It's not so long,
 really.

CHANNERY
 I'm already two down.

FRITA
 It doesn't exactly go fast.

CHANNERY
 Haven't you only been here a week?

IRENE
 (to no one)
 Is it crazy that I'm looking
 forward to it?

No one responds.

IRENE (CONT'D)
 What else do you do besides...
 (gesturing vaguely to the
 landscape)
 this?

CHANNERY
 There's lots to do around Reno.
 Music, swimming, dancing--

FRITA
 Drinking, gambling.

CHANNERY
 Men. You'll see. Cow.

A rustling from a nearby bush. Ursulin and Minnie emerge, dragging Bea along with them, all staying low to the ground.

FRITA
Human, human, human.

IRENE
Hi, Bea!

Bea smiles quickly but doesn't make eye contact.

URSULIN
(whisper-yelling)
Get down! There's a *rogue cow* on
the loose.

CHANNERY
Says who?

MINNIE
Ann!

CHANNERY
I wouldn't believe Ann Cetera.

Bea smiles at this. Ursulin and Minnie pay Channery no mind and run off to tell the others about the *rogue cow*, pulling Bea with them. Frita walks ahead of Channery and Irene.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)
(to Irene)
Reno's not boring. But it is
strange. Different than Cambridge.
(admiring a cow in the
distance)
I'm glad you're here. A familiar
face, even if only sort of.

Irene smiles at Channery and takes her hand.

FRITA (O.S.)
Cow!

CUT TO:

INT. RENO CASINO - THAT NIGHT

Judge Ramses enters with his loyal clerk, CLERK ONMORGAN (24, idolizes Judge Ramses), who tails the Judge closely and removes his WOOL CAPE for him as they enter. The front room of the casino is full of smoke and colorful electric lights. It is bustling: faro, poker, roulette--you name it, they're playing it. Olmo, one of the boys from the opening sequence, works as a dealer at one of the tables. Onmorgan tries to get the Judge's attention to ask him something, but he brushes his attempts aside.

Judge Ramses waltzes from table to table, shaking hands, generally schmoozing with his Reno constituents. He makes his way to the the back, where he winks at BARTENDER (50, average type o' guy, fun suit).

BARTENDER

Ramses.

JUDGE RAMSES

Bartender.

Bartender motions the Judge and Clerk through a series of red curtains into a private back area.

INT. BARTENDER'S (RENO CASINO BACK ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

A secret (illegal) restaurant is operating speakeasy-style out of the back room. A LARGE SIGN reads "Bartender's at the Reno Casino." The lights in here are low and there are fewer people about. Conversation is almost at a whisper. A MAITRE D' (85) approaches the duo and takes Onmorgan's COAT. When he reaches to take the Judge's cape, Onmorgan pulls it back.

CLERK

I'll hold onto it, thanks.

A FULL BAND plays in the corner in exaggerated pianissimo. There are far more waiters than customers, yet the waiters all seem busy. Most tables are occupied, but the back corner booth is open and has two fresh drinks on the table--a MANHATTAN and a WATER with an ALKA-SELTZER TABLET next to it. Walt, one of the other boys from the opening, is a waiter here, and, clad in suit and tie, he walks Judge Ramses and Onmorgan over to the booth--business as usual. The Judge sips his Manhattan. Onmorgan adds the tablet to his water and watches it fizz, finally asking Judge Ramses his question.

CLERK (CONT'D)

It's just, Sir, please, with all due respect, don't you think three weeks for bank robbery is a little light?

JUDGE RAMSES

(paternal)

Doesn't do anyone any good to keep good men in jail, Onmorgan.

A beat. Onmorgan tries to wrap his head around Judge Ramses' logic. The Judge, meanwhile, wonders why Onmorgan isn't touching his drink. He stares quizzically. Onmorgan notices.

CLERK

I don't like it when it's fizzy.

Dean, Gorn, and Bruise enter through the curtains and scan the room. Dean smiles when he sees the Judge. They walk over.

DEAN

Good evening, Judge. Mind if we
join you?

Judge Ramses shrugs, apparently amused, and motions with a sweep of his hand. Onmorgan gets squished between Bruise and the Judge, who doesn't make any effort to make space. Dean extends his hand out to the Judge, who doesn't take it.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Dean Joralemon. Pleased to meet
you.

Silence, hand still outstretched. Onmorgan reaches out to take it.

ONMORGAN

Onmorgan. Clerk.

Dean gestures to his associates.

DEAN

This is Gorn and this is Bruise.

Bruise grunts and Gorn doffs an invisible hat and grins. A waiter approaches with a large silver DISH and places it on the table. He lifts it to reveal a RIVER CAKE. Crawfish, crab legs, and small fish poke out of a grayish corn gel. The judge carves himself a portion, paying no mind to the surveyors. Dean looks around.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Nice back here. I never knew there
were places like this around Reno.

The Judge pauses his eating for a moment but doesn't respond.

DEAN (CONT'D)

You know, we've been pretty waylaid
by the permit process around here.
Slow moving.

BRUISE

Waylaid bad.

JUDGE RAMSES

Takes a while to assess permit
applications.

Silence while Judge Ramses takes a huge bite of a crab leg. Onmorgan quickly places his own napkin on the Judge's lap.

DEAN
Anything folks can do to...speed
that up?

Judge chews.

ONMORGAN
It's a very complicated process.

A beat. Dean picks a piece of shrimp from the river cake and holds it up, shaking it.

DEAN
I wonder--how would your Sheriff
like to know that Reno's judge
spends his nights in places like
this?

Judge pauses for a second and looks at Dean. Onmorgan holds his drink up and swirls it, checking the bubbles. Still too fizzy. Judge Ramses points to a booth on the opposite wall.

JUDGE RAMSES
Ask him yourself.

SHERIFF LEWTHWAITE (whatever, happy-go-lucky, volunteer for the department) drinks and laughs in his booth, his arm around Twyla. The Sheriff notices Judge Ramses pointing and greets him by way of holding up his drink. Dean smirks.

DEAN
Well then, seems no one would mind
if we...worked something out.

Dean eats the shrimp in his hand. Judge Ramses raises an eyebrow. Onmorgan decides it's time to take a tentative sip. He grimaces. He takes his napkin back from the Judge's lap and searches for a clean part.

JUDGE RAMSES
Where did you fellas say you came
from again?

DEAN
Far afield, here, there, by way of
Sparks.

Onmorgan spits into the napkin.

JUDGE RAMSES

We don't typically do business with Sparks.

DEAN

Doesn't have to be business then.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIRGINIA STREET BRIDGE - SOMETIME LATER

Judge Ramses, Onmorgan, Dean, Gorn, and Bruise stroll along the bridge in the direction of the town--they've been at this a while. Bruise takes in the scenery. It is a cool, dry Reno night. Judge Ramses is wrapped in his cape. He and Dean walk a few feet ahead of the others. Gorn pokes Onmorgan in the back and then turns, feigning innocence.

ONMORGAN

(to Gorn)
Stop.

DEAN

All we want is to do our jobs in peace--can't survey with ranchers chasing after us. Can't assess land without being on the land.

JUDGE RAMSES

Honest work.

ONMORGAN

(piping up)
Fellas, why, though? Who do you work for?

BRUISE

I'm glad you asked. Because it's a good town, Reno.

GORN

We'd like to know it better. Be a real part of it.

DEAN

Simple as that. Good land deserves to be measured.

Gorn kicks Onmorgan's right knee from the back, causing him to buckle and fall. Onmorgan gets up quickly and dusts himself off.

ONMORGAN

(to Gorn)
Please. Stop that.

DEAN

Maps are good for everyone.

In the middle of Dean's sentence, Judge Ramses vanishes into thin air, his cape falling empty at Onmorgan's feet. All saw it; all stand astonished. Onmorgan gasps and looks at the surveyors.

ONMORGAN

What? What did you do?

DEAN

What the...

Onmorgan picks up the cape, looking around desperately.

ONMORGAN

Where did he go? What did you do to him?

BRUISE

We can't vanish a man!

GORN

You saw it as well as us!

Bruise and Gorn shake their heads profusely, eyes wide and scared. Gorn scans the bridge and the water below, searching for Judge Ramses. Even the usually cool Dean is shaken.

DEAN

That really wasn't us.

ONMORGAN

Oh my god. JUDGE! MY JUDGE!

CUT TO:

INT. OXBOW SEPARÉE SLEEPING QUARTERS - SAME NIGHT

Some women sit on their beds, some roam about and chat--the place is full. All are in nightclothes. A few oil lamps circulate. Channery sits on her bed, holding a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of herself standing arm-in-arm with her family--her husband, CLAY FLECK (30s, handsome, shifty) and their kids, JOEY (5) and GRACIE (3).

CUT TO:

INT. HAYLOFT - SAME TIME

Roger attempts to put on a silk pajama shirt and hide himself from Ann, who holds up FABRICS she is considering for a quilt. She has already made some TEST SQUARES. Roger gets into his bed. Ann holds up a BLUE SATIN next to a RED TWILL. Other fabric scraps are spread across his sheets.

ROGER

Ann, please. I've been traveling
all--well you can't use that satin.
It makes the red look dull. Show me
the velvet again?

CUT TO:

INT. CARLYNS' BED - SAME TIME

Some women in the sleeping quarters put cotton in their ears and bury themselves in their beds, some hold PHOTOGRAPHS, read LETTERS, and weep silently.

One of many pairs of women talking throughout the barn. CARLYN (mostly background, a separée who wanted to remain married) sits on her bed and speaks with OLIA (like Carlyn, she is ensemble background, friendly to all).

CARLYN

My mother finally got in touch.
Wrote that I shouldn't bother
coming home after I'm done here.
I'm due to leave in three weeks.

Olia looks at Carlyn with pained sympathy.

OLIA

I'm sorry, Carlyn. She'll come
around. Maybe Jean can write to
her.

CARLYN

(laughing, sad)
This wasn't even my idea! He
just...decided! Shipped me off to
Reno, go get us a divorce, that's a
good girl. Can't say I'm not
obedient. God! I didn't want to
come here.

A beat.

CARLYN (CONT'D)

Shame and shame and *shame*. Everyone at home will just *know*. That I look divorced.

She grabs a mirror.

OLIA

So go somewhere else.

CARLYN

Hah! Where? Sodom? Or didn't you hear?

CUT TO:

INT. URSULIN'S BED - SAME TIME

Ursulin and Minnie sit on Ursulin's bed, hunched over a DRAWING PAD.

URSULIN

I think it was the right arm that would have thrown it. 'Cause Ann said it--

She mimes a projectile darting to the right.

MINNIE

(nodding)

Arm side run.

Minnie erases something. She moves and reveals a bizarre drawing of a cow with one human arm.

URSULIN

We have to show the Marions first thing tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. BEA'S BED - SAME TIME

Bea looks out the window and watches Cliff, now shirtless, play a GUITAR next to the horses.

INT. IRENE'S BED - SAME TIME

Irene and Frita sit facing each other.

IRENE
Why don't you like it here?

FRITA
I like it fine.

IRENE
You can do anything you want!

FRITA
(amused)
Sure, cheat, steal, kill.

IRENE
I mean it!

FRITA
I do, too!

Channery comes over holding the photograph of her family and a LAMP. She's smiling.

CHANNERY
Can I show you something?

She holds out the photograph to Irene, who takes it and looks for a long time before passing it to Frita. Irene then takes it back to look again. She keeps staring even as Channery and Frita talk.

FRITA
They're beautiful.

CHANNERY
Aren't they? I miss them more than anything.

FRITA
(quietly)
A beautiful family.

CHANNERY
It was.

Irene pulls herself away from the photograph.

IRENE
They really look like both of you.

CHANNERY
Yes. I wish they looked a little less like him sometimes. Without looking different, somehow.

IRENE
(looking down)
Well, you look pretty happy here.

URSULIN (O.S.)
(surprised)
I thought you were spending the
night with the sheriff!

Twyla, wearing the same dress she had on in the speakeasy,
has just run into the barn, her face red.

TWYLA
(out of breath)
Judge Ramses! He's gone.

Women turn to listen. Cliff rushes into the doorway, still
holding his guitar. Dolores sits up and removes cotton from
her ears. Ann descends from the hayloft part of the way.

ANN
They killed him?

TWYLA
(snapping her fingers)
No. Vanished! Thin air.

MINNIE
Where?

TWYLA
Out on the bridge. Walking with
Onmorgan and those...map fellas.

DOLORES
Oh Jesus...

Dolores starts pacing and crying. She exits the barn. Irene
returns to looking at the picture.

TWYLA
Onmorgan ran into Bartender's and
told the Sheriff he disappeared.
Then he passed out on my lap.

FRITA
Did anyone actually see it happen?

TWYLA
Just the surveyors. And Onmorgan.

URSULIN
Onmorgan saw him disappear?

TWYLA
That's what he said.

Roger tries to climb down from the hayloft but Ann is still on the ladder so he has to crane his neck. They entangle awkwardly.

FRITA
Where are the surveyors now?

TWYLA
Onmorgan said they ran off right after.

ROGER
(scared)
They could be coming here...

Ann rolls her eyes at him.

ANN
So Onmorgan is Judge Ramses now?

TWYLA
I don't know. Town meeting in the morning.

The separées talk excitedly about the news. Irene, breathing heavily, finally looks up from Channery's photograph and jumps to her feet.

FRITA
Are you okay?

IRENE
Yes, just need some air.
(quickly, mumbled)
Can't believe about the Judge.

Irene exits the barn.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXBOW OPEN RANGE - SOON AFTER

Irene leans on a fence and catches her breath. Ten or so feet away, Dolores does the same, crying to herself. Irene clutches at the locket around her neck. The moonlight is strong and illuminates the desert scene. Irene wanders toward a cow and calf working on a spiny mesquite bush. She watches them. As the calf roams, the mother follows close behind, not letting her baby out of sight.

Irene composes herself. The cows relax her. She fingers a mesquite pod, working it open and inspecting its beans. Channery approaches.

CHANNERY

Are you alright?

IRENE

Yes, yes, sorry.

CHANNERY

It's overwhelming here, I know. But you get used to it.

IRENE

I thought it would be quieter in the desert.

A beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Can I ask what happened with your marriage?

CHANNERY

I'm not really sure. I thought we were happy, honestly. And then I found out he was having an affair. So I left.

Irene looks straight ahead.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)

I didn't want to know anything; I didn't ask any questions. Honestly, if you've heard anything, don't tell me.

IRENE

(turning to face Channery)

I'm sorry, Channery.

Silence for a moment. Irene pushes the beans out from the mesquite pod. The women hear shouting and laughter from inside the barn.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I haven't slept in the same room as someone else since I was a kid. Tank and I--that wasn't our arrangement.

CHANNERY

You have siblings?

IRENE
I had a sister.

Dolores is lying face-down on the hill nearby.

CHANNERY
Well, it'll be good to get used to.
You said you have someone you're
going back to. Anything will be
easier than this.

Irene laughs. They look at Dolores, then at each other, and
begin to walk in her direction.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)
(cautious)
Everything okay, Dolores?

Irene and Channery roll Dolores onto her back. She stares at
the sky with unfocused eyes.

DOLORES
My final hearing was tomorrow. I
was going to leave.

IRENE
I'm sure you won't have to wait
long.

CHANNERY
Everyone makes it out.

DOLORES
Not Jean and Marian.

IRENE
They were divorcées?

Dolores nods from the ground.

CHANNERY
And they fell in love. Worse things
happen.

DOLORES
I wish something that bad would
happen to me.

IRENE
There's still time, Dolores. For
something terrible to happen to
you.

Irene and Channery lie down on either side of Dolores.
Silence.

CHANNERY

They'll call up another judge.
You'll go home.

IRENE

They have to, right? The city
couldn't run without divorce.

Ursulin and Minnie enter the field holding a pile of ROCKS.
They roll one towards the cows and then duck behind a bush.
Ursulin pulls out her binoculars and looks to see if any cows
react strangely. Nothing. Ursulin throws another rock. A thud
and a cow moos offscreen.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Bright moon.

CHANNERY

No clouds.

DOLORES

Too dry for clouds.

The moon.

CUT TO:

INT. RENO COURTHOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

The courthouse is packed and bustling. Everyone we've met is
there. Even more we don't know yet. Sheriff Lewthwaite stands
together with his Volunteer Police Force. Harlan Pawn,
Bartender, the four Oxbow Ranchers, and Onmorgan, wearing
Judge Ramses' cloak, make up the front row.

Separées line the back rows of seats. Some Reno locals eye
them rudely. Ann is surreptitiously cutting off strips of
fabric from the coats of men in the crowd. People talk loudly
and the Sheriff tries to get their attention, to no avail. He
picks up a GAVEL from the Judge's desk and bangs it: silence.

SHERIFF

HEY!

ONMORGAN

Don't touch that!

Sheriff puts the gavel down.

SHERIFF

As you've heard, Judge Ramses vanished last night, leaving us without a judge. We'll need to be practical about this.

Dolores stands up.

DOLORES

What about our divorces?

HARLAN

To hell with divorces! What about our *city*? Some of us *actually* live here, own property here--

Sheriff bangs the gavel some more. Twyla shushes people and smiles at him.

ONMORGAN

(hiss, to Sheriff)
That's not yours!

SHERIFF

Alright, alright. Will ya let me finish? We've sent notice across the state that Reno needs a new judge.

ONMORGAN

So you're just writing off Judge Ramses? He could come back.

SHERIFF

Like I said, we need to be practical about this. We all know how important Judge Ramses was to Reno's...operations. We've called up Sparks' town judge and he'll preside while we find someone permanent. Until he gets here, all court proceedings are on hold.

He bangs the gavel again and puts it back down upon seeing Onmorgan stand up, glaring. General uproar. Dolores has to be restrained.

DOLORES

Bastard!

BARTENDER

He was about to renew my liquor license!

SHERIFF

(loudly)

If you have individual questions,
you can find me at the Volunteer
Police Department. Meeting
adjourned.

The Sheriff reaches for the gavel to end the meeting but Onmorgan has grabbed it. The Sheriff and his police force exit through back doors. The rest of the attendees shuffle through the main doors until the only people left in the room are Onmorgan and the four Oxbow ranchers. Onmorgan caresses the gavel and Alvin approaches him.

ALVIN

Hey, Clerk.

Onmorgan doesn't say anything.

ALVIN (CONT'D)

(skeptical)

So, he really just vanished?

Marion steps in.

MARION

Look, we're sad to see him go, too.
We just want to check--you're sure
you didn't see those surveyors do
anything to him?

ONMORGAN

He was right in front of me. No one
touched him.

MARION

What did they want with him?

ONMORGAN

You know. Same as anyone.
Permissions, exceptions. Said
they're making maps. Measuring.

A beat.

ONMORGAN (CONT'D)

Can't do much now. Without a judge.

Onmorgan considers the gavel. The ranchers look at each other. Marion pats Onmorgan on the back and gently guides the gavel from his hands back onto the desk. All five exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTHOUSE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Irene, Channery, Frita, and Dolores stand outside of the courthouse. Dolores is incensed. Onmorgan and the ranchers exit the courthouse and pass by. Onmorgan parts ways with them.

DOLORES

I mean, how unlucky can a girl get?

CHANNERY

Just a few extra days.

DOLORES

(with conviction)

The day of my hearing? I am going to shoot anyone. Maybe the surveyors.

FRITA

Onmorgan said they didn't have anything to do with it.

CHANNERY

They must know *something*.

Irene gets an idea.

IRENE

(matter of fact)

Let's go find them. And ask.

FRITA

What?

CUT TO:

EXT. VIRGINIA STREET BRIDGE - SAME TIME

Ursulin, Minnie, Bea, Roger, and Ann find Onmorgan sitting despondent on the bridge with his back to the railing. Ann gives him a small nudge with her foot. Minnie sits down next to him.

MINNIE

Hey, we've been noticing some strange things going on, too.

Onmorgan looks up.

ANN
Real strange.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTHOUSE SQUARE - SAME TIME

Back to Irene, Dolores, Channery, and Frita.

IRENE
Why not? They must be somewhere,
polt? ["polt" is an extinct
linguistic particle of the period.]

CHANNERY
We could ask around, maybe
someone's seen them.

Irene is getting excited.

IRENE
Yes!

DOLORES
Let's start with Bartender.

FRITA
Well, wait. Think about it: while
everyone's in town, don't you think
they'd be out doing
their...whatever it is they do? Out
in the hills?

IRENE
Smart, Frita. Yes. The hills.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIRGINIA STREET BRIDGE - SAME TIME

Back to the group speaking with Onmorgan.

MINNIE
You don't have any idea where
Ramses went?

Onmorgan shakes his head.

URSULIN
Nowhere he liked to go? Never
needed to be alone?

ONMORGAN
(defeated)
Look, I saw it happen. He was right
there.

He points to a spot on the bridge.

ONMORGAN (CONT'D)
And then just...gone.

He puts his head in his hands.

ANN
So what makes you think he can't
reappear just as quickly?

Onmorgan perks up. The group realizes they can egg him on.

URSULIN
'Cos strange things've been
happening. Like Minnie said.

MINNIE
Like I said.

ROGER
Don't you think he'd want you to
look for him?

Onmorgan sighs, thinks, nods. Nice one, Roger.

ONMORGAN
Okay. You're right.

The separée crowd smiles and Onmorgan gets to his feet.

URSULIN
So. Where would he go when he
wanted to be alone?

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS, BASE OF RENO HILLS - SOMETIME LATER

Frita, Irene, Channery, and Dolores look at the climb ahead
of them. Irene leads. Frita, as usual, seems checked out.

IRENE
(panting)
It'll be easy once we're up there.

DOLORES
What if they're not out here?

CHANNERY

What if they are?

IRENE

Then we confront them! And capture
them, parade them into to town, I
don't know.

Channery and Dolores look at each other nervously but keep
going.

CUT TO:

EXT. BANKS OF THE TRUCKEE, EDGE OF TOWN - SAME TIME

Ann, Ursulin, Bea, Minnie, Roger, and Onmorgan walk with
purpose along the Truckee. Ann and Onmorgan lead the pack.

ONMORGAN

Again, my judge really doesn't use
the cabin this time of year. But
it's the only place I can think of.

URSULIN

Even if *he's* not there, I bet
something will be.

ONMORGAN

(intrigued)

What kind of something? What did
you guys see?

MINNIE

You'll see.

CUT TO:

EXT. RENO HILLS RIDGE - SAME TIME

The group searching for the surveyors continues through the
hills. Everyone is out of breath. Irene still leads the way
as they walk along a ridge. The open desert extends for miles
in every direction. Irene stops and squints.

CHANNERY

See something?

IRENE

...Not yet.

DOLORES

If they were out here, don't you think we'd be able to see them by now?

Irene is annoyed. She turns around.

IRENE

Are you serious?

DOLORES

(defensive, gesturing)

Look! There's *nowhere* to hide.

IRENE

Aren't we doing this for you?
Aren't you the one that wanted to do something?

DOLORES

I wanted to find them and they're not here! Let's go back.

IRENE

(upset)

I won't give up that fast.

CHANNERY

It's not giving up, Irene. She's right, I mean...where could they be?

The desert is bare.

CHANNERY (CONT'D)

We might do better asking around town like we planned. They'll have to be staying somewhere--

FRITA

I still think they're out here.

IRENE

(emphatic)

Thank you, Frita!

FRITA

But they'll be on high ground. Better for surveying. We wouldn't be able see them from here. We should try and get higher.

Dolores rolls her eyes. She and Channery look at each other and put their hands up as if to say, "yeah, fine."

CUT TO:

EXT. JUDGE RAMSES' FISHING CABIN - SAME TIME

Onmorgan, Ann, Ursulin, Minnie, Bea, and Roger arrive at Judge Ramses' fishing cabin, a run-down and sun-silvered wooden structure set in the trees along the Truckee. A ROWBOAT floats next to a small DOCK. Roger walks with Onmorgan.

ROGER
(to Onmorgan)
Not a bad spot. You fish?

ONMORGAN
Sure. You?

ROGER
Oh, yes. My wife is the better angler. But I love boats. Water. I...rowed in undergrad.

The door to the cabin is PADLOCKED shut.

ONMORGAN
Maybe there's a key...

He wanders around the corner of the cabin. Bea picks up a ROCK and smashes the padlock open.

ONMORGAN (CONT'D)
Hey!

ANN
(impressed)
Bea!

Bea pushes the door open. Everything is covered in a thin layer of dust--clearly uninhabited of late. The group enters. Ursulin and Minnie walk back-to-back, combat-style. Ursulin mimes a throwing motion, reminding Minnie that the rogue cow throws with its right hand.

ONMORGAN
(nervous)
My judge? Judge Ramses?

CUT TO:

EXT. RENO RIDGE PRECIPICE - SAME TIME

The surveyor-hunters look around and over the cliff--nowhere higher to go after this.

DOLORES
(over it)
See anything, Irene?

CHANNERY
I bet they've been holed up
somewhere in town all along.

IRENE
No. They're out there. Right,
Frita?

A conspicuous lack of response from Frita. She is tired herself.

CHANNERY
Why don't we head back, we could
get some food, water, ask around...

IRENE
(proud)
You can go if you want.

DOLORES
(softer)
Irene, seriously, it's not safe to
stay out here on your own.

IRENE
The cows do it.

CHANNERY
They have water. And four stomachs.

DOLORES
And they're not alone.

Irene scoffs.

IRENE
I can handle it. I've dealt with
worse.
(patronizing)
Seems like maybe you haven't. So go
back. Get ice cream! Kick back!

DOLORES
(quiet)
Ice cream could be nice.

CHANNERY

(to Irene)

Irene, they're obviously not out here. There's no point in just wandering around the desert forever.

IRENE

There's no point in doing anything until it works! I don't know how you all do things around here, but I don't just give up and run away when something isn't working out.

CHANNERY

(frustrated)

Oh, we ran away? Like cowards? Staying would be the easy thing, you know that. Anyone who leaves knows that. Leaving is a *sacrifice* and it's *hard*--and everyone here did it!

IRENE

Congratulations. But I won't let getting divorced be the heroic part of *my* story.

CHANNERY

I don't know what makes you think you're so much stronger than the rest of us. Didn't you--

DOLORES

Just leave it, Channery. She's new. Let her find out on her own.

Dolores moves to leave.

IRENE

Go!

Channery stares at Irene for a moment, then leaves with Dolores. Frita watches them, looking like she wishes she was leaving, too. Irene shakes her head with disgust.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Run away, run away, run away.

CUT TO:

INT. JUDGE RAMSES' FISHING CABIN - SAME TIME

The Judge-hunting group sits scattered about the cabin interior. The front left corner of the room is full of FISHING EQUIPMENT. A RIFLE hangs on the wall above a fireplace. Roger is laid out on a RUSTIC CHAISE, Onmorgan sits with his head in his hands at a RUSTIC TABLE, Ann rifles through CABINETS, looking for and successfully finding LIQUOR, and Ursulin and Minnie sit opposite Onmorgan. Bea reads the spines of various legal tomes.

ONMORGAN

I knew he wouldn't be here. He's gone. Of course he's gone.

ROGER

Well, I think it was worth checking. Considering all the strangeness--

Onmorgan pulls his head out of his hands.

ONMORGAN

(getting angry)

What strangeness? What are you all on about?

Ursulin and Minnie share a serious look. They look to Ann, who nods to say, "go ahead."

URSULIN

(serious, to Onmorgan)

We didn't want to show you this.

She pulls out the drawing of the rogue cow and shows it to Onmorgan. Onmorgan studies it.

ONMORGAN

(confused)

What?

URSULIN

Rogue cow. Back at the ranch.

ONMORGAN

It has hands?

URSULIN

(nodding)

At least one.

MINNIE

The right one.

Minnie does the motion again. Onmorgan puts his head back in his hands and groans. This is what he's been putting his faith in?

ONMORGAN
(exhausted)
Oh god. A cow with a hand. I can't believe I came here.

CUT TO:

EXT. RENO VALLEY - SAME TIME

Irene and Frita march on. Irene is manic. She and Frita both look and sound thirsty.

IRENE
Quitters, all of them! Pathetic runaways. I'm going somewhere, after all this. Look, Frita.

Irene pulls her locket out from under her clothes and takes it off, handing it to Frita, who opens it. Inside? A small photograph of Clay Fleck. Channery's husband. Frita looks at it, saying nothing. Irene looks at Frita and her pride disappears. She sits down, facing away from Frita.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(sigh)
Clay.

FRITA
...Channery's husband?

Irene nods.

IRENE
(sober)
He always told me they were separated. That they never loved each other to begin with.

A beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I believed him. Why wouldn't I? But I--it seems like Channery really loved him. Loves him still, even.

Irene begins to break down.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(ashamed)
They were a real family. He never
told me that.

Frita closes the locket. A long silence. Quiet tears on
Irene's face.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I love him. I've never loved *anyone*
like this. I can't help it.

More silence.

IRENE (CONT'D)
And I wouldn't want to. Not even
for Channery. But it's--she just
has no idea.

A beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)
And you can't tell her.

FRITA
Will you tell her?

IRENE
I want to. I will. I want to tell
her. I want her to know that I
didn't know.

A beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)
It's easier that she doesn't know.
So long as she doesn't know, it
isn't my fault. It really *wasn't* my
fault, when I didn't know.

A beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I guess I knew a little.

More silence. They look to Reno in the distance.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(embarrassed)
We should go back.

CUT TO:

INT. JUDGE RAMSES' FISHING CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Roger is helping himself to a dusty BOTTLE OF WHISKEY from the Judge's stash. Bea looks out a window onto the water.

ROGER

(grave)

No, listen here Clerk, man to man,
I am not the *credulous* sort--but
this *thing* is out there. And it is
dangerous. I wouldn't have believed
it myself if it hadn't almost taken
off my head.

Onmorgan is completely unswayed.

ONMORGAN

I am never going to believe you.

BEA

(quiet)

It's them!

Ann, nearest to Bea, is the only person who hears her. Bea's eyes are wide.

ANN

What, girl? Speak up!

BEA

The surveyors!

Everyone rushes to the window. The surveyors stand a little ways downriver in the shallows with their pant legs rolled up. Gorn carries all three pairs of shoes and socks. Dean removes a TWO-GALLON JUG from his bag. Bruise carries a NOTEBOOK. They talk amongst themselves. Inside the cabin, Ursulin grips Onmorgan's arm.

URSULIN

We *must* catch them.

Minnie sprints to the door. Ursulin drags Onmorgan there, too.

ROGER

Wait! Let's think this through...

They stop, nod. Everyone casts about for supplies. Minnie approaches the fishing equipment and grabs a NET. Roger looks at the rifle on the wall and smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. ACROSS THE RIVER - SAME TIME

Dean, Gorn, and Bruise stand in the water. Dean leans down with the large glass bottle. Gorn looks at his watch.

DEAN
Count me in.

GORN
Ready...now.

Dean plunges the bottle sideways into the water and holds it there. It begins to fill. Gorn counts under his breath.

DEAN
(looking around at the
landscape)
You know, not so long ago this
river was large enough, strong
enough, to carve out the whole
valley. Okay...stop!

The bottle fills completely and he removes it from the water. There are some WEDDING RINGS inside.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Time?

GORN
Thirty-five seconds.

Bruise makes a note.

DEAN
Healthy flow rate. Gives us
something to work with.

He holds the bottle up towards the sun to look at the rings. In view past the bottle, the door of the fishing cabin bursts open. The judge-hunters run out wielding FISHING RODS and NETS. Onmorgan wears a LIFE VEST.

ANN
HEY!

The surveyors jump. They splash to shore and hastily gather their supplies. They leave their shoes behind in the scramble.

ROGER
Not so fast!

Roger cues Minnie and both cast their fishing rods towards the surveyors without breaking from their run towards the dock. The lines immediately get caught in trees overhead, stopping them with a jolt and yanking them backwards. They land on their backs. The surveyors run off barefoot back toward town.

Ann has untied Judge Ramses' rowboat from the dock and urges everyone to get in. Onmorgan joins but grumbles--he is not sold on what they're doing. Roger and Minnie get up and run to join the others in the rowboat, basically diving in. The boat rocks but does not tip. Onmorgan sits at the back, gripping the sides tightly. Everyone else holds an OAR and paddles feverishly, clumsily, following the surveyors downriver back towards town. Someone leans out of the boat and grabs the surveyors' shoes.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS, BASE OF RENO HILLS - SUNSET

Irene and Frita reach the bottom of the hills, heading back to town. They walk in contemplative silence. Up ahead on the path are Channery and Dolores walking towards them, holding two BOTTLES OF WATER.

IRENE
(apologetic)
What are you doing here?

Channery hands Irene a bottle.

DOLORES
We were getting worried about you
two up there so late.

Silence.

IRENE
Know what? I don't think they're
out there.

Channery smiles.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. You were right, both of
you. I shouldn't have blown up like
that.

CHANNERY
Happens to everyone. It's not a
small adjustment.

A beat.

IRENE

You're not quitters. It's very brave. Of everyone. I'm sorry.

(hurt)

I just can't get over the way they looked at us at the town meeting.

Dolores nods.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Like livestock. Like we just wandered in. When we have every reason to care. We live here now, too. Maybe it's pride, forgive me, but I don't like being written off.

CHANNERY

Us neither. Let's just catch our breath, get something to eat. Then let's get to asking around town.

Irene nods. Channery takes Irene's hand. Frita watches. The four women walk off together towards Downtown Reno.

CUT TO:

EXT. ACROSS FROM THE VIRGINIA STREET BRIDGE - LATER, DUSK

Channery, Irene, Frita, and Dolores sit on a BENCH in their filthy clothes, watching the Truckee and eating ICE CREAM. The sun has set. In the distance, they see the other separée group in their rowboat, paddling much slower now. As the boat approaches, it crashes into the bridge. Ursulin waves to the women on the shore, smiling. Minnie is dripping wet and shivering. Ann gets out and drags the boat to shore. All crawl out. Onmorgan pulls the boat up onto the bank and inspects the damage. Roger falls on his back and stays there. Everyone from the boat looks exhausted.

Ann takes a long look at the ice cream-eaters on the bench.

ANN

(with disgust and concern)

What the hell happened to you guys?

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Thick black PAPER has been taped over the windows. The only light in the room comes from a red electric LAMP, which Dean carries around. Gorn lies on a BED with a pile of photographic PRINTS. It is too dark to see them. He picks river rocks out of his toes. Bruise stands, helping Dean as he develops a GLASS PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATE. With gloved hands, he places the plate in a TRAY OF LIQUID and gently agitates it. He counts under his breath.

DEAN

Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty five.

He removes the plate, holding and tilting it in the light. It is a negative twice as wide as it is tall, two apparently identical photographs next to each other. Landscapes.

BRUISE

Good?

DEAN

Very good.

He plunges the plate quickly into a STOP BATH and shakes it.

BRUISE

I could tell it was a good one when I took it.

Dean moves the plate to the FIXER and counts to five. He goes to the bathroom SINK and runs cold water over it.

He takes the finished plate to a DESK and turns on a DESK LAMP. Holding the plate in full light, we finally see it clearly: a view of Oxbow Ranch from a hill--a pair of views, actually. A stereographic pair, though we don't know this yet.

Gorn makes a "poof" effect with his hands.

GORN

(to himself)

I've never seen anything like that before.

(louder)

You guys ever seen a guy vanish before?

DEAN

Never.

BRUISE

Nope.

A large piece of PAPER is pinned to the wall behind the desk: a map in progress, still in early stages. An outline of Reno, the course of the Truckee River running through it, and some sketchy contour lines.

DEAN

Where was this one again?

BRUISE

(pointing on the map)

Here. Facing uh, west. So from here towards the ranch.

Dean adds a letter and an arrow pointing west from it to the map where Bruise indicated. Similar symbols with arrows mark a few other points on the map. Dean follows the arrow and finds another point east of the ranch. The distinctive oxbow of the ranch is partially sketched in by the contour lines.

DEAN

(to Gorn, making "gimme" motion)

Gorn, Lambda. Please.

Gorn sits up and searches through the prints, each labelled with a Greek letter. He finds Lambda (λ) and brings it over.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Okay, good.

Dean takes it. He looks at the photo and gestures to a complex DEVICE in the corner.

DEAN (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Alright, boys. Let's set it up.

The front door opens. The silhouette of a woman. She holds three pairs of shoes tied together by the laces. As she comes into the light, she tosses the shoes at Gorn.

FRITA

You oughta be more careful.

She walks over to Dean, who stands at the desk. He embraces her and they kiss passionately. The photograph is still in Dean's hand, wrapped around Frita's back.

END OF EPISODE 1.