

GOD'S COUNTRY

Written by
Maryanne Pope

Adapted from the book:
"The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart"
by Nell Shipman

Pink Gazelle Productions Inc
1304 Gilley Cres
Parksville, BC V9P 1W5
Canada
+1(778)678-4496
maryannepope@pinkgazelle.com
www.pinkgazelle.com

*Note on colour-coded script: to help differentiate the three different time periods, the 1960's are in red, the early 1900's are black and present day is pink.

IRIS OUT

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOS ANGELES - 1966

Elevator door opens.

REVEAL OLDER NELL SHIPMAN, 75, dressed rather shabbily with long grey hair. She smooths down skirt, stands tall and steps out elevator then walks down hall, stopping at a door with sign that reads: "Motion Picture Relief Fund." She takes a deep breath then opens door.

SUPERIMPOSE: Los Angeles, 1966

Inside office, the RECEPTIONIST, 25, is at reception desk. She looks Older Nell up and down.

RECEPTIONIST

May I help you?

OLDER NELL

I have an appointment with the
Chairman of the Board.

RECEPTIONIST

Your name?

OLDER NELL

Nell Shipman.

RECEPTIONIST

Ahhh yes...Mrs. Shipman. How are
you doing, dear?

OLDER NELL

A little hungry, thanks.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh. Well, I *am* sorry to hear that.
Unfortunately, something's come up
and the Chairman is unable to meet
with you today.

OLDER NELL

What about another Board member,
then?

RECEPTIONIST

No, I'm sorry. I'm the only one in.

Receptionist opens a file on her desk.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
But they did leave me an answer to
give you...in response to your...
(clears throat)
...request.

Receptionist removes top piece of paper from file.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
First of all...thank you for your
detailed letter. You did a
wonderful job outlining your
professional history in
filmmaking...it all sounds most
interesting and varied!

Receptionist puts letter down and picks up next document.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
(clears throat)
However, your resume indicates that
you worked actively in motion
pictures from 1912 until
1924...writing, directing,
producing and acting in multiple
films...

OLDER NELL
(frowns)
Over forty of them, yes.

RECEPTIONIST
I see. Well, unfortunately...with
the exception of your 1929
screenwriting credit for "Wings in
the Dark," we have no record of you
having any other association with
the motion picture industry.

Older Nell's mouth drops open.

OLDER NELL
Pardon me?

RECEPTIONIST
I'm sorry, Mrs. Shipman...but it
was the consensus of the Board that
they cannot grant your request for
financial assistance at this time.

Older Nell stares at receptionist a moment then turns and
walks out, loudly SHUTTING door behind her.

EXT. BUSY STREET - LOS ANGELES (DAY) - 1966

Older Nell, angry, crosses busy street, grumbling to self.

OLDER NELL
Goddamn it! I just...

Older Nell stops walking, right in middle of road. She breaks into a big wide-eyed smile.

OLDER NELL (CONT'D)
I'll just write my memoir! That'll
show 'em...

A horn honks by impatient motorist. Older Nell looks at driver, irritated.

OLDER NELL (CONT'D)
Oh...cool your jets!

Older Nell continues walking, slowly , across street.

FADE TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - DAY (1968)

Music (first part of Beatles' song, "Octopus' Garden") begins. From high up in sky a woman is seen floating on her back in ocean. Camera slowly moves down towards her.

SUPERIMPOSE: Two years later...Santa Monica, CA, 1968

REVEAL woman is Older Nell Shipman, smiling, hands clasped behind head. Her eyes are closed, her long grey braids float beside her. We continue to move towards her.

There is the sound of bubbles in song and we go right through Older Nell into water. Song's tempo picks up.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RIVER - DAY (1918)

POV from below surface of water, looking up towards YOUNGER NELL SHIPMAN, 30, floating face-down in water. On location of a silent film shoot, something's gone wrong. She is unconscious, the hair of her wig a tangled mess. "Octopus' Garden" song fades.

O.S. Muffled SHOUTS of concerned onlookers.

BILL DAGWELL, AD, 50, stands on dock, calling to Nell. The Script Girl (adult LIL), 25, is beside him. Her long dark braided hair is pinned up and she's wearing high lace-up black boots. She holds a stack of script pages.

BILL
(Irish accent)
Nell!

Nell doesn't move.

BILL (CONT'D)
Shit! Nugget's not acting!

Bill grabs a nearby pole and plunges it into Nell's wig. He twists the hair like spaghetti on a fork and hauls her in. Nell gasps for air, coughs. Bill pats her back.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Billy Dagwell was our AD... "Nugget Nell" I was to him. I trusted Bill with my life...which, I might add, he saved on more than one occasion.

NELL
(weak)
Thanks.

Nell coughs again. Lil places blanket on her shoulders.

LIL
You OK?

Nell nods and looks to river bank. JOE WALKER, 30, stands beside his camera, concerned. He wears a tweed ivy cap.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Joe Walker was our cinematographer.

NELL
(calls out to Joe)
Did ya get the shot?

Joe shakes his head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But he was a man of few words, our Joe.

NELL
That's not like you!

BILL

He was a wee worried about ya,
love.

NELL

I'm fine...

Nell stands up, still shaky.

NELL (CONT'D)

Let's get 'er done, boys.

Nell looks toward Lil and nods.

NELL (CONT'D)

(smiling)

And girl.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Our Script Girl, Lil, had been my
best pal since we tread the boards
together in Vaudeville.

Bill pulls flask from pocket and hands it to Nell. She takes
a swig. Bill nods to Joe. Joe adjusts his camera. Bill winks
at Lil, then grabs bullhorn.

BILL

Places!

Nell drops blanket and steps to edge of dock.

BILL (CONT'D)

And...action!

Nell takes deep breath then dives in.

Bubbles in water slowly form title of film (cursive writing):
"The Story Girl."

Bubbles dissipate as sound of film reel TICKING is heard.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - CALGARY (PRESENT)

Sound of film reel TICKING continues. Flickering light of
film is reflected in a student's eyes.

REVEAL student is HELEN, 22, watching film on screen. She is
in front row of small classroom. A male student (her
boyfriend), BAILEY, 22, is beside her. He wears an ivy cap.
Behind Bailey sits another male student, TYE, 22.

Classroom door opens. Another student, SAMANTHA, 28, saunters in. She is beautiful, with long dark hair and wearing black lace-up motorcycle boots. Samantha is Bailey's older sister.

FILM STUDIES PROF (O.S.)
Good of you to grace us with your
presence, Samantha...even if it *is*
a bit tardy.

REVEAL the handsome FILM STUDIES PROF, 50. He has a beard. He is the same actor who plays Bill Dagwell in the film the students are watching ("The Story Girl").

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)
(teasing)
Or is that one of the perks of
being a mature student?

Samantha blows the Prof a kiss, then sits besides Helen.

REVEAL image on screen is next scene in "The Story Girl."

BACK TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - DAY (1968)

Older Nell Shipman is still floating on back in water, smiling dreamily, hands clasped behind head and eyes closed.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)
(whispers)
What the hell is this?

HELEN (O.S.)
(whispers)
It's about a
silent film star.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)
(whispers, sarcastic)
Oh dear God...

HELEN (O.S.)
Sshhh! It's the *Prof's* film!

FILM STUDIES PROF (O.S.)
(clears throat)
Ahem...

O.S. Muffled SHOUTS of concerned onlookers.

Older Nell opens her eyes, irritated, then lifts head.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

NAIL?!

Older Nell looks to beach.

REVEAL watching her (through her old binoculars) is Nell's son, OLDER BARRY, 65. His daughter, NINA, 30, who is expecting, is sitting on blanket. An old banjo and a stack of manuscript pages are beside her. Nina's daughter, WESTERLY, 2, plays in sand.

OLDER BARRY

(calls out to Older Nell)

You okay?!

Older Nell smiles and waves, then resumes floating on back.

Back on beach, Older Barry flops down beside Nina, who continues to watch Older Nell.

OLDER BARRY (CONT'D)

(irritated)

What is she *doing* out there?

NINA

Remembering, dreaming...planning...

OLDER BARRY

Planning *what*?

Nina finally looks at Older Barry.

NINA

Her comeback, Dad.

OLDER BARRY

(snorts)

Nina...the woman is 77 years old.
If it hasn't happened yet, it ain't
gonna happen.

NINA

Not in *this* lifetime, no.

Nina picks up manuscript.

NINA (CONT'D)

That's why you have to find a
publisher for her autobiography.

Nina hands Older Barry the manuscript.

NINA (CONT'D)

Trust me...someday...*someone* is
gonna come along and tell the story
- or stories - that need to be
told.

Older Barry rolls his eyes and puts manuscript in his lap.

OLDER BARRY

You, my dear, have spent far too
much time with the old bird.

Nina smiles. Older Barry looks out to sea again to check on
Older Nell. Nina looks, as well.

As if on cue, a hand rises from water and gives a wave.

Older Barry laughs and shakes his head.

NINA

So, it would seem, have you.

OLDER BARRY

I *had* to. She's my Mother.

Older Barry picks up banjo and strums a few chords: tune from
"Boil 'Em Cabbage Down."

OLDER BARRY (CONT'D)

I can't believe she hung on to my
old banjo. Funny the things we
save...

NINA

Funny the things we don't.

Older Barry looks out to where Older Nell is floating in sea.

OLDER BARRY

She tried so hard, Nina. She put
WAY too much pressure on herself...

Older Barry shakes head, wistful.

OLDER BARRY (CONT'D)

She cared too much.

Nina turns to look at Older Barry.

NINA

Can we care too much?

Older Barry looks at Nina a moment. Then he sighs, puts banjo down and picks up manuscript. He lies on his stomach and begins reading. Nina looks out to sea and smiles, satisfied.

REVEAL Older Nell still on back, still smiling.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
This is where I first came in...

*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COTTAGE - VICTORIA, BC - DAY (1892)

The cozy cottage is modest but tidy. Nell's mother, ROSE, 30, is sitting up in bed, holding a motionless baby.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
Though legend has it, I damn near
didn't.

SUPERIMPOSED: Victoria, British Columbia, 1892

Rose, concerned, looks down at infant. Nell's father, ARNOLD, kneels beside Rose, also concerned. On the other side of Rose, a doctor stands, solemn, hat in hand. The doctor checks baby's pulse and shakes his head.

DOCTOR
(to Rose)
I'm sorry...

Rose leaps out of bed and runs to door, baby in arms. Arnold watches, stunned, then races after her.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY (1892)

Sobbing, Rose races out front door and runs across road, housecoat fluttering behind her. Arnold follows.

ARNOLD
Rose!

Rose runs through woods, Arnold close behind, and emerges at cliff bluff. Rose stops at edge of bluff, rocking baby as tears stream down her face. Arnold watches carefully.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)
(softly)
Rose...

Nearby, a patch of sweet broom sways in breeze. Rose continues to gently rock baby, looking out to sea.

Arnold opens his mouth to speak but the sweet broom suddenly quivers, as if being shaken.

Rose looks down at baby.

The baby's eyelids flutter to life and she lets out a WAIL.

Rose sobs with relief and breaks into a smile. She turns around and looks at Arnold. He raises his eyebrows.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

(chuckles)

We often wondered if there was a
bit of wild elf in the sweet broom
that day...a soul in limbo perhaps,
anxiously seeking a new home - and
managed to nip inside the tiny
Victoria-girl...quick as a wink?

Arnold puts arm around Rose. They look fondly at crying baby.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. VAUDEVILLE THEATRE - DAY (1905)

Rose, beautifully dressed, watches from second row, horrified. Beside her, Arnold, looks equally mortified. This is a rehearsal so theatre is empty.

A gaudily-dressed and heavily made-up TEENAGE NELL, 14, dances badly on stage while singing off-key. A kind but disheveled-looking man, CHARLIE TAYLOR, 50, plays piano.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

That might explain the paradox of
my stately British parents giving
birth to a creature so completely
foreign to them..

Teenage Nell does a few high kicks, revealing her bloomers.

Rose gasps and her hand flies up to her mouth. Arnold sinks lower in seat, wide-eyed.

ROSE

(British accent)

Helen!

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

My given name was Helen Barham.
"Nell Shipman" didn't come till
later.

ARNOLD
(British accent)
Heavens...this *has* to stop.

Charlie stops playing piano.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Sweet old Charlie Taylor owned the
Vaudeville theatre.

Teenage Nell takes a bow. Charlie stands up.

CHARLIE
Way to go, Gypsy!

Teenage Nell turns to look at Charlie and puts her hands on her hips.

TEENAGE NELL
Charlie...why do ya always call me,
Gypsy?

CHARLIE
'Cause ya are one! Always gotta be
on the move...ya got hot moccasins!

Charlie grins, sits down again and starts playing next number on piano.

Teenage Nell dramatically gets into character for her next act. She looks off stage and makes a dramatic expression of surprise then says something inaudible.

REVEAL another actress with long dark hair, TEENAGE LIL (who becomes the Script Girl as Adult Lil), waiting in wing. Lil frowns and cups her hand to her ear.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
My partner in crime, Lil, was with
me from the start.

Beside Teenage Lil is FRANK EGAN, 50. Frank scowls at Teenage Nell and motions upwards with his hands, indicating for her to speak louder.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Frank Egan was my grumpy old acting
teacher. He had his work cut out
for him.

Teenage Nell repeats her look of surprise and again says something, slightly louder but still barely audible.

Frank sighs, taps Lil on shoulder and nods towards stage. Teenage Lil shrugs and tap dances over to Teenage Nell, who opens her arms, excited, then again says something inaudible.

Off stage, Frank motions wildly upwards with his hands.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Poor Frank...he was always telling
me I had to...

FRANK EGAN
SPEAK UP!

BACK TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - DAY (1968)

Older Nell Shipman is again floating on her back. She is no longer smiling.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And then one day...I did.

EXT. WOODS - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1915)

Archival clip (10 sec) from silent film, "The Grub Stake" ("God's Country and the Woman" not available), of NELL, 30, wearing pioneer-looking clothes (white shirt under wool dress), frantically running through snow, as if being chased (00:46:00 to 00:46:10).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
My concern for animals in motion
pictures began when I was working
at Vitagraph on my first silent
film...

Archival clip continued: Nell reaches a clearing in trees, stops and turns around, lost. She runs towards dense forest.

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR (O.S.)
And...cut!

REVEAL behind the scenes of above archival clip: a man, 50, the VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR, holds a bullhorn up to his mouth.

SUPERIMPOSED: On set of "God's Country and the Woman," 1915

Nell turns around and walks back towards director (live action, not archival clip).

NELL

What's wrong?

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR

Damn bobcat ain't doin' much.

Vitagraph Director, irritated, looks at a gruff-looking man, 50, the ANIMAL TRAINER.

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Make 'im more lively, will ya?!

ANIMAL TRAINER

(nods)

Yessir.

Director looks at CAMERAMAN, male, 30.

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR

Focus on the cat.

CAMERA MAN

Yes, Sir.

Nell frowns, wary. Director CLAPS hands.

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR

Places!

Nell looks over at animal trainer. Her expression turns to horror as she realizes what's going to happen.

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And...action!

Camera man starts cranking camera. The SNAPPING sound of an electric prod is heard o.s.

NELL

NO!

Nell races towards animal trainer.

BACK TO:

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL - PRESENT DAY

Helen is watching film, upset. Her hand flies up to mouth.

ANIMAL TRAINER (O.S)

Stay back!

VITAGRAPH DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Did ya get the shot?

CAMERA MAN (O.S.)
Yup!

Helen, wide-eyed, turns to Samantha. Samantha nods towards screen. Helen resumes watching film.

BACK TO:

EXT. WOODS - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1915)

Nell is now on ground beside dead bobcat. She gently strokes bobcat, distraught. She closes eyes and wipes away a tear.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
My first reaction was grief.

Nell opens her eyes, a look of resolve on her face.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But then a determination to do
something for their cause was born.

Nell looks down at dead bobcat.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
I made up my mind during that shoot
that someday I would get my own
cast of animals...and NEVER use
shocks, drugs, whips, guns, or
screams.

Nell gently places hand on bobcat's head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
(sad)
But today I would say...God keep
you in your wilderness...
(sighs)
What's left of it.

Animal trainer walks over and looks down at Nell, irritated.

ANIMAL TRAINER
Lighten up, little lady...it's just
an animal.

NELL
Just?

ANIMAL TRAINER

Yeah...just! The woods are full of
'em. What's wrong with you?

Nell stands up and looks animal trainer in the eye.

NELL

I could ask the same of you.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

What's the hold up?!

ANIMAL TRAINER

The bobcat bit the biscuit!

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Then get another one!

Animal trainer storms off. Nell drops to her knees and gently places hand on bobcat's head again. She closes her eyes.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

The Girl from God's Country had
made her debut.

A tear rolls down her cheek. She doesn't wipe it away.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

(softly)

It was a good thing I could not
foresee just how weary this girl
would become...nor how treacherous
the terrain she was to travel.

Nell opens her eyes, sad.

FADE TO:

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1916)

Nell, nicely dressed, walks down hallway and stops outside door of production office. The sign on frosted glass door reads: "Sam Goldfish." Nervous, she knocks on door.

MR. GOLDFISH (O.S.)

Come in!

Nell opens door and pokes her head inside. Mr. Goldfish is at his desk, smoking a cigar. He breaks into a smile.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
In 1916, I was summoned to the
office of Mr Sam Goldfish...soon to
be Goldwyn.

MR. GOLDFISH
Nell! Good to see you!

Mr. Goldfish motions to chair on opposite side of his desk.

MR. GOLDFISH (CONT'D)
Sit down...sit down...

Nell sits, perched on edge of chair.

NELL
Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Goldfish slides a piece of paper across desk to Nell.

MR. GOLDFISH
I know it's less than they're
paying you at Vitagraph...

Nell picks up paper and scans it. Her eyes widen.

NELL
A seven year contract?

MR. GOLDFISH
Yes Ma'am.

Nell, contract in hand, leans back and lets out a sigh.

MR. GOLDFISH (CONT'D)
Well...?

NELL
Well, with all due respect Sir...

Nell leans forward and places contract back on desk.

NELL (CONT'D)
I'm going to have to say no.

Mr. Goldfish leans towards Nell, astonished.

MR. GOLDFISH
Pardon me?

NELL
I said no thank you, Sir.

MR. GOLDFISH

Why?

NELL

Because I know I can't be the kind
of star you want me to be.

Mr. Goldfish shakes head and stubs cigar out in an ashtray.

MR. GOLDFISH

You're making a big mistake. You
think you're ever gonna get another
offer like this?

NELL

Probably not, Sir. But -

Mr. Goldfish pushes his chair back.

MR. GOLDFISH

Well then, I certainly hope you
know what you're doing.

NELL

(manages a smile)
So do I.

Mr. Goldfish stands up.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (5 sec) of typical-looking silent screen star
(i.e. Mary Pickford) in action.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Truth is...I *hated* the floofy look
of their starlets...

Archival clip (10 sec) of Nell in action in outdoor scene.
Suggest "Back to God's Country" (1:05:55 to 1:06:05) of Nell
standing on back of dog sled, her wounded husband sitting up
front. They are in the middle of a frozen lake. Nell points
her gun at man standing in front of her, threatening him. The
man gets the dog team moving again.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

This outdoor gal preferred to lope
across the silver screen in fur
parka and mukluks.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT (1916)

Nell, bundled in sweater, scarf and hat, sits at desk, working at typewriter. The door behind her is shut. She stops typing a moment and rubs her hands together.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
When, that is, she wasn't writing
for the silver screen.

REVEAL her son, Barry, 4, curled up asleep in hallway outside door, shivering.

Nell's husband, ERNIE SHIPMAN, 40, walks down hallway, drink in hand. He sees Barry and frowns.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
By that point I was married to
Ernie Shipman. I was Mrs. Shipman
number four, if that tells you
anything.

Ernie puts glass down, picks Barry up and takes him into nursery across hall. Ernie places Barry in crib and tucks blanket around him. Ernie retrieves drink and knocks on Nell's office door.

NELL
(irritated)
Yes?

Ernie opens door. Nell looks up, annoyed.

ERNIE
The boy was asleep outside the
door, shaking like a leaf.

Nell leaps up, alarmed.

NELL
The front door?

ERNIE
No, your office door.

NELL
Oh. He musta got out of his crib
again.

ERNIE
Obviously.

NELL
I'll check on him.

Nell brushes past Ernie and goes into nursery.

Ernie rubs his hands together then tucks them under his armpits to keep warm. He walks over to typewriter and looks down at half-typed page. Nell comes back in office.

NELL (CONT'D)

He's sound asleep.

ERNIE

I coulda told ya that. I just put him in his crib.

NELL

(sighs)

Ernie, what's wrong?

ERNIE

Aside from you trying to freeze our son to death?

Nell rolls her eyes.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

All right...how about you saying no to a seven year contract?

Nell closes office door.

NELL

We've been through this. I told you...that's not my style.

Nell re-wraps the scarf around her neck.

ERNIE

What about heat? Is that not your style either?

NELL

Oh, don't be so melodramatic! I'm still with Vitagraph, for Heaven's sakes. *Some* money is coming in.

ERNIE

(points to his chest)

ME melodramatic!?

(points at Nell)

You're the one who ground production to a halt because of a silly *bobcat*. You're the one who turned down seven years of guaranteed work because you don't want to wear a pretty DRESS!

Ernie shakes his head then sits in comfy chair in corner.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, woman.

Ernie slugs back the last of his drink.

NELL
You know I hate it when you take
the Lord's name in vain.

ERNIE
(smiles)
And you know *I* hate it when good
money is left on the table.

Nell walks to desk and sits in front of typewriter.

NELL
Well then...I'd best finish writing
this scenario, seeing as *I'm* the
only one bringing home the bacon
these days.

Nell begins typing. Ernie watches her a moment before
speaking. He takes another drink.

ERNIE
I met with James Oliver Curwood
today.

NELL
(still typing)
Oh? And what did that pompous ass
of an author have to say?

ERNIE
You've never met the man.

NELL
(shrugs)
I've heard enough.

ERNIE
He's interested in forming a
partnership with us.

Nell stops typing and looks at Ernie. He holds his glass out
towards her, as if to toast.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
The Shipman-Curwood Production
Company...

Ernie takes a sip and raises his eyebrows.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Has a nice ring, don't you think?

Nell stands up and walks over to Ernie.

NELL

(incredulous)

A motion picture company?

ERNIE

Yes Ma'am...one in which you'll
have a say as to how the animals
are treated. He wants us to produce
an independent feature, based on
his *Back to God's Country* story.
You would play the lead, of course.

Nell sits on Ernie's lap, throws her arms around his neck and
kisses him on lips.

NELL

Why didn't you tell me this before?

ERNIE

(grins)

I wanted to make sure you were good
and grateful.

With a snort, Nell shakes her head, smiling.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

After you get the treatment
written, we'll meet him in Calgary.

NELL

Then I best get started!

Nell stands up but sways a bit, dizzy. She closes her eyes
and puts her hand on table to steady herself.

ERNIE

You all right?

Nell opens her eyes and nods.

NELL

I must've stood up too quickly.

ERNIE

You look a bit pale.

NELL
I'll be fine.

Nell manages a smile then gingerly walks over to her desk.

CUT TO:

Archival clip of newspaper headline:

SPANISH FLU SWEEPS THE COUNTRY, KILLING MILLIONS!

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
I wasn't.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY (1918)

Six men, dressed in black, carry a coffin out front door. The weather is overcast and drizzly. The visual has a dream-like look to it.

INT. HOUSE - DAY (1918)

Nell is asleep in bed, sick. Most of her hair has fallen out. She opens her eyes and blinks a few times.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But at least I survived.

Frowning, Nell turns her head and looks towards window. With effort, she pulls back covers and slowly gets out of bed. She shuffles to window, pulls back curtain and looks down. Her hand flies up to her mouth.

REVEAL the men now slowly carrying coffin down porch steps. Nell's father, ARNOLD, follows, head bowed.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
My beloved Mother wasn't so lucky.

Nell remains at window, watching through rain-streaked glass that parallels the tears rolling down her cheeks.

CUT TO:

Archival clip of newspaper headline: CALGARY TO BECOME CENTRE OF MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But the show, as they say, must go on.

Archival clip of second newspaper headline: NELL SHIPMAN IN CALGARY TO FILM CURWOOD'S "BACK TO GOD'S COUNTRY"

INT. COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - CALGARY (PRESENT)

Helen frowns. Sam raises eyebrows. Bailey pulls out notebook and pen from backpack.

BACK TO:

INT. PALLISER HOTEL FOYER - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

Nell, wearing hat with what little hair she has left tucked up under it, still looking sick with no make-up on, walks through posh foyer to elevator. She pushes button and waits.

SUPERIMPOSED: Palliser Hotel, Calgary, Alberta, 1919

A slight, uptight-looking man, JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD, 40, and his wife, MRS CURWOOD, even more uptight, walk up to elevator. They both stare straight ahead and don't acknowledge Nell.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
When I finally made it to Calgary,
I met the great James Oliver
Curwood and his dreadful wife.

Nell smiles at James. He nods curtly, obviously not recognizing her, then resumes staring at elevator door. His wife, unimpressed at this woman's attention to her husband, grasps his arm and moves closer, frowning.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
He didn't recognize me at first. I
certainly didn't resemble the girl
he'd seen in the movies.

POV of James' fantasy-like recollection of Nell in her Girl from God's Country look, particularly the long hair.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(sexy)
She of the long, thick hair...

BACK TO:

INT. PALLISER HOTEL FOYER - DAY (1919)

James finally recognizes his dream-girl at the elevator, looking quite the opposite. Nell smiles sheepishly.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Most of *my* hair had fallen out from the flu...a fact I intended to keep hidden. For the man was a *nut* about women's hair...took *pages* to describe it in his damn stories.

MRS CURWOOD

(sharp)

James?

Elevator door opens. James, clearly disappointed, tips his hat to Nell.

JAMES

After you, Mrs. Shipman.

NELL

Thank you, Sir.

Nell walks into elevator. James and his wife follow and stand in front of Nell. As elevator door closes, we see James' disappointed expression, his wife's smugly pleased one and Nell's sad one. Elevator door closes.

INT. PALLISER HOTEL ROOM - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

Ernie, drink in hand, is on sofa. Nell paces, frowning, reading a script. With no hat on, we see Nell's short sparse hair but now she is dressed nicely, wearing make-up and looks rested. Nell tosses script on table.

NELL

The man doesn't know the first thing about writing for pictures. His comments are ridiculous.

ERNIE

Give him what he wants, Nell. It's *his* story.

NELL

The short story was, yes. But that's very different from writing a script for a moving picture, Ernie. That's *my* job.

ERNIE

No...

Ernie stands up.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Your job is to be the star.

NELL

But without a proper script, my
love, the star cannot shine.
Relax...I can handle him.

There is a loud KNOCK at door. Nell grins mischievously.

NELL (CONT'D)

Can you get that?

Nell goes into bedroom. Ernie walks to door.

In bedroom, Nell pulls out long, dark-haired wig from trunk.
She sits at vanity, puts wig on and brushes it.

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD (O.S.)

I despise what she's done to it...

In the mirror, we see Nell roll her eyes.

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The woman doesn't know the first
thing about writing!

Nell giggles then quickly covers mouth with hand, wide-eyed.
She straightens wig then stands up and walks to doorway.

James Oliver Curwood is standing beside table. Ernie is
fixing him a drink.

Nell clears throat. James turns to look and his eyes widen.

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD (CONT'D)

(stunned)

You have *hair*.

NELL

Of course! When you saw me at the
elevator, it was just tucked up
under my hat...

(smiles, coy)

For safekeeping.

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

(softly)

Oh.

Ernie grins, hands James his drink then leaves hotel room.
Nell smiles sweetly and motions towards script on table.

NELL

Shall we?

James nods and sits at table. He folds his arms across chest, ready for a fight. Nell pulls a chair close to his and sits down. She picks up title page and places it face down on table. The first page of script is covered in red scribbles. Nell gently taps one scribble with her index finger.

NELL (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Now, Mr. Curwood...you comment here that there is no character in your story by the name of "Iris"...

JAMES

(gruff)

There isn't. And there's no need for one!

NELL

Oh, I agree! But...ummm...actually, "Iris" isn't referring to a woman. "Iris out" is a technical term used in motion pictures to indicate the opening shot...

Looking into James' eyes, Nell uses her hands to demonstrate a flower slowly opening up.

NELL (CONT'D)

Like a flower opening up to the sun...

James swallows again, flustered. He looks back at script and uncrosses his arms.

JAMES

(embarrassed)

Oh. Well how was I to know that?

NELL

Exactly. That's why I wanted to go through the script *with* you.

Nell smiles and places her hand on James arm.

NELL (CONT'D)

So thank you.

James looks at Nell's hand but not at her face.

JAMES
(gruff)
You're welcome.

Nell returns her attention to script. She flips over several more pages, looking for the next batch of red scribbles.

NELL
I think we just need to develop the action in a way that's a *bit* more suitable for the silver screen...

Nell finds what she is looking for in script.

NELL (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Ahhh...here we go...

Nell places script back on table and smooths her hand over a page covered in red scribbles. James leans over to look, more curious than angry now.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
James began to calm down and listen with growing enthusiasm as I addressed his concerns, one by one.

INT. PALLISER HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY (1919)

Ernie and the production manager, BERT VAN TUYLE, 50, pace nervously. Both men are smoking, drink in hand.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Meanwhile, in the hallway, Ernie and the production manager, Bert Van Tuyle, waited anxiously.

INT. PALLISER HOTEL ROOM - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

Nell moves her hair over her shoulder. James stares at script, trying not to get distracted. Nell gently trails her index finger beneath one of James' red scribbles.

NELL
So when Delores is in the forest, getting ready for a swim with her pet bear...she doesn't just look behind her, thinking she hears someone in the bushes...

CUT TO:

Archival clip (10 sec) from "Back to God's Country" of Nell (as Delores) preparing to disrobe and swim in river. A bad guy lurks in the bushes, watching (00:20:25 to 00:20:35).

NELL (V.O.)
Rather...she *trembles*. Her
fluttering hands cover her heaving
bosom and her hair...

BACK TO:

INT. PALLISER HOTEL ROOM - DAY (1919)

James now stares, smitten, at Nell as she reads from script.

NELL (CONT'D)
(sexy)
...her bountiful, glorious hair flows
about her alabaster shoulders...

Nell tosses her hair back.

JAMES
(breathless)
Yeah...

Nell looks at James in earnest.

NELL
Could you see that scene in your
mind, James?

James, speechless, nods in awe.

NELL (CONT'D)
Excellent.

Nell places her hand on James's arm.

NELL (CONT'D)
That's all we're trying to do here.

James nods again, spellbound. Nell smiles sweetly.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(smug)
I won him over.

INT. PALLISER HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY (1919)

Hotel room door opens. Ernie and Bert stop pacing. Nell and James walk out, both wearing serious expressions.

ERNIE
(anxious)
Well?

James links his arm through Nell's arm and breaks into big smile. Nell grins and pats his hand.

JAMES
Well...we've added a million bucks
to the picture!

Ernie laughs, relieved. They all hug each other, excited.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And we had. "Back to God's Country"
ended up being Canada's most
commercially successful silent
film...ever.

With all the commotion, Nell's wig gets slightly knocked out of place and she quickly adjusts it, wide-eyed. Only Ernie notices and gives her a wink.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SNOWBANK - NORTHERN ALBERTA - DAY (1919)

A train WHISTLE sounds. A train slows to a stop in the middle of a frozen landscape. No station, just a snowbank. A native, wearing furs, stands beside a dog sled team, waiting.

SUPERIMPOSED: Faust, Northern Alberta, 1919

Nell, Bert, Joe and the lead actor, RONALD BYRAM, jump from train, enthusiastic. All the men are clean-shaven.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But it came at great cost.

The native watches, concerned, as they unload their gear.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Thanks in part to James Curwood and
his *damn* obsession with authentic
locations.

Group gathers in front of native. Using hand gestures to communicate, he points to his open mouth and pretends to take in a deep breath then quickly shakes his head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Right off the bat, we were warned
NOT to breathe deeply in such
brutally cold weather - but rather
take *shallow* breaths, to avoid
catching pneumonia.

The native points to Bert's skimpy shoes and shakes his head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And definitely not wear leather
shoes under the heavy over-
boots...*only* thick socks.

Bert shrugs then reaches into an inner pocket, pulls out
flask and takes a drink. He winks at Ronald.

BERT
Hair 'a the dog?

EXT. RUSTIC CABIN - NORTHERN ALBERTA - NIGHT (1919)

Door of cabin bursts open and Ronald saunters out, smiling,
flask in hand. He's not wearing a coat.

REVEAL Nell and Bert, both dressed warmly, walking towards
his cabin. They stop and stare in surprise.

RONALD
(slurs with Aussie accent)
Hey...when ya guys gonna shoot my
scenes?

BERT
Ronald, get back in your cabin!

Ronald opens his arms and breathes in deeply. Then he beats
his chest with his hands.

RONALD
Awe...yer a buncha sissies! This
ain't cold -

Ronald bursts into a coughing fit and doubles over. Nell
immediately races towards him.

INT. RUSTIC CABIN - NORTHERN ALBERTA - DAY (1919)

Joe Walker, in parka and fur hat, is kneeling on dirt floor
of cabin, changing film in a black camera bag, careful not to
expose film to light.

His camera is propped against cabin wall. Joe now has a stubbly beard and the whiskers around his mouth are frosty, his breath is seen in white puffs.

Joe finishes changing film and removes his visibly shaking bare hands from change bag. He stands up, breathes on his hands then quickly puts his gloves back on.

Joe leaves his cabin, walks over to nearby Nell's cabin and KNOCKS on her door.

INT. NELL'S CABIN - NORTHERN ALBERTA - DAY (1919)

Nell is standing by wood stove, warming her hands. She doesn't have a wig on and isn't wearing any make-up. She looks exhausted.

NELL

Who is it?

JOE WALKER

It's Joe, Ma'am.

NELL

(smiles)

Come in.

Joe stamps snow from his feet then enters Nell's cabin. He immediately removes his gloves and rubs his hands together.

JOE

Whoa Nelly...it's a cold one.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (10 sec) of night scene from "Back to God's Country" (1:03:15 to 1:03:25): Nell shoots a man, who is wearing a long fur coat, in the shoulder. After a heated exchange, she jumps on a dog sled, where her wounded husband is waiting, and heads into the frigid darkness.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Deadly cold. It was *sixty-below* the night we filmed me mushing my wounded husband across the frozen lake.

INT. NELL'S CABIN - NORTHERN ALBERTA - DAY (1919)

Back in the cabin, Joe has joined Nell at stove. He is warming his hands as Nell warms her backside.

NELL
(anxious)
How's Ronald?

JOE
(shakes head)
Not good. He needs a hospital. It's
probably pneumonia.

NELL
(softly)
Damn.

Nell turns back to face stove, pensive.

JOE
But on a happier note, I think
we're getting some great
footage... 'course I won't be able to
know for sure 'till we're back at
the lab.

NELL
(sighs)
You're a sport for shooting in
these conditions, Joe. We
appreciate it.

Joe Walker smiles and starts putting gloves back on.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Joseph Bailey Walker would go on to
work with Frank Capra in such
classics as "It's a Wonderful
Life." Joe made more than a hundred
and sixty films in his career. He
was destined for greatness.

The cabin door opens suddenly and Bert bursts in.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Bert Van Tuyle...not so much.

BERT
(stressed)
Ronald's down for the count. We
can't shoot his scene.

NELL
(shakes head)
We can't afford another delay.

BERT

Then I'll do it. I'm the same size
and I'll be covered in furs...no
one'll be able to tell.

Nell bites her lip and looks at Joe. He nods.

NELL

Okay. Let's get 'er done.

Nell picks up coat, strides over to door and opens it. Joe
and Bert follow her out.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S CABIN - NIGHT (1919)

Cabin door opens. Nell and Joe help limping Bert into chair.

BERT

Bloody hell...that's cold.

Nell helps Bert remove his heavy over-boots as Joe starts
fire in stove.

REVEAL Bert is wearing leather shoes.

Nell's eyes widen. She carefully removes Bert's shoe and a
thin sock. Joe catches sight of Bert's foot and winces.

NELL

(to Bert)

You've got frostbite...bad.

BERT

(to Joe)

Can ya grab me a handful 'a snow?
We gotta pack that on there.

REVEAL Joe's look of surprise.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PALLISER HOTEL ROOM - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

A beautiful young woman sits at vanity in Ernie and Nell's
hotel bedroom. She looks in mirror, dreamily brushing her
long blonde hair with Nell's hairbrush.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Meanwhile, back in Calgary, Ernie
was wrapping up the deal...

Ernie, in suit, comes up behind her and wraps his arms around the young woman's shoulders.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Among other things.

She looks up at him, adoringly, in mirror. He kisses her neck. She puts brush back down on vanity. A long blond hair is visible.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Silly little peccadillo.
Unfortunately, Ernie had brought
home many a such.

INT. BOARDROOM - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

Ernie, in same suit, stands in front of room full of men - businessmen and ranchers.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And yet...despite his flaws as a
husband, he was a good businessman.
I'll give him that.

Ernie takes a sip of drink then puts glass down. The room goes quiet. Ernie smiles.

ERNIE
(to room)
Gentlemen...I can promise you *Back to God's Country* is THE best place to put your money this year.

Ernie looks around room, confident. A rancher wearing overalls, plaid shirt and cowboy hat eyes him, skeptic.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
At only a hundred bucks a share,
you do NOT want to miss this
opportunity to double - possible
triple - your investment.

Rancher stands up. Everyone turns to look. Rancher reaches into pocket, pulls out wad of crumpled bills and tosses them on table.

RANCHER
I'm in.

A businessman tosses his money on the table.

BUSINESSMAN

Me too.

Ernie breaks into an even bigger grin.

ERNIE

(to group)

My wife is on location as we
speak...making us one *hell* of a
picture, I can assure you.

Ernie tilts back rest of drink. More men step forward to put
their cash on table.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (15 sec) from "Back to God's Country" of Nell
running through snow towards a cabin where a vicious dog is
getting whipped. Nell races into the action and stops the
abuse. Then she drops to the snow and cuddles the dog,
immediately calming it down (00:56:05 to 00:56:20).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

And we were.

EXT. CABIN - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1919)

REVEAL behind the scenes of above archival clip: Joe (in fur
hat) stops cranking camera. Nell stands up then walks away
from dog, back towards Bert and Joe.

JOE'S POV of Bert, livid, limping towards Nell.

BERT

What a stupid thing to do!

NELL

What?!

BERT

You coulda got hurt!

NELL

I knew I'd be all right.

Bert grabs Nell's shoulders.

BERT

You coulda got bitten! Your
face...your beautiful face...

Bert and Nell stare into each other's eyes. Bert wraps his
arms around Nell.

Joe busies himself with camera, embarrassed.

FADE TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - EDMONTON - DAY (1919)

Bert, limping badly, is practically carrying a very ill Ronald Byram in the hospital door. A nurse rushes over.

SUPERIMPOSED: Edmonton, Alberta

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Bert finally got Ronald to the
nearest hospital. Joe and I and a
few other stragglers stayed up
North to finish the shoot.

INT. HOSPITAL - EDMONTON - DAY (1919)

Bert is sitting on examining table. A doctor inspects his foot. The doctor says something. Bert shakes his head and jerks his foot away, wincing.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
While he was there, Bert got his
foot looked at. He didn't like the
idea of amputation, so he tried his
own treatment instead..

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EDMONTON - NIGHT (1919)

Bert limps into room and sits on edge of bed. A bellhop follows him, carrying a small washtub, can of kerosene, cigarettes and liquor.

BELLHOP
What would you like done with all
this, Sir?

Bert nods towards bottle of booze and cigarettes.

BERT
You can gimme those.

Bert nods to floor beside bed.

BERT (CONT'D)
Put the tub there and pour the
kerosene in.

BELLHOP
(raises eyebrow)
Yes Sir.

Bellhop gives Bert cigarettes and liquor then pours kerosene into washtub. Bert takes swig from bottle then puts his foot in tub of kerosene. He puts a cigarette in his mouth and reaches into his shirt pocket, searching for matches. He doesn't find any.

BERT
(to Bellhop)
Gotta match?

REVEAL the Bellhop's mouth drop open in surprise. Wide-eyed, he shakes his head.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - CALGARY - DAY (1919)

Ernie and Bert are on platform as train pulls up. Both men look solemn.

Train stops. Nell, Joe and rest of team climb down, subdued. Joe is back wearing his trademark tweed ivy cap.

Ernie stays where he is while Bert limps over to Joe, Nell and the others. Bert looks at Nell and shakes his head, glum.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(upset)
We'd taken too long to get Ronald
to a hospital.

Nell looks away, blinking back tears. Ernie walks up behind her, takes her arm and gently leads her away from the others.

NELL
(shaking head)
We shoulda got him out sooner...

Nell stops walking and turns to Ernie.

NELL (CONT'D)
Have you contacted his family?

ERNIE
Yes.

Ernie clears his throat, uncomfortable.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
There's something else...

Ernie reaches out and puts his hand on her shoulder.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Your father died while you were on
location, Nell...I'm sorry.

Nell gasps and her knees buckle. Ernie steadies her.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
We thought it best not to try and
reach you. You understand...

Ernie looks down at his feet.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
...the picture...

Nell looks away and nods slowly, as tears begin.

NELL
Right...the picture.

ERNIE
Do you, uhh...do you need some
time?

Nell sighs and looks at Ernie again. She folds her arms
across her chest, waiting for him to finish.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
(clears throat)
Because...uhh...we kinda need ya in
California...

NELL
Well...there's not much point in me
taking time off *now*.

ERNIE
(relieved)
Okay. Then I'll uhh...

Ernie looks at crew unloading last of items from train.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
I'll leave you to it.

Ernie turns back to Nell and pats her on shoulder. They look
at each other a moment then Ernie turns and walks towards
waiting vehicle. Nell watches him go.

REVEAL Bert beside train, watching Nell, concerned.

Ernie opens back door of vehicle and the young woman with long blonde hair can be seen in back seat.

Nell quickly turns away, upset. She wipes her eyes then strides purposefully back towards Bert and the others.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
The show must go on.

FADE TO:

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Back to God's Country" of Nell (Delores) in cabin, standing by kitchen table with her sweetheart and father. Little Brownie bear cub is on table (00:14:05 to 00:14:10).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
With the Northern Alberta shoot out
of the way, we headed to California
to film the animal scenes...

Continuation of archival clip (5 sec) of bear cub on table eating from sugar bowl as adults talk (00:14:10 to 00:14:15).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
(animated)
...which is where Little Brownie
Bear made her adorable debut.

INT. RUSTIC CABIN - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1919)

REVEAL behind the scenes of above archival clip: Bert stands against wall of cabin, out of shot. Joe (in ivy cap) films.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The Director was sick one day, so
Bert tried his hand at directing...

Bert steps forward from the wall.

BERT
And...cut!

Joe ignores him and continues cranking camera.

Continuation of archival clip (5 sec) of bear cub on table with head now in sugar bowl and bottom sticking out; scene ends with Iris In (00:14:15 to 00:14:20).

INT. RUSTIC CABIN - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1919)

Joe stops cranking camera and straightens up. He exhales.

NELL
(to Joe, breathless)
Did you get that?

JOE WALKER
Yes, Ma'am.

Joe turns to Bert.

JOE WALKER (CONT'D)
Sorry...I just had a feeling we
were in for a great shot.

Bert grins and slaps Joe on the back.

BERT
Attaboy!

Nell looks around at cast and crew and smiles.

NELL
We make a good team.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (5 sec) of opening title screen of Nell's film,
"Something New" (00:00:00 to 00:00:05).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
It was time for something new.

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Something New" of next screen
that reads: "A Nell Shipman Production" (00:00:05 to
00:00:10).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
After *Back to God's Country*, Ernie
and I got a divorce. I started my
own production company...

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Something New" of screen with
Nell, Bert and Joe's credits (00:00:20 to 00:00:25).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...and took Bert and Joe with me.

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Something New" of Nell sitting at
a typewriter under tree, then caption: "A lady in search of
an inspiration...Nell Shipman"(00:00:40 to 00:00:45).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Although *Back to God's Country* was
in release and doing fine, my take
was delayed because I'd annoyed Mr.
Curwood and the management.

Archival clip from "Something New" (5 sec) of Bert and
caption: "The Hero...Bert Van Tuyle"(00:03:30 to 00:03:35).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So in between pictures, we shot
"Something New" for the Maxwell Car
Company...

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Something New" of Nell in front
of car, stroking Maxwell crest (00:51:35 to 00:51:40).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(laughs)
It was basically a very long car
commercial!

Archival clip (5 sec) from "Something New" of Nell, Bert and
Laddie (Border Collie) in the Maxwell, bouncing over rough
canyon terrain, dust flying (00:39:20 to 00:39:25).

EXT. CANYON - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1919)

REVEAL behind the scenes of above archival clip: the Maxwell
lurches to a stop. Dust hangs heavy in air. Nell, in
passenger seat, remains in vehicle, rattled from ride. Bert,
in contrast, turns ignition off and leaps out of vehicle.
Laddie follows. Bert limps towards camera, grinning.

BERT
Did ya get that?

REVEAL Joe Walker, standing beside his camera.

JOE
I did.

In vehicle, Nell smooths back hair then climbs out, shaken.
Laddie runs over. She reaches down and pets him.

NELL
(to Laddie)
I bet you're as glad as I am that
damn ride is over, Laddie!

Bert laughs.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY - LOS ANGELES (1920)

Bert, Nell, Joe (wearing cap) and Laddie drive along in old canvas-topped touring car with large tear in roof. Bert drives, Laddie is in passenger seat. Nell and Joe are in back, perched on top of camera equipment, heads poking through the canvas top.

SUPERIMPOSE: Los Angeles, 1920

Bert drives past a car dealership and catches a glimpse of his passengers' comical reflection in the window.

REVEAL Bert's embarrassed expression. Without a word, he turns car around and goes back to dealership. Nell and Joe look at each other.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
The hardship days were over, so it
was no longer fitting I drove
around in a beat-up old car...

Still not saying anything, Bert gets out of vehicle and limps inside. Nell and Joe watch him leave. Joe raises an eyebrow.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...no matter how faithful it'd been
over thousands of miles.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE NELL'S HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY (1920)

Bert, Joe and Nell pull up in front of bungalow in a new car. A "For Sale" sign is on front lawn.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And for the first time in my life,
I bought a house.

Front door opens and a boy, YOUNG BARRY, 10, runs out. A matronly woman, the HOUSEKEEPER, follows. A man in a nice suit, the REALTOR, follows.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Barry was ten by that point.
We even had a housekeeper.

Nell, Bert and Joe get out of car. Young Barry races over.

YOUNG BARRY
Let's get this place, Nail...it's
the bees knees!

Nell opens her arms and Young Barry hugs her. Bert gets out of car. The realtor walks over to join them. Young Barry pulls back and looks up at Nell.

YOUNG BARRY (CONT'D)
(to Nell)
Well?

NELL
I'm thinkin'! Buyin' a house is a big decision...

Bert nods towards empty lot beside house.

BERT
There's a vacant lot next door. I could build my bungalow there...

Nell looks at realtor so doesn't notice Young Barry's frown.

NELL
(to realtor)
I'll take it.

Young Barry notices new car.

YOUNG BARRY
Nail...where's our car?

BERT
It was time to retire that old Jalopy.

Young Barry folds arms across chest and glares at Bert.

YOUNG BARRY
I *liked* that old Jalopy.

Nell puts her arm around Young Barry's shoulders.

NELL
Come on...let's go figure out where we're gonna put the animals.

Nell leads Young Barry towards driveway.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
By that point, we'd begun to gather a few critters.

Bert and Joe remain standing beside car. Bert pats the hood.

BERT
She's a beaute!

Joe nods and smiles politely. Bert grins and winks at Joe.

BERT (CONT'D)
But she ain't no Maxwell.

JOE
No.

Bert tilts his head.

BERT
Say...is there somethin' on yer
mind, Joe? You seem kinda
distracted...

JOE
Yes! I'm concerned Nell is getting
in over her head with these
animals...

Bert laughs and slaps Joe on the back.

BERT
Aww...don't you worry! She knows
what she's doing.

Joe, concerned, looks towards Nell and Young Barry who are
now at top of driveway. Nell, excited, is pointing out to
Young Barry where the different cages will go.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
I thought I did.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (10 sec) from "A Bear, a Boy and a Dog" of
Little Brownie Bear, Laddie and a boy (that looks like Barry)
in comedic action: Young Barry is sitting with Laddie in
woods and Brownie bear comes up behind them (00:14:55 to
00:15:05).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
*Little Brownie bear was fully grown
by then - but still small by bear
standards...*

Archival clip continues (20 sec): the boy jumps up and runs
off, Laddie close behind. Boy climbs tree and Brownie bear
follows. Bear catches up to boy then climbs over him to get
to top first (00:15:05 to 00:15:55 minus captions).

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET - LOS ANGELES - DAY (1921)

POV of driver in car behind Nell, as Nell drives down street in new car. Laddie's head sticks out front window. Brownie Bear is in back seat, her head sticking out window.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Laddie was Brownie's companion and
full-time bear-sitter.

A passing motorist cranks his head around to make sure he's seen correctly. Car weaves as a HORN HONKS. Nell laughs then pulls car to side of street and stops.

OLDER NELL V.O.
I would drive into downtown Los
Angeles with the two of them and
leave them in the car while doing
errands...

INT. CAR - DAY (1921)

Nell turns car off then turns to Laddie in passenger seat.

NELL
Now, Laddie...you know the deal.
Keep an eye on...

Nell nods her head and flips her thumb towards back seat.

NELL (CONT'D)
You know who.

Nell cranks head around and points to Brownie Bear in back.

NELL (CONT'D)
(mock sternness)
As for you: no theatrics!

Nell opens her door.

NELL (CONT'D)
I'll be right back.

EXT. STREET - LOS ANGELES - DAY (1921)

Nell is walking down street back towards her car again. She sees something and winces good-naturedly. She trots to car where a crowd of people have gathered on sidewalk, pointing and laughing at something happening in the back seat.

REVEAL two furry bear-legs now sticking up in air, one leg partly out window.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(laughing)
I'd return to find Brownie Bear
standing on her head in the back
seat, clowning for the sidewalk
audience!

REVEAL Laddie curled up in front seat, forlorn.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Laddie, on the other hand, only
performed for the camera - so was
rather disgusted when Brownie made
an ass of herself for free.

EXT. NELL'S HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY (1922)

Nell walks slowly around her property...past her swanky car
parked in the driveway...past the house...

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So there I was...I had a wonderful
son, a supportive partner, a lovely
home, a posh car, my own production
company and an entire zoo of
beautiful animals.

A dog BARKS as Nell walks past the animal cages now at top of
driveway. She walks towards garden, stops, reaches down,
picks a flower and brings it to her nose. She closes her
eyes, inhaling deeply.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Life was good. And it seemed to me
then that the sun would always
shine, the flowers in my garden
bloom...and my movies always sell.

BERT (O.S.)
Ya gonna stand around sniffin'
roses all day?

Nell opens her eyes and turns to Bert's bungalow next door.

REVEAL Bert standing on his front porch, grinning.

BERT (CONT'D)
Or are ya gonna come over and go
through the last of the revisions
with me?

Nell smiles, tucks flower behind ear and walks towards Bert.

NELL
I'm comin', I'm comin'...

EXT. WOODS - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1922)

Nell sits on a folding camp chair, looking in make-up case mirror on lap and patting her face with powder. A blond wig is in her lap. The Script Girl, adult Lil, is beside her on grass. Lil's long, dark hair is in braids and pinned up. She wears tall black lace-up boots and is fiddling with a blade of grass, deep in thought.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
That spring, we shot our next
feature film, *The Girl from God's
Country*.

NELL
Penny for your thoughts...

Lil lifts her head.

LIL
You'll laugh.

NELL
Try me.

LIL
Do you believe in reincarnation?

NELL
Absolutely.

LIL
Really?

NELL
Yes.

LIL
Why?

NELL
Well...for starters 'cause there's
so much I want to accomplish down
here, there's no way I could get it
all done in one shot.

BERT (O.S.)
Cameras roll in five minutes!

The Script Girl grabs script from ground and jumps up. She cups her hand around her mouth.

LIL
(calls out)
We're coming, Mr. Van Tuyle...

Nell puts on blonde wig and looks in mirror, adjusting it.

NELL
I mean, how could we possibly learn everything we need to learn down here in one lifetime?

LIL
So...you think we just keep coming back 'till we get it right?

NELL
Yes ma'am.

BERT (O.S.)
Four minutes!

Nell and Lil begin walking back to set.

LIL
Can I, umm...can I speak to you about the script?

NELL
What about it?

LIL
I think we're getting off track.

NELL
(irritated)
I know we are.

LIL
It doesn't even make *sense* anymore.

NELL
It will. It'll all come together in the editing.

LIL
I'm not so sure...

NELL
Mr Van Tuyle knows what he's doing.

LIL

So do you.

Nell stops walking and turns to look at her.

LIL (CONT'D)

Nell, you're paying me to keep everyone on track with the script...but they aren't. It's just one action scene after another.

BERT (O.S.)

Three minutes!

Nell looks in Bert's direction.

NELL

(frustrated)

We're coming!

Nell folds arms across chest and looks at Lil again.

NELL (CONT'D)

Then maybe when we meet again in our next life, we'll get it right *that* time around.

Lil's mouth drops open.

BACK TO:

INT. COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - CALGARY (PRESENT)

Samantha is staring, mouth open, at screen. Beside her, Helen shifts in seat, uncomfortable.

NELL (O.S.)

In the meantime, we have a scene to shoot. Am I clear?

Helen and Samantha turn and look at each other.

BACK TO:

EXT. WOODS - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1922)

Lil nods, blinking back tears. Nell turns and walks briskly towards set, where a crashed plane is now visible. Bert is on set with Joe Walker, in cap, and Bill Dagwell. Nell strides up, with Lil following, head-down.

BERT
'bout time, ladies.

Bill smiles and nods towards Lil's boots.

BILL
Betcha it was doin' *those* things up
that took ya so long!

Lil manages a small smile.

BILL (CONT'D)
You got more laces goin' on there
than an octopus got legs.

Lil giggles, blushing.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Despite the growing tension, it was
wonderful to be working with the
ever-cheerful and talented Bill
Dagwell again.

Bill lifts plane wing, making room for Nell to crawl under.

BILL
(bows to Nell)
Your chariot awaits, Lady Nugget.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
But even *he* couldn't save us from
the waiting wreckage.

Nell climbs into wreckage and lies down. Bill gently places wing on top of her. Bert limps to the side. Joe readies his camera. Lil flips through the script, frustrated.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
The Girl from God's Country was
very expensive to make and it *did*
jump from one adventure to the
next, never stopping long enough to
just *be...*rather like myself.

BERT
And...action!

Nell struggles to move beneath debris. Joe films action as Bert, Bill and Lil watch. Nell turns her head towards camera, resting cheek on wing.

BERT (CONT'D)

Cut!

(beat)

Nell, don't move.

Bert looks to Joe.

BERT (CONT'D)

Catch a still 'a this, will ya,
Joe? It's a keeper.

Joe nods and snaps photo of Nell in wreckage. Flash goes off.

MATCH CUT TO:

Archival-looking clip of above photo with newspaper caption:

NELL SHIPMAN, MOVIE STAR, ON SET OF "GIRL FROM GOD'S COUNTRY"

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS

Smiling Nell stands on street, talking to reporters who scribble on steno pads. Journalists snap her photo.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That summer, I lived in a whirlwind
of editing, publicity and writing
our next picture.

Music - *When I Change Your Mind* by Cherry Poppin' Daddies
(upbeat Charleston-sounding song) - begins (0:00 to 00:27).

Smiling Nell cuts ribbon at ribbon-cutting ceremony. Flash-bulb goes off.

Smiling Nell kisses cute kid. Flash-bulb goes off.

Tired Nell working at typewriter.

Nell and Young Barry in barn clothes tend to the animals, in their pens beside house. Nell and Young Barry break into the Charleston dance, doing goofy jazz hands, etc to song (music stops just before lyrics begin).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Plus, of course, there was the
ongoing care of animals and child.

INT. EDITING ROOM - BERT'S BUNGALOW - DAY (1922)

Nell and Bert work side by side, sweating, physically cutting and taping pieces of film together.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Bert had built an editing suite in his bungalow, so throughout that hot summer, we cut and re-cut the footage until *Girl From God's Country* was down to a reasonable twelve thousand feet.

Nell straightens up and stretches her crimped neck. She looks at the small mountain of film still on table.

NELL
Good Lord, Bert...why did we shoot so much footage? We have *far* more than we need.

BERT
(shrugs)
I guess Joe went a little overboard.

Nell's mouth drops open and she looks Bert in the eye.

NELL
Horsefeathers.

Bert, embarrassed, resumes splicing film together.

NELL (CONT'D)
No wonder we're over-budget. We've got enough film here to sink a battleship.

Bert continues splicing, not looking at Nell.

BERT
No one was holdin' a gun to yer head. You coulda said somethin'.

NELL
Well I am now.

BERT
Too late.

Nell sighs and watches Bert a moment.

NELL

The next shipment of animals
arrives next week.

Bert looks up.

BERT

Another shipment?

NELL

(nods)

We've got a sweet little Panamanian
deer coming!

BERT

How much did *that* cost?

Nell and Bert stare at each other a moment in tense silence.
Then Bert resumes splicing film.

EXT. NELL'S HOUSE - DAY (1922)

Front door opens. Nell strides out, confident, dressed
professionally in fur-collared coat and carrying briefcase.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Despite the growing doubt...and
debt...this producer took herself
seriously. The contract with the
folks financing our film said NO
interference: *I* had final approval.

Nell gets into her fancy car and drives off.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

What Lola wanted...Lola got.

(beat)

Or so she thought.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY (1922)

Powerful-looking men in business attire are talking. Nell
walks in, room goes quiet. BILL CLUNE, 50, watches her
carefully. Several men glance at each other, exchanging looks
of concern. Nell sits down.

Bill Clune looks at Nell and gives her a smile and nod.

BILL CLUNE

Mrs. Shipman.

NELL
(nods back)
Mr. Clune.

BILL CLUNE
How is the production going?

NELL
(clears throat)
It's coming together nicely, Sir.

Bill leans back in his seat and touches his fingertips together, tapping his two index fingers.

BILL CLUNE
(smiling)
With an overhead of \$10,000 a day,
I would certainly hope so.

Nell swallows nervously.

NELL
The picture is going to be a
delight, Sir. I promise.

Bill Clune pushes his chair back.

BILL CLUNE
Good. I look forward to seeing your
masterpiece at the screening.

Nell nods, anxious.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Problem was...I knew very little
about the business side of movie-
making.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT (1922)

Bill Clune and other Hollywood men, nicely dressed and smoking cigars, are in first row, waiting for film to begin. Bert, Joe, Lil and Bill Dagwell are in second row.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But the Hollywood boys backing my
film sure did.

Nell, in white dress and carrying a bouquet of roses, walks on stage, as organist plays theme music to *Girl from God's Country*. Crowd gives standing ovation.

Grinning Bill Clune exhales a cloud of cigar smoke.

Nell sits between Bert and Joe. In row behind them is Charlie Taylor and Frank Egan. Lights go down.

On screen, the title, "Girl from God's Country" (archival not available) appears.

Bert smiles and squeezes Nell's hand.

On screen, a blonde Nell in lacy night attire is sipping coffee in bed.

Charlie Taylor puts his hand on Nell's shoulder.

CHARLIE

(loudly)

Hey Gypsy, you look great in bed!

People LAUGH. Bert shoots Charlie a dirty look.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

(laughs)

Poor old Charlie Taylor was deaf as
a post by then, and forgot how
silent the silent movies were.

On screen, a brunette, (also played by Nell) in outdoorsy clothes, storms into room. Blonde Nell, surprised, spills her coffee on white bedspread. Furious, she makes a fuss about spill as she sneakily slides her hand beneath pillow.

Brunette Nell strides over to bed and grabs blonde Nell around neck, trying to choke her. Blonde Nell fights back with one hand. A gun can be seen in her other hand.

The crowd CLAPS. Nell turns to Joe and grins.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Joe pulled a doozie of a double-
exposure out of his hat. The crowd
loved it!

In front row, Bill Clune, no longer smiling, claps slowly and a little too loudly. Behind him, Nell is beaming. Bill Clune removes cigar from mouth. The man beside him turns to look.

Close-up of Bill mouthing words: "Cut it."

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

My backers...not so much.

EXT. MARQUEE OUTSIDE THEATRE - SANTA ANA (1922)

Marquee sign reads: "Nell Shipman in *The Girl from God's Country*."

INT. SANTA ANA THEATRE - NIGHT (1922)

Nell and Bert are sitting in middle of near-empty theatre, watching the screen, clearly upset.

REVEAL on screen the same scene from *Girl from God's Country* where blonde Nell in lacy night attire sips coffee in bed and a brunette Nell, in outdoorsy clothes, storms room.

Blonde Nell spills her coffee but the shot of her making fuss about spill and searching for gun under pillow has been cut. Brunette Nell strides over to bed and grabs blonde Nell around neck, trying to choke her.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
When Bert and I caught the film on
general release a few weeks later,
we were shocked. It had been
slashed from twelve thousand feet
to *nine*...slaughtered senseless.

In theatre, REVEAL Nell's livid face. Her eyes narrow.

INT. TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DAY (1922)

Nell, in fur-collared coat and carrying briefcase, stomps into a Western Union office. She loudly dictates a telegram to clerk behind desk, who types it out.

NELL
This is to go out to every theatre
in the country...
(Nell holds up hand,
dramatic)
Dear Mr. Exhibitor...do NOT book my
picture! It has been *castrated* and
is now a cruelly cut catastrophe...

SERIES OF SHOTS

Surprised reactions of various theatre owners, reading telegram.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY (1922)

A man reading the telegram angrily crunches it up.

REVEAL Bill Clune, furious. He stands up, tosses telegram in garbage then storms out, SLAMMING door behind him.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
After that, you could practically
hear the doors slamming shut in
Hollywood.

EXT. NELL'S HOUSE - DAY (1923)

Burly men carry moving boxes from house to truck. More boxes are on lawn. A "For Sale" sign is back on lawn. Joe Walker is by moving truck. Nell comes out of house, carrying a box.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
I packed my toys and moved north.

Bert limps out of his bungalow, box in hand. He joins Nell and Joe by moving truck. They all watch as their car is driven away by new owners.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Not an easy move...and probably not
the wisest. My house was sold. So
was Bert's. As was the fancy car.

Two movers walk past Nell and Bert, carrying Nell's piano.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Our belongings went into storage...

Bert turns and limps towards Nell's front door as Young Barry comes out. They give each other a wide birth. Young Barry heads to animal pens.

JOE WALKER
(to Nell)
Are you *sure* about this move to
Idaho? I hear it's very isolated...

NELL
(sighs)
I'm as sure as I can be, Joe.

Nell walks briskly back to bungalow.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (5 sec) from "The Grub Stake": first screen shot of opening credits: "Bert Van Tuyle presents Nell Shipman in The Grub Stake" (00:00:05 to 00:00:10).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Our first stop was Spokane, where
we began shooting our next feature,
"The Grub Stake."

Continued archival clip of second screen shot (5 sec) of "The Grub Stake" opening credits: "Written by Ms Shipman, directed by Bert Van Tuyle in collaboration with the author, photographed by Joe Walker" (00:00:10 to 00:00:15).

Archival clip from "The Grub Stake" (10 sec) of Nell holding on for dear life to a tree on side of cliff, as a group of concerned onlookers watch from bottom (1:36:30 to 1:36:40).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It had guts, it had heart and was a
real cliff hanger...literally. But
it carried too much on its nose. It
had to be the best and the biggest.
Except the budget was the lowest
since "Back to God's Country."

EXT. DAVENPORT HOTEL - SPOKANE - DAY (1923)

A cab pulls up. Nell, Bert and Young Barry climb out. A bellhop begins unloading trunks. Nell looks stressed. Young Barry looks around in awe.

YOUNG BARRY
Wow...this place is swell!

A second cab pulls up. Joe Walker, Bill Dagwell and Lil get out. Joe looks around at the swanky surroundings, concerned.

JOE WALKER
Gee...this is pretty fancy.

BERT
Only the best for our crew!

Joe Walker looks at Nell and raises his eyebrows.

NELL
(to Joe)
If ya wanna keep good people, you
gotta treat 'em well.

JOE WALKER
Yes, I understand that but -

Bert cheerfully slaps Joe Walker on the back.

BERT

Oh, don't be a wet blanket! We got
a picture to make!

Bill Dagwell and Lil exchange concerned glances.

INT. DAVENPORT HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY (1923)

Nell, tense, in snazzy coat and briefcase, walks into elegant ballroom filled with mostly wealthy-looking people. As she walks to front of room, snippets of conversations are heard.

MAN #1

I just don't know if she can pull
this off...

WOMAN

I hear they're *already* over-
budget...

MAN #2

...all those animals must cost a
fortune to feed...

When she reaches front of room, Nell stands quietly. The room goes silent and people take their seats.

NELL

(to crowd)

Thank you for coming today. I
appreciate your support and I can
assure you the finished picture
will be outstanding. Unfortunately,
we are experiencing delays due to
unforeseen circumstances...

Nell places a hand on her heart, her voice waivers.

NELL (CONT'D)

As such, I'm asking you, again, to
invest in *The Grub Stake*. And
today, we can offer you twelve
dollars a share...

The room is quiet. A rancher in back row stands up. He's wearing overalls, plaid shirt and cowboy hat (same man as in earlier scene with Ernie pitching *Back to God's Country* to Calgary investors). Nell looks at him. Her eyes widen. Others turn to look.

RANCHER
(looks around room)
I invested in her picture up in
Calgary...

Rancher reaches into pocket and pulls out fistful of bills.

RANCHER (CONT'D)
(waving bills)
...and made *three hundred percent* on
my money!

The room erupts into CHEERS. Nell smiles, visibly relieved.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And the show went on.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (10 sec) from "The Grub Stake" of Nell modeling for art students. Nell stands on a pedestal, wearing long white robe (with a shawl draped on her arm) and flowers in her hair. Man in other room RINGS bell. Nell, eyes wide and looking rather confused, drops shawl and steps down from model's stool (00:01:45 to 00:01:55).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Behind the scenes, however, things
were starting to unravel.

BERT (O.S.)
Cut!

INT. ART STUDIO - SILENT FILM SET - DAY (1923)

Behind the scenes of above archival clip: Bert looks at Joe, in cap, who is still filming, and runs his finger across his throat. Joe stops camera. Lil, concerned, script in hand, stands between Bill and Joe.

BERT
(to Nell)
No, no, no!

Bill raises his eyebrows.

NELL
Now what?

BILL DAGWELL
(to actors)
Take a break.

The actors playing the art students stand up. Lil walks over and picks up shawl. Bert heads over to Nell, his limp is getting worse.

BERT

Don't look so damn...doey-eyed!
He's ringing the bell to get your
attention because you're *supposed*
to be out front, behind the
counter.

The actors watch the heated exchange, embarrassed.

NELL

I know that...I wrote the script!

BERT

Well then give us an expression
that *shows* that!

Bert storms off set, limping. Nell stands there, stunned.

Bill looks at Joe and nods towards Nell. Bill walks over to actors. Joe walks to Nell and puts a hand on her shoulder.

JOE

(softly)

Nell...what is Faith *feeling* when
she hears the bell?

NELL

(flustered)

Ummm...she...she's worried she's
going to get caught doing something
she's not supposed to be doing.

JOE

Okay...then how be you give us a
look that shows her *concern* -
versus one of confusion.

Nell rubs her forehead and nods, embarrassed.

NELL

I, I...I must have too much on my
mind...

Joe nods slowly, eyebrows raised, then walks back to camera.
Nell remains there a moment, looking a bit lost.

BILL

You okay, Nugget?

NELL

Yeah.

Nell manages a smile. Lil hands Nell shawl and Nell takes it.

NELL (CONT'D)

Where did Bert go?

LIL

(shrugs)

Dunno.

REVEAL Bert, around corner, drinking from flask. He slips it back into an inside pocket then limps back onto set.

BERT

Places!

The actors scurry back to their seats. Nell steps up on pedestal and holds her arms out to side. Instead of a bell ringing, a train WHISTLE is heard.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - SPOKANE - DAY (1923)

Lil and several actors are on platform, loading their luggage on train. Everyone looks grim. Nell tries to help one male actor with the luggage but he shakes his head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

After finishing with the bulk of the human actors in Spokane, we shipped them back to Hollywood - still owed two weeks' worth of wages. As soon as we got the rest of the picture shot, edited and distribution arranged, we'd collect an advance and pay everyone off.

The train WHISTLE sounds again. Lil turns to look at Nell and folds arms across chest. The other actors glare at Nell.

NELL

You *will* get paid. Please...you need to have patience.

MALE ACTOR

What we *need* is money.

LIL

People have to eat, Nell.

NELL

So do the animals.

LIL

Oh come on! You stayed at the
Davenport Hotel...*that* was money
that could have gone to wages AND
food for the animals.

NELL

You stayed at the Davenport, too,
my dear.

LIL

All I'm saying is that maybe you
need to take a good look at some of
the decisions you're making.

NELL

And all *I'm* saying is that you and
everybody else'll get paid WHEN we
get an advance from a distributor.

The whistle BLOWS again. Nell cringes at sound. Lil boards
train. The others follow.

BERT (O.S.)

Nell!

Nell whips around to look at Bert standing on other platform.
She holds up her index finger, as if to say "hold on." Nell
looks back up at Lil's train.

Lil is now seated by open window. Lil and Nell look at each
other. Train begins to move. Lil slides window shut.

Nell strides over to other platform.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(softly)

The rest of us continued north with
the animals.

BACK TO:

INT. COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - CALGARY (PRESENT)

Helen and Sam turn and look at each other. Sam raises her
eyebrows. Then they both resume watching movie.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILDERNESS - IDAHO - DAY (1923)

Train winds its way through wilderness.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We had to take the train from
Spokane to Priest River...

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - COOLIN - DAY (1923)

The train slows to a stop in front of "Coolin" sign. Nell and her crew pile out of train.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
...and then on to Coolin.

EXT. LOWER PRIEST LAKE - BARGE - DAY (1923)

Nell is standing on barge as last of animal cages are loaded on. Nell directs crew about which animals are to be placed where. Young Barry, excited, roams around barge, squeezing in between cages and checking on animals.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
From Coolin we took a barge twenty
miles to Upper Priest Lake.

Once the last cage is loaded on, Nell turns away from the others and we can see the anxiety and stress on her face.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In other words, it took an
incredible amount of time, money
and effort to get to Priest
Lake...so I don't know why it
didn't occur to me that leaving
again would be just as
difficult...and *more*, come winter.

Bill walks up to Nell. He smiles kindly.

BILL
Last chance to go back to Los
Angeles and shoot on set like
everybody else...

CUT TO:

INT. SILENT FILM SET - HOLLYWOOD (1923)

A camera man in short-sleeved shirt is cranking camera, filming several actors in an outdoor scene as fake snow flutters to the ground.

BACK TO:

EXT. LOWER PRIEST LAKE - BARGE - DAY (1923)

Nell smiles and shakes her head.

NELL

Nope. We need authenticity.

Barge begins to move. Bill joins Young Barry in checking the animals. Bert, limping badly, comes up to Nell and puts arm around her, squeezing her shoulders. Nell relaxes a little and leans her head on Bert's shoulder.

EXT. UPPER PRIEST LAKE - DAY (1923)

Barge stops at edge of lake. Nell and Young Barry climb off first and gaze in awe at wilderness. Barry races into forest.

Nell opens arms, looks to sky then slowly turns in a circle.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Arriving at Priest Lake was like
a...homecoming for my soul.

POV of Nell looking up at tree tops and sky, as she turns.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D

Maybe I hoped that being in my
beloved wilderness would make
everything okay again...

Nell stops turning. With her arms still open, she closes her eyes and takes in a deep breath.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

For a little while, it did.

Nell is about to exhale when a loud Tarzan-like YELL is heard. Nell opens eyes, just in time to see Young Barry leaping from a tree branch into the lake.

Nell winces, good-naturedly. Bert, box in hand, limps up to her, frowning.

BERT

(gruff)

The boy's going to hurt himself. We
can't have that...

Bert waves his hand around at wilderness.

BERT (CONT'D)

Not out here.

NELL

You're right. I'll speak with him.

Nell looks at Young Barry, now treading water in lake.
Smiling, she motions for him to come to shore.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

In the beginning, we *did* have fun.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS

Music begins: *Boil 'em Cabbage Down* by Wild Rose Express.

Nell, Bert, Joe and Bill swing dance to song around campfire.
Young Barry plays banjo.

Nell washes laundry with washboard and old zinc tub.

Bert, limping, hauls firewood.

Nell and Young Barry, covered in flour, bake dog biscuits.

Joe sets up a shoot with his famed mirrors to reflect the
light. Bill assists him.

Lyrics begin (30 seconds into song): "Boil 'em, boil 'em,
boil 'em boil 'em, boil 'em cabbage down..."

Nell and Young Barry sing words as Nell pulls boiled cabbage
from pot on ancient stove. She grimaces. Young Barry laughs.
They bow to each other.

Nell serves hotcakes to hungry crew.

Nell, wearing bandana, and Young Barry tend to animals.

When Nell and Young Barry reach Brownie Bear's cage, she
rears up on her hind feet and sticks one paw out. Nell bows
and shakes her paw then hands her a carrot, grinning.

Nell and Young Barry move on to next cage. Nell, still
smiling, leans over to look at the cougar. Music fades.

From behind Nell, Joe takes photo. Flash goes off. Nell turns
around. Her smile fades when she sees Joe's expression.

NELL

Everything all right, Joe?

JOE WALKER

(hesitant)

Yeah...

Nell walks over to where Joe Walker is standing by camera.

NELL

Joe, I know you better than I know
my own self. I can tell when
something's bothering you.

Joe, uncomfortable, looks to ground.

JOE

Well...it's just that...

Joe lifts his head again, looking Nell in the eye.

JOE (CONT'D)

Do you ever wonder if keeping all
these wild animals in *cages* is the
right thing to do?

Nell's shoulders slump and she bites her lip. She looks away
a moment, blinking back tears, then turns back to Joe.

NELL

Of course I do. But I hope that
what we're doing here will make
some sort of difference...

JOE

To?

NELL

How animals are treated in motion
pictures!

Joe nods his head slowly but doesn't say anything. There's an
uncomfortable moment of silence.

JOE

I know. But -

Nell points towards forest.

NELL

And we're also trying to show
people working in *harmony* with
nature instead of exploiting it...

Nell's hand drops to side.

NELL (CONT'D)

And to achieve all that, I think
authenticity is really important.

JOE WALKER

Yes...but at what cost?

Nell looks at Joe a moment, stunned.

JOE WALKER (CONT'D)

I'm concerned you've bitten off more than you can chew in terms of *caring* for these animals...in the long run, I mean.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey now...what's with the serious talk?

REVEAL a gruff old native man, 60, DADDY DUFFILL, standing behind them. He breaks into a toothless grin.

Joe and Nell turn to look. Nell forces a strained smile.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Daddy Duffill, a local old-timer, had joined our crew to help look after the animals. But Joe was right. We didn't have a contingency plan if things went south.

CUT TO:

Archival clip (30 sec total) from "The Grub Stake" of Nell with beavers, bear and raccoons (0:54:10 to 0:54:40).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

What the plan *had* been was that Priest Lake would be where Nature and her wild children could act freely...not as animated puppets but as living, breathing images of wilderness purity at its divine source...

Continued archival clip from "The Grub Stake" of Nell with beavers, bear and raccoons.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D

And at first, it *did* seem a continuation of Curwood's fictional fantasies, where I played the compassionate woman giving stage to the animals.

Archival clip (15 sec) from "Trail of the North Wind" where a horse struggles to stand up in deep snow and then Nell cuddles a baby skunk wearing a sweater (00:8:20 to 00:8:35).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But we took the fantasy too
far...and trusted Mother Nature to
follow suit.

Archival clip (20 sec) from "Trail of the North Wind": Nell and Young Barry, 10, stumble through deep snow in forest as snowstorm rages. Young Barry collapses and Nell helps him to his feet (00:16:30 to 00:16:50).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She didn't.

FADE TO:

INT. EDITING LAB IN BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1923)

Both exhausted, Nell and Bert work side by side in a lab, carefully splicing film together.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
When the time came for me and Bert
to return to Hollywood to edit *The
Grub Stake*, there was no private
editing suite anymore. The work was
done in a lab...one that was owed a
lot of money.

Bert stops splicing and stretches arms above head.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But they agreed to make a Show
Print for us to take to New York so
we could find a distributor.

EXT. EDITING LAB BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1923)

Lil and several of the actors (who played the art students) wait outside the building, pacing angrily. Several people carry protest signs: "Owed two weeks worth of wages!"

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The cast members, on the other
hand, were suing us for the two
weeks back salary...which was
ridiculous because tying up the
picture would mean no distribution
deal...and therefore NO pay!

INT. EDITING LAB IN BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1923)

Nell now stands by window, peeking through blinds at cast members below. Bert stops splicing and looks at Nell.

BERT
Are they still there?

NELL
(anxious)
Yup.

Nell walks away from window and rejoins Bert. Clearly under strain, she rubs forehead, looking down at strips of film on the counter. She picks up a strip and holds it up to the light. She manages a smile.

NELL (CONT'D)
The baby ducklings with their
momma...

Bert looks up from what he's doing.

BERT
It's going to be a fine picture,
Nell.

Nell brings her hand down and looks at Bert.

NELL
I hope so.

Bert clears his throat.

BERT
But we are gonna need money to get
to New York.

NELL
I know.

BERT
And?

NELL
(resigned)
And...I guess you better pay
another visit to the pawn shop.

Nell returns to splicing film, weary. Bert limps to door.

EXT. PAWNSHOP - DAY (1923)

Bert limps into pawnshop, carrying large box. In background, two burly men unload Nell's baby grand piano from a truck.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Bert raised the money for the trip
by hocking the rest of my personal
belongings.

Inside the pawnshop, a pile of boxes, some opened, and a large tin trunk is by counter. A shady-looking PAWNSHOP OWNER greedily rifles through contents of a box. As Bert walks up, the pawn shop owner pulls out a gleaming silver tea pot. Pawnshop owner nods to box in Bert's arms.

PAWNSHOP OWNER
You can put that on the counter.

As Bert puts box on counter, pawnshop owner lifts up lid of tin trunk and, with his back to Bert, grins.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
Everything...gone.

POV of contents of trunk from pawnshop owner's perspective: old photos, a christening gown, linens, more silver.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(upset)
Much of it family heirlooms.

BACK TO:

INT. EDITING SUITE - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1923)

Bert and Nell, in different clothes, now have movie spliced together. Bert is carefully winding the film onto a reel as Nell fiddles with a projector.

SUPERIMPOSED: One week later

Bert snaps reel into projector.

BERT
Get the lights, will ya?

Nell walks towards doorway.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
We ran and re-ran the footage until
we had a perfect print to take to
New York to show the distributors.
(MORE)

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Then we would secure a decent cash
advance and pay everyone off.

Nell is reaching for light switch when Joe Walker appears in doorway. He has some envelopes in his hand and looks upset.

BERT

Joe! Just in time to see your
handiwork...

Bert limps over to Joe and shakes his hand enthusiastically.

JOE WALKER

(concerned)

I reckon that limp of yours is
getting worse, Bert. Maybe ya ought
to get that checked before you head
back to Priest Lake?

BERT

(waves his hand)

Nah...

REVEAL Nell's exasperated expression. She nods at window.

NELL

(to Joe)

Are they still out there?

JOE

'Fraid so.

Joe removes his cap and looks to ground, uncomfortable.

NELL

(concerned)

What is it?

Joe reluctantly hands envelopes to Nell.

JOE

The animals...

Nell grabs a letter out of an envelope and scans it quickly.
Her hand flies up to her mouth.

NELL

Oh God.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Frantic letters were arriving from
Priest Lake. The animals were
nearly out of food...and we were
out of money.

(MORE)

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We had to find a distributor in New
York. We needed that advance more
than ever.

EXT. EDITING LAB BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD - DAY (1923)

Lil and other actors are still waiting outside front door.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE AT BACK OF LAB BUILDING - NIGHT (1923)

Nell, carrying film canister, sneaks down fire escape. She
climbs into a taxi where Bert is waiting, the other canisters
stacked beside him. Cab pulls away.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So we made a rather quick getaway.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE HOTEL - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

New York taxi pulls up in front of hotel. Nell helps Bert,
now clearly sick, out of cab. She holds his arm as he limps
towards front door of hotel.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Bert had been under tremendous
strain. He came down with the flu,
bordering on pneumonia.

Bert stops walking and coughs violently into a handkerchief.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

Nell walks into a small empty theatre-like room and sits in
back row, beneath projector.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And so it came to pass that I went
on my own to the Trade Show
screening.

Serious-looking men in suits, the distributors, file past
her, sit down and light their cigars.

Nell, nervous in back row, shifts uncomfortably in her seat.
Theatre lights go down.

On the screen is repeat of archival clip (5 sec) from "The Grub Stake": first screen shot of opening credits: "Bert Van Tuyle presents Nell Shipman in The Grub Stake" (00:00:05 to 00:00:10).

In front row, a weasly-looking man, FRED WARREN, the distributor from American Release, yawns loudly and stretches. The room is slightly smokier.

From back row, Nell notices the yawn and sinks lower in her seat. The room continues to get smokier.

On the screen is repeat of archival clip from "The Grub Stake" (10 sec) of Nell holding on for dear life to a tree on side of cliff, as a group of concerned onlookers watch from bottom (1:36:30 to 1:36:40).

A meaty-looking man, the METRO DISTRIBUTOR, sitting in front of Nell, checks his watch. The room is smokier still.

Nell, chewing her thumbnail, sees this and grimaces.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
It was awful.

On screen is archival clip (30 sec) from end of "The Grub Stake": Nell is pulled from cliff, everyone cheers. Ducklings swim behind their momma, baby raccoons frolic, a white dog nurses its pups and Brownie bear checks out Nell's new human baby in cradle then heads outside to her cubs. The final screen reads: "The End" (1:38:00 to 1:40:00 minus captions).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
When the time came for the baby
ducklings to follow their momma
across the screen, the distributors
had obviously had enough...

Room is now filled with smoke. The lights come up. The only sound is the TICKING of film reel. No one claps or speaks. The men simply stand up and file, stone-faced, past Nell. She watches them, anxious.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
They made a hasty exit from the
projection room...seemingly
relieved the ordeal was over.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

Nell opens door to hotel room and overhears Bert on phone. Bert, in pajamas and robe, stands by small telephone table.

BERT

No. She couldn't possibly do it.

Bert hangs up phone.

NELL

What couldn't I possibly do?

BERT

That was your old acting teacher,
Frank Egan...

Bert, limping badly, walks over to larger table where there's
a bottle of whisky and a glass.

BERT (CONT'D)

He offered you the lead in a
Broadway production.

NELL

What?! You said NO?!

Bert removes cap from bottle and pours some into glass.

BERT

'Course I said no. You're a motion
picture star...you don't *do* stage
anymore.

NELL

Bert...that would've been the
answer to our money problems!

Bert puts glass down and turns around slowly.

BERT

Why?

NELL

'Cause it looks like we have a
turkey, that's why.

Bert, breathing harshly, glares at Nell.

BERT

What did they say?

NELL

Absolutely nothing. They just stood
up and walked out -

The phone RINGS, shrill. Startled, both Bert and Nell turn to
look at phone. Nell swallows nervously.

BERT

Answer it.

Nell walks over to phone, reaches down and picks up receiver.

NELL

Nell Shipman.

Nell listens intently, nodding. She slowly smiles.

NELL (CONT'D)

Yes, Sir. I'll be right there.

Nell hangs up phone and turns to Bert.

NELL (CONT'D)

That was Fred Warren from American Release. He IS interested in *The Grub Stake!*

BERT

(relieved)

Thank Christ.

NELL

We're to meet with him now.

Bert has another coughing fit. Nell watches, concerned.

NELL (CONT'D)

You're in no shape to go.

Bert picks up his glass and takes a drink.

BERT

I'll manage.

NELL

No. I can do it. You stay here and rest.

Bert coughs again and lets Nell helps him back to bed.

BERT

Just remember...no advance, no deal.

NELL

I know...

Bert points finger at Nell.

BERT

And *nothing* less than \$50,000.

Nell nods and walks towards door.

INT. AMERICAN RELEASE OFFICE - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

As if in a scene from a silent film, complete with melodramatic piano music, the weasly-looking distributor from American Release, Fred Warren, is sitting at desk. Nell, anxious, is perched on edge of chair. Nell meekly asks Fred a question (which can't be heard). He frowns and shakes head. Her eyes widen in surprise. He shrugs, helpless, then slides a contract across desk. Nell bites her lip, hesitant, then reluctantly signs it. Piano music fades.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
American Release couldn't give us
an advance...they didn't have the
money. But the contract was drawn
up, so I signed it. I was so sure
that was the only offer we were
going to get...

Fred Warren grins and stands up. He reaches across table to shake Nell's hand.

FRED WARREN
It's a pleasure doing business with
you, Mrs. Shipman.

Nell remains seated and shakes Fred's hand, upset.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

Nell softly opens hotel room door, trying to be quiet. Bert, in bed, immediately sits up.

BERT
Well?

NELL
Well...we got the deal...

BERT
(eyes narrow)
But?

NELL
No advance.

BERT
What?!

NELL

They don't have the cash, Bert. You can't get blood from a stone.

BERT

Then there's no deal.

NELL

I signed the contract.

BERT

WHAT?!

Bert throws back bed covers and swings his feet over edge of bed, wincing in pain.

NELL

It was better than nothing! No one else has called with an offer now, have they?

BERT

No but -

The phone RINGS. They both turn and look at phone. It rings again. Nell walks over to phone and picks up receiver.

NELL

Nell Shipman.

Nell grips receiver, nodding. She closes eyes. Bert remains on edge of bed, listening.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

That afternoon, calls came in from every major distributor. The best offer was from Metro.

Nell opens her eyes and rubs her forehead, distraught.

NELL (CONT'D)

But I thought you didn't *like* it?
You didn't *say* anything at the screening...

Nell grips receiver, nodding. She bites her lip.

INT. METRO OFFICE - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

The meaty-looking distributor from Metro is on phone. His feet are up on desk and he's puffing away on a cigar.

METRO DISTRIBUTOR

We never say anything at a trade
show, Sweetie...you know that!

BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEW YORK - DAY (1923)

Nell, still on phone, is now in a chair, practically slumped
against telephone table.

NELL

(softly)

No, I didn't.

Bert, now out of bed, is slowly limping towards Nell.

NELL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Sir...we've already
signed with American Release.

Nell hangs up. Bert stares at her, his breathing harsh.

BERT

An advance?

Nell nods, blinking back tears.

BERT (CONT'D)

How much?

NELL

Seventy-five thousand.

Bert's head drops to chest, defeated. Without a word, he
limps to bathroom and gently closes door behind him.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

We wouldn't be able to pay the
actors the wages owed them.

INT. THEATRE - SEATTLE - DAY (1923)

On screen is repeat of archival clip (20 sec) from end of
"The Grub Stake": Nell is pulled from cliff and everyone
cheers. Ducklings swim behind their momma, baby raccoons
frolic, a white dog nurses its pups (1:38:00 to 1:39:00 minus
captions).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But we managed to scrape together
enough money to keep the animals
fed...for awhile.

Continued archival clip from "The Grub Stake": Brownie bear checks out Nell's new human baby in cradle then heads outside to her cubs. The final screen reads: "The End" (1:39:00 to 1:40:00 minus captions).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
As part of the deal with American
Release, I was paid \$1500 a week
for personal appearances at
screenings of *The Grub Stake*.

Lights come up in three-quarter full theatre. People clap.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
And so...six times a day, after the
ducklings had followed their momma
across the screen, the lights would
come up...

REVEAL Nell, seated on edge of stage, saucily swinging feet. The white dog, Lady, from *The Grub Stake* is on one side of her. Another dog, Tex, is on her other. Nell wears her trademark outfit: fur parka with wolverine hood framing face and beaded headband across forehead.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And there I'd be: front and centre.

EXT. MARQUEE OUTSIDE THEATRE - SEATTLE - DAY (1923)

Sign on marquee reads: "Nell Shipman in *The Grub Stake*" and "Come SEE the star TODAY!"

Front of theatre and building next to it are plastered in large posters with close-ups of smiling Nell in fur parka.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
As promised, American Release had
gone all out promoting *The Grub
Stake*.

At back of theatre, Nell exits via stage door with Lady and Tex. Even back of theatre has multiple posters of Nell. She sees them and cringes.

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Me! Me! Me! Everywhere I looked.
Oh, how I longed to get back to
Priest Lake and the animals...

Again, as if in a scene from a silent film, complete with piano music, Nell rounds corner of building and nearly collides with Joe Walker, in his trademark cap. The dogs greet Joe, excited. Nell grins and hugs Joe. Joe removes cap and looks to ground, embarrassed. Nell tilts her head to one side, puzzled. Joe looks her in the eye. Piano music fades.

JOE WALKER
I, uh, I won't be going to back to
Priest Lake, Nell. I'm sorry but I
just...I just think it's time we
parted ways. I'm so sorry...

Nell, visibly shaken, nods her head, fighting back tears.

NELL
I understand.

Joe hugs Nell tightly. The dogs sit quietly.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(softly)
That was the last time I worked
with Joe Walker. With no money to
pay him, he had to move on.

Nell lets go of Joe. They walk off in opposite directions.

FADE TO:

Archival clip (5 sec) of title screen of short film series from "Trail of the Northwind": "Little Dramas of the Big Places" (0:00:00 to 00:00:05).

OLDER NELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
With our remaining crew, we managed
to make a few short films...a series
we called "Little Dramas of the Big
Places..."

Archival clip (50 sec) from "Trail of the Northwind": Nell hiking with her dog, Tex. Then caption: "They called her story girl...because she listened to the voices of the wilderness..."

Clip continues with wilderness images: rushing river, Brownie Bear, owl. Then caption: "And translated what she heard." (0:00:15 to 0:00:50).

BACK TO:

INT. COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - CALGARY (PRESENT)

Helen is staring at screen, mouth hanging open.

BACK TO:

Archival clip (30 sec) from "Light on the Lookout": Nell coaxes Brownie Bear to frighten two bad guys in tent. Brownie Bear wanders over to tent, goes inside and there is much commotion (0:15:10 to 0:15:40).

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
The shorts had simplicity and
charm...a sense of getting there
just in time, you know?

Continued clip (15 sec) as Nell races over, collapses the tent then throws back head, laughing. The scene is comical, the piano music lively (0:15:40 to 0:15:55).

The image of Nell laughing beside the collapsed tent freezes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANIMAL CAGE - PRIEST LAKE - WINTER - DAY (1924)

Nell, bundled up in warm clothes, has pail of feed in one hand and undoing the cage latch with the other. It is so cold, her breath can be seen.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
(upset)
Unlike in real life.

Nell looks around cage, concerned.

NELL
Nikisia?

Nell sees something at back of cage and gasps, dropping pail. The feed spills onto ground.

REVEAL a small frozen deer at back of cage. Nell races over, drops to knees and reaches for deer. She lets out a sob.

NELL (CONT'D)
(distraught)
Oh! Oh...I'm so sorry...

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
My sweet little Panamanian deer
froze to death in a cold snap.
(pause)
She wasn't the first to die under
our care...and not the last.

YOUNG BARRY (O.S.)
Nail?

Nell quickly wipes eyes then turns around.

Young Barry is standing by pail and spilled feed.

Nell stands up but remains by the deer.

NELL
(upset)
It was too cold for her. I should
have brought her inside. I...

Young Barry walks over to Nell and hugs her. She hugs back tightly and lets out a sob.

YOUNG BARRY
(muffled)
Nail?

NELL
Yeah?

YOUNG BARRY
(looks up at Nell)
Bert's drunk again and saying funny
stuff.

Nell's head drops to her chest in despair. Then she lifts her head again and looks at Young Barry, anxious.

NELL
Don't tell him about Nikisia.

YOUNG BARRY
(snorts)
No worry of *that*.

NELL
He's in a great deal of pain,
Barry. His foot...

Young Barry gives Nell a look of disbelief and folds arms across chest. Nell looks away, embarrassed, then drops to her knees and begins scooping feed back into pail. Her hands are shaking. Young Barry watches her a moment.

YOUNG BARRY

You gotta say somethin', Nail. He
ain't bein' nice.

Nell stops scooping and looks up at Young Barry, distraught.

NELL

He needs a hospital.

Young Barry drops to his knees to help Nell.

In cage next door, Brownie Bear rears up on her hind legs. But she doesn't stick her paw through for a treat. Instead, she lets out a woeful little roar. Nell and Young Barry exchange concerned glances. Nell bites her lip, anxious, and resumes picking up spilled feed.

INT. LIONHEAD LODGE - DAY (1924)

Bert is in a chair in front of fire, drink in hand. His bad foot is propped up on an ottoman. He stares into fire.

The door opens. Nell and Young Barry come inside. Young Barry remains outside a moment, stomping the snow from his boots. Bert continues staring into fire.

BERT

Shut the goddamn door.

Nell swallows nervously and motions to Young Barry to get inside. Nell quickly closes door. Young Barry removes his boots and immediately goes into kitchen. Nell takes off her boots, parka, hat and gloves as Bert stares into fire.

BERT (CONT'D)

Mail come?

NELL

Not yet.

BERT

We need money.

NELL

I'm sure American Release will pay
us our share any day now. *The Grub
Stake* is doing okay...

BERT

We're gonna have to slaughter the
horses for feed.

Nell gasps. Bert hauls himself up and glares at Nell.

BERT (CONT'D)

Unless you got any better ideas?

Bert limps into kitchen. Nell runs hand through hair,
stressed. She walks over to table beneath window where there
is a typewriter. She sits down and starts typing, frantic.

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

Now what are you writing?

Nell keeps typing. Bert stands in doorway, drink in hand.

NELL

Our next picture.

BERT

(snide)

Another two-reeler?

Nell stops typing but doesn't turn around. Bert sips drink.

BERT (CONT'D)

If so, you better bring in some sex
appeal.

Nell pushes chair back, stands up and turns around. Bert
looks her up and down.

BERT (CONT'D)

That's been missin' in you lately.
And without sex, glamour fades...if
it every really existed in you in
the first place.

Bert takes another drink. Nell watches him carefully.

NELL

(calm)

Bert, you don't know what you're
saying...

BERT

(slurring slightly)

There's *plenty* 'a people that never
hearda YOU, Nell Shipman.

YOUNG BARRY (O.S.)

Don't talk that way to my mother.

REVEAL Young Barry standing in doorway, ready for a fight.

Bert laughs and limps over to his chair by the fire.

Nervous, Nell grabs her boots and starts putting them on.

NELL

(upset)

I'm gonna go check for the mail
sled again.

Nell looks at Young Barry.

NELL (CONT'D)

Wanna come?

Young Barry shakes his head in disgust then leaves room.

Nell puts on parka and gloves. Hands shaking, she picks up a set of binoculars, slips them over her head and goes out.

EXT. ICE COVERED PRIEST LAKE - DAY (1924)

It is twilight. Nell, in parka with binoculars around her neck, stands on ice, a few feet from shore. She peers up-lake through binoculars.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

With so much on my mind, I was
making mistakes.

Still looking through binoculars, Nell takes another step forward to get a better view up-lake. There is a loud CRACK as the ice slowly breaks near her.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Or maybe, on some level, I was
looking for an easy way out.

Nell slides slowly, feet first, towards open water. As she's sliding, she calmly removes the binoculars from around her neck and gently slides them over the ice towards shore.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Funny the things we save.

Nell slides into water and shudders from the shock. She looks towards Lionhead Lodge.

REVEAL Lionhead Lodge, in distance, smoke coming out chimney.

Nell calmly treads water, watching Lionhead Lodge.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

That was not my man saying such
cruel things...but rather a fellow
human being who was still my
partner in a venture that was
crashing to Earth like a broken-
winged bird...

Nell closes her eyes, sinking lower into water.

Nell's eyes fly open again and she gives her head a shake.
She takes a deep breath to muster up strength.

NELL

One...two...three...

Nell kicks her legs hard and does the breast stroke,
propelling herself up ice. But the ice breaks again. She
gasps, her eyes wide with fear as her body slips back into
water. She is shivering, her face is starting to turn blue.

She kicks her legs harder and does breast stroke, again
hauling herself up onto ice. She lays there a moment, holding
her breath, waiting to see if ice holds. It does. Remaining
on her tummy, she slowly slithers across ice until she
reaches the binoculars. She grabs them, stands up and
stumbles, dripping wet, towards Lionhead Lodge.

INT. LIONHEAD LODGE - NIGHT (1924)

Nell softly opens front door and slips inside. Bert is still
in chair by fire but is now asleep and snoring, his head
slumped against his chest. His glass is empty. Nell tiptoes
behind him through the living room but right before she gets
to the kitchen, she steps on a floorboard that CREAKS. Bert
opens his eyes and winces in pain, moaning.

BERT

(groggy)

I'm all right, I'm all right.

Nell raises her eyebrows then tip toes into kitchen.

INT. LIONHEAD LODGE - DAY (1924)

Nell, exhausted, in pajamas, tattered housecoat and slippers,
walks from kitchen into living room, coffee pot in hand.

NELL

Can I top up your -

REVEAL Bert's empty chair by fire.

Nell looks around living room, panicked.

NELL (CONT'D)

Bert?!

Nell runs to front door and opens it.

It is snowing. REVEAL Bert wandering around in snow, wearing only pajamas and slippers.

NELL (CONT'D)

BERT?!

Nell throws parka over housecoat and quickly slips into a pair of Bert's boots. She races outside.

EXT. LIONHEAD LODGE - DAY (1924)

Nell runs up to Bert.

NELL

You're gonna freeze to death! Come back inside!

Bert, confused, stares down at his boots on Nell's feet.

BERT

(mumbles)

I have to go to the hospital.

NELL

I know. But come inside first and get dressed and then we'll go -

Bert looks Nell in eye and it is clear he's snapped.

BERT

Oh. You're not coming.

Bert turns and limps over to where a dog sled is leaned up against lodge. He drags his bad foot. Nell follows him.

NELL

Bert...*please*. Be reasonable.

BERT

Go to hell.

Bert yanks sled so that it falls on snow. Nell turns and runs back inside.

Bert stares at sled, confused as to what to do next. Excited sled dogs BARK in background. Bert turns and limps towards where they are chained.

INT. LIONHEAD LODGE - DAY (1924)

Nell races from living room into kitchen, tugging a sweater over her head.

NELL
(calls out)
BARRY! Get up...NOW!

In kitchen, Nell grabs random bags of food from pantry and races back into living room to stack them by front door.

Young Barry, disheveled and rubbing his eyes, appears in kitchen door. He watches Nell race around, grabbing blankets and coats and piling them by the door.

YOUNG BARRY
(yawns)
What's up?

NELL
Bert's snapped.

YOUNG BARRY
(shrugs)
So what else is new?

NELL
Really snapped. He's wandering
around in the snow in his pajamas.

YOUNG BARRY
Why?

Nell stops what she's doing and looks at Young Barry.

NELL
'Cause he snapped! Now go get
dressed, grab two blankets and a
sack of meat for the dogs and meet
me outside. Pronto!

Young Barry gives Nell mock salute and saunters into kitchen.

EXT. LIONHEAD LODGE - DAY (1924)

Nell races out front door, carrying coats, blankets and food. She stops suddenly and her mouth drops open.

REVEAL Bert harnessing the last dog to the sled. It is snowing harder and the wind is picking up.

NELL

Bert!

Nell races over to dog sled just as Bert is about to get on. She begins to quickly load the items into the sled.

Without a word, Bert removes items and throws them in snow.

Barry, now dressed warmly, emerges from lodge, carrying a sack of meat for the dogs and two blankets. When he sees what is going on, he stops and watches calmly.

NELL (CONT'D)

(to Bert)

Don't be stupid! You're gonna freeze to death.

Bert stops what he is doing and turns to Nell.

BERT

DON'T CALL *ME* STUPID! It's YOUR fault we're in this goddamn mess!

Nell turns to look at Young Barry. He shrugs. Bert gets on dog sled and takes off. Nell and Barry watch him leave. It is snowing more heavily.

NELL

He's not gonna make it.

YOUNG BARRY

Nope.

NELL

If I slip out the back trail on snowshoes, I'll end up in front. Then maybe I can talk some sense into him...

Young Barry looks at Nell and folds his arms across his chest. He stares at her a moment then snorts and goes back inside lodge, shutting door behind him. Nell grabs a pair of snowshoes from where they're leaning against lodge and puts them on with shaking hands.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL - SPOKANE - DAY (1924)

A man in a hospital bed is holding a newspaper in front of his face, reading it. The headline on front page of Spokane Daily Chronicle reads: NELL SHIPMAN, MOVIE STAR, AND SICK PARTNER CONQUER UNTOLD DIFFICULTIES IN TWO DAY BATTLE OVER 30-MILE STRETCH AT PRIEST LAKE.

REVEAL man is Bert when he snaps newspaper down and tosses it angrily on bed. His bandaged foot is propped up on a pillow. Nell, standing at end of bed, flinches. She looks exhausted.

Bert's eyes narrow and he glares at Nell.

BERT

You and your goddamn obsession with authentic locations...

NELL

Bert...

Bert jerks his head towards newspaper.

BERT

(sarcastic)

Even made the front page. That oughta make ya happy.

NELL

American Release declared bankruptcy. We're sunk.

Bert closes eyes and leans back onto pillow.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

We were lucky to be alive...but we wouldn't clear a dime on *The Grub Stake*.

Nell turns and walks out of room.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)

Bert and I had reached the end of our trail.

Waiting in hallway is Young Barry. She holds out her hand to him. He takes it. They slowly walk down hallway.

YOUNG BARRY

(looks up at Nell)

Now what, Nail?

Nell looks at Young Barry and squeezes his hand.

NELL
(strained)
Dunno. But we'll figure it out.

Suddenly unsteady, she sways slightly and closes eyes, reaching out to wall for support. Young Barry tries to grab her but she slumps to her knees and collapses on floor. Young Barry drops to his knees to help. Nurse comes running.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
It all finally caught up with me. I
collapsed...and didn't wake up for
five days.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - SPOKANE - DAY (1924)

Nell is in bed, asleep. Sunlight streams through window onto her face. She opens her eyes, alarmed.

NELL
The animals!

Nell lifts her head and looks around room, panicked. Young Barry, Joe Walker and Bill Dagwell watch her carefully.

NELL (CONT'D)
Are they okay?

BILL DAGWELL
Better than you. Don't
worry...Daddy Duffill's takin' good
care o' the critters.

Nell exhales with relief and throws back covers.

NELL
Thank God! I -

Nell swings her feet to side of bed. Suddenly dizzy, she closes eyes and puts hand on bed, steadying herself. She takes a few calming breaths then opens her eyes again.

NELL (CONT'D)
I have to get back to the animals.

Joe takes a step towards Nell.

JOE WALKER
Whoa Nelly...you need to rest
first. You've been under an awful
lot of pressure...

Nell nods and lies back down. She pulls sheet up and closes eyes. Joe Walker and Bill Dagwell look at each other then leave quietly. Young Barry stays behind, watching Nell. Nell opens her eyes and looks at Young Barry.

NELL

You okay?

Young Barry nods.

NELL (CONT'D)

I gotta get back to New York. We need money to feed the animals.

YOUNG BARRY

But -

Nell sits up.

NELL

I have a great idea for a movie...not just a short but a real feature!

YOUNG BARRY

(frowns)

I like your shorts, Nail. They hold together better.

NELL

(shakes head)

Shorts don't pay the bills, Barry. But I really think I can get financing for a feature!

Nell enthusiastically pats side of bed. Young Barry sits, hesitant. Nell theatrically fans hands out in front of her.

NELL (CONT'D)

So watch and wait, Brownie Bear...I'll be back! And you know what *that* means, my friend?

DISSOLVE TO:

Archival clip (15 sec) from end of "Light on the Lookout": Nell and Brownie bear curl up beside each other in woods and fall asleep. Final screen reads: "The End." (00:16:30 to 00:16:45)

NELL (V.O.)
Movie-making...the Job...old times! The
come-back trail...

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL BAR - NEW YORK - NIGHT (1924)

The bar is bustling with well-dressed people laughing and drinking. Nell is seated at one end of bar, talking on phone.

SUPERIMPOSE: New York City, one month later

NELL
(loudly)
Barry? Is that you? Sorry...it's so
loud!

NELL (CONT'D)
(shakes her head)
No. They didn't give me the
financing. But I've met some *really*
nice people and they've got
connections...

A nicely-dressed but sleazy-looking man, CHARLES, 40, winks at Nell and nods his head towards dance floor.

Nell smiles and nods, holding up index finger.

NELL (CONT'D)
(into phone)
How are the animals?

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - SPOKANE - NIGHT (1924)

Young Barry is on phone at one of Nell's friend's homes. An elderly man and woman putter in the background.

YOUNG BARRY
Daddy Duffill says they're okay for
now...but he's wondrin' when you're
comin' home, Nail?

Young Barry shakes head, upset.

YOUNG BARRY (CONT'D)
He needs MONEY to feed 'em! What
are we gonna do?

BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL BAR - NEW YORK - NIGHT (1924)

Nell is still at bar on phone but is now standing. Upset, she runs hand through hair. Charles waits behind her, impatiently tapping foot.

NELL
I...I don't know. I just...
(sighs)
I'll call Billy and see what he
says. Listen I gotta go. Love you.

Nell hangs up phone, upset. Charles taps her on shoulder. She turns around. Charles bows slightly then holds out his hand.

CHARLES
May have I this dance, Ms. Shipman?

NELL
In a sec.

Nell turns back to bar and looks at phone a moment. She bites her lip then picks up receiver and begins dialing. She holds receiver to ear and waits, anxious.

NELL (CONT'D)
Bill? It's Nugget. I didn't get the
financing. What am I gonna do about
the animals? I - *what?! When?*

Nell, distraught, sits down again. She drops her head into her hand. She nods slowly then lifts her head again.

NELL (CONT'D)
How much?

A tear rolls down her cheek. She angrily wipes it away.

NELL (CONT'D)
Do you think I should?

Nell lets out a little sob. Her hand flies up to her mouth. She places her hand over her heart and nods.

NELL (CONT'D)
Okay.

Nell slowly puts down receiver. She sits there, stunned.

A man's hand rests gently on her shoulder. Nell turns around.

REVEAL Charles standing there, concerned. He holds out his hand. Nell hesitates a moment then takes it. They walk to dance floor. Nell leans her head on Charles' shoulder as they dance to slow song. A tear rolls down her cheek.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
The show must go on.

FADE TO:

EXT. ANIMAL CAGE - PRIEST LAKE - WINTER - DAY (1924)

Brownie Bear, in pen, rears up on her hind legs and places paws on bars, whimpering. Laddie trots up to cage. Brownie Bear drops back down and they touch noses through cage.

Daddy Duffill walks up to cage, carrot in hand.

DADDY DUFFILL
Why so glum, ladies?

Daddy Duffill leans over and gives Laddie a pat on the head.

DADDY DUFFILL (CONT'D)
Don't worry...she'll be back!

Daddy Duffill holds carrot through the bars to Brownie. But Brownie turns away and walks to back of cage.

REVEAL Daddy Duffill's concerned expression.

FADE TO BLACK.

Title card: "The animals were sold to the San Diego zoo, so their lives could be saved. Nell never returned to Priest Lake. She spent the rest of her life in poverty, struggling to make a living as a writer."

OLDER NELL (V.O.) CONT'D
But I never gave up trying to make
a comeback.

EXT. BEACH - SANTA MONICA - DAY (1970)

Close-up of Older Barry staring out to sea where Older Nell had been floating two years earlier.

OLDER BARRY

And you probably never will, Nail.

Superimposed: Santa Monica Beach, 1970

REVEAL Westerly and Nina (holding sleeping baby Lani) standing beside Older Barry at water's edge, solemn. He holds urn with Nell's ashes. Little Westerly holds banjo. Nell's old binoculars are around Nina's neck.

Older Barry opens urn and sprinkles some ashes into ocean. He, Nina and Westerly watch as ashes slowly sink. Nina reaches for binoculars and looks through them, first at ocean then she slowly looks up towards sky.

POV of camera looking down on family. Camera begins to move up. Music begins: Leonard Cohen's song, "Banjo." Lyrics: "There's somethin' that I'm watchin'...means a lot to me..."

Camera continues to move up into sky, away from ocean.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TAR SANDS - NORTHERN ALBERTA (PRESENT)

"Banjo" song continues as camera begins to move down towards devastated landscape caused by tar sands development in Northern Alberta: massive tailings ponds, bulldozers clearing the forest, uprooted trees, smoke billowing from smokestacks, miles upon miles of strip mined land, etc.

SUPERIMPOSE: What "God's Country" looks like today...

SUPERIMPOSE: Tar sands development, Northern Alberta, Canada

IRIS IN

INT. LECTURE HALL - COLLEGE FILM STUDIES CLASS - PRESENT DAY

Helen, Sam and Bailey are all staring at screen. Room is silent. Film Studies Prof walks to front of class.

FILM STUDIES PROF

Wow...tough crowd.

Students immediately start CLAPPING. Prof takes small bow.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Film Studies Prof glances at watch.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)
Okay...we're short on time, so our
discussion will have to be brief.
Let's start with first
impressions...

SAMANTHA
Loved it!

FILM STUDIES PROF
Why?

SAMANTHA
'Cause... 'cause I love HER!

TYE
Why?

Samantha and Helen turn around to look at Tye.

TYE (CONT'D)
She made bad decision after bad
decision, pissed everybody
off...and in the end lost it all
anyway!

REVEAL Samantha's angry expression.

FILM STUDIES PROF (O.S.)
Thank you, Tye. So...am I correct
in assuming you are unsympathetic
to our protagonist?

Helen and Samantha turn around again to look at the prof.

TYE
Yup. No offense to the filmmaker.

FILM STUDIES PROF
(smiles)
None taken. I appreciate your
candour.

Film Studies Prof looks at Helen.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)
Helen...thoughts?

HELEN
It looks to me like Nell made the
best decisions she could at the
time.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

I liked how older Nell narrated the actions of her younger self...so we could see what she'd learned.

TYE

Or didn't.

Samantha turns around again to look at Tye.

SAMANTHA

Who shit in your Shreddies?

Film Studies Prof clears throat. Samantha gives Tye the stink eye then turns around again to face front.

FILM STUDIES PROF

(to Helen)

Would you say the protagonist is Older Nell...or Younger Nell?

HELEN

(thinks a moment)

Older Nell.

FILM STUDIES PROF

Why?

HELEN

'Cause she's the one driving the story.

FILM STUDIES PROF

(nods)

Okay. We'll return to that in a moment...

Film Studies Prof looks around at class.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

Would you say this film is a tragedy?

TYE

Oh yeah.

FILM STUDIES PROF

Why?

TYE

'Cause it was Nell's own *flaws* that led to her downfall.

Samantha turns around to look at Tye.

SAMANTHA

Oh come on! There were other factors. Hollywood shut her out. The studio system was taking over. Silent films were on the way out. Her partner was a drunk. She was a strong woman trying to make it in a man's world. She had a kid to raise. She got in way over head with all those animals. The pressure was on. She did her best...cut her some slack!

FILM STUDIES PROF

All valid points, Samantha.

Samantha smiles, smug, at Tye, then turns to the front again.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

However, *if* Tye is correct in calling this story a tragedy...then *when* was the die cast? What was the point of no return?

HELEN

The move to Priest Lake.

Film Studies Prof looks around room.

FILM STUDIES PROF

Is everyone in agreement with that?

The other students nod.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

And is everyone in agreement with Helen's earlier suggestion that Older Nell is the protagonist?

The students nod.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

So is it safe to say, then, that Older Nell is also the hero?

SAMANTHA

Yes.

The other students nod.

HELEN

No.

Film Studies Prof and other students turn to look at Helen.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I don't think Older Nell is the hero. I think she's the guide.

FILM STUDIES PROF

(smiles)

I see. Then *who* is the hero?

HELEN

Anyone who sees this film and is inspired to take action.

TYE

To do *what*?

Helen turns around and looks at Tye.

HELEN

Listen to the wilderness and translate what we hear. That's the whole *point* of "The Story Girl."

TYE

(snorts)

That's not what I got.

BAILEY

(to Prof)

I agree with Helen. I think that's why you showed the tar sands footage at the end...to show people what that area looks like today, compared to when Nell shot "Back to God's Country" up there, a hundred years ago. I think you were leaving us with the question...what would Nell say about what we're doing to the planet?

TYE

Oh come on, man!

Bailey turns around to look at Tye.

TYE (CONT'D)

Nell Shipman was like the...the Tiger King of the 20's, for God's sake! She collected a whole buncha wild animals, locked 'em up in CAGES, hauled the poor things out once in awhile to parade around in her dumb movies...then sold them to a zoo when the money ran out!

Film Studies Prof smiles and looks around room.

FILM STUDIES PROF

Ahhh...perhaps you are beginning to understand the enigma that was Nell Shipman. Some love her, some not so much. However...regardless of our personal opinions, she was a pioneer in film and deserves to be recognized as such.

Film Studies Prof glances at watch.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

Okay, your final assignment is due next week. I want you to work in small groups to create a short film...five minutes max. In terms of the subject matter, that is entirely up to you...

Film Studies Prof points to screen.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

...whatever "The Story Girl" inspires you to create, is what I want to see.

Film Studies Prof holds up index finger.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

But...you can only use the resources and technology *already* available to you...phone, laptop, stock images, etc. The purpose of this exercise is to create a film *within your means*...which, as students, should be zero. Don't worry about rights or permissions at this point...

Film Studies Prof smiles.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

If anyone manages to create a masterpiece, we'll deal with those later.

Film Studies Prof holds hands out to each side.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

Any questions?

Students shake their heads.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)

Kay. See you in a week.

Students stand up and begin gathering their belongings. Sam, Helen and Bailey walk towards door. Samantha flips thumb over shoulder, towards screen.

SAMANTHA

That was us.

BAILEY

Huh?

SAMANTHA

That was *us* in our last lifetime.

BAILEY

What the heck are you talking about?

SAMANTHA

(shrugs)

Reincarnation. Helen was Nell. I was Lil. You were Joe Walker...

Samantha nods towards Tye, who is talking loudly and slapping another student on the back.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Dumbass there was Bert.

BAILEY

That's ridiculous!

SAMANTHA

What? That Nell and her team reincarnated in *us*? Or reincarnation in general?

BAILEY

Both!

Samantha goes to open door but pauses a moment, her hand on door handle, for effect.

SAMANTHA

Have you or have you not always wanted to become a cinematographer and, in fact, have been making little movies since before you could walk?

BAILEY

That doesn't make me Joe Walker!

HELEN

You wear the same hat he did.

Samantha grins and opens door, they all walk into hallway.

BAILEY

(to Helen)

Oh come on...don't tell me you
believe any of this nonsense?

Helen shrugs. Samantha, Helen and Bailey walk down hallway.

SAMANTHA

The prof's in on it, too.

BAILEY

Oh...this oughta be good.

HELEN

He was Billy Dagwell.

BAILEY

Helen!

SAMANTHA

Which was Nell's real name, by the
way. In case you didn't catch that.

Bailey rolls his eyes. Helen smiles.

HELEN

(to Bailey)

'Member at the beginning...when
Bill Dagwell fished Nell outta the
river and the Older Nell voice-over
said: "He saved my life on more
than one occasion?"

BAILEY

Yeah.

HELEN

Well, he did it again in *this*
lifetime by making "The Story
Girl." THAT was Nell's comeback.
Now we get to take it from here.

BAILEY

(shakes head)

I don't believe you two...

HELEN

(smiles)

It doesn't matter. But I do have an idea for our assignment...

SAMANTHA

Let's hear it.

HELEN

Okay, you know how the die was cast when Nell decided to go to Priest Lake with the animals?

SAMANTHA

Yeah...

HELEN

I think it's the same thing with the environment. The die is dangerously close to being cast with climate change and the loss of so many species. The planet is under WAY too much pressure...we're at the point of no return. I think *that's* the story we have to tell.

BAILEY

(nods slowly)

I like it.

Bailey opens door to outside.

BAILEY (CONT'D)

See...scientific *facts* I don't have a problem with...

SAMANTHA

Oh we *know*, little bro.

BAILEY

(rolls eyes)

Sam...you're *only* six years older than me.

SAMANTHA

(winks)

But six lifetimes wiser, my friend.

Helen laughs. Bailey rolls eyes. Door closes behind them.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - FILM STUDIES CLASS - PRESENT DAY

Helen, Sam and Bailey, all wearing matching black t-shirts, are standing at front of classroom.

SUPERIMPOSED: One week later.

FILM STUDIES PROF
Whenever you're ready...

Helen pushes button on laptop. Their short film, "Under Pressure," begins on screen.

*Note: this short film (4 minutes) is already made but music and photo rights not yet secured. So add 4 pages to length of "God's Country" script to account for this short film.

Here is the private link to watch "Under Pressure" on Vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/401428557>

Password: UnderPressureEA

BACK TO:

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - FILM STUDIES CLASS - PRESENT DAY

Students clap. Helen, Samantha (now holding extra black t-shirt rolled up in one hand) and Bailey, bow.

FILM STUDIES PROF
(smiles)
Bullshit Productions...nice touch.

Helen, Sam and Bailey turn around in unison, revealing the same matching logo (for BSHit Productions) on back of t-shirts. Samantha tosses extra black t-shirt at Film Studies Prof. He catches it and looks at logo.

REVEAL close-up of logo on t-shirt: an octopus with it's tentacles woven around the name, BSHit Productions.

Film Studies Prof slowly breaks into a smile.

INT. FILM STUDIES PROF'S OFFICE - PRESENT

Film Studies Prof is sitting at his desk. Behind him is a large bookshelf full of books, including Nell Shipman's autobiography, "The Silent Screen and My Talking Heart." Helen and Samantha are seated. Bailey is standing.

FILM STUDIES PROF
So...ya wanna make movies, do ya?

SAMANTHA
Yup. With you.

BAILEY
(to Samantha)
Well, that was subtle.

Samantha blows Bailey a kiss.

HELEN
(to prof)
But we need your help.

FILM STUDIES PROF
To do what?

HELEN
To make movies that *matter*.

BAILEY
(to Prof)
What got you into filmmaking?

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY (PRESENT)

Film Studies Prof, 50, (no beard) is flying helicopter over tar sands.

FILM STUDIES PROF (V.O.)
I used to be a helicopter pilot in Northern Alberta. Made a ton of money in the tar sands...

Film Studies Prof begins lowering helicopter towards ground.

EXT. HELICOPTER PAD - DAY (PRESENT)

A HUNTER, 40, holding a rifle, stands off to one side of helicopter landing pad.

FILM STUDIES PROF (V.O.)
But then one day, I picked up a passenger who was carrying a rifle...

Film Studies Prof lands helicopter and turns off rotors. Hunter runs over and climbs in.

HELICOPTER PILOT (V.O.)
Turns out he'd been hired by the
government to shoot wolves as part
of their kill program...a misguided
and inhumane attempt to save the
last of the caribou.

BACK TO:

INT. FILM STUDIES PROF'S OFFICE - PRESENT

Helen, Samantha and Bailey are listening intently.

HELICOPTER PILOT
(shrugs)
Everyone's got their line in the
sand...that was mine. I quit the
next day.
(smiles)
Sold all my energy stocks, right
before the price of oil fell...and
decided to make movies.

BAILEY
But why did you make a movie about
Nell Shipman in particular?

HELICOPTER PILOT
(grins)
Well...that's where things got
interesting...

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY (PRESENT)

Film Studies Prof is flying over tar sands development. The
hunter is in passenger seat, looking out window. Both are
wearing headsets.

EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY (PRESENT)

POV of hunter looking down from helicopter at massive
tailings ponds.

HUNTER (O.S.)
Not much lefta God's Country, eh?

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY (PRESENT)

Film Studies Prof frowns. He looks over at hunter.

FILM STUDIES PROF
You don't hear *that* expression much
anymore.

HUNTER
(tilts head)
Ya never hearda Nell Shipman?

FILM STUDIES PROF
Who?

HUNTER
Nell Shipman. She was a silent
screen star back in the day. Her
most famous film was called "Back
to God's Country"...it was shot
just southa here. She was a real
nature buff and animal lover...
(snorts)
You oughta look her up.

FILM STUDIES PROF
(sighs)
I don't how you can do this, man.

HUNTER
Do what? Kill wolves?

FILM STUDIES PROF
Yeah.

HUNTER
Ya really want to know?

FILM STUDIES PROF
Yes.

HUNTER
I take aim and pull the
trigger...then try to not to think
about it. It's called
compartmentalization.

Hunter nods out window and tar sands devastation.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
That's how any of us working in
this shit show are able to do our
jobs...

Hunter turns to Film Studies Prof.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Including you.

BACK TO:

INT. FILM STUDIES PROF'S OFFICE - PRESENT

Helen, Samantha and Bailey are all staring at Prof.

FILM STUDIES PROF
If you guys want to make movies
that matter...ones that actually
bring about change for the better,
then we're gonna show more than one
side of any given issue.

HELEN
You said "we."

FILM STUDIES PROF
(smiles)
Did I?

Film Studies Prof stands up and pulls Nell's autobiography
from bookshelf then hands it to Helen.

FILM STUDIES PROF (CONT'D)
Funny the things we save.

Helen takes book and looks down at cover.

REVEAL book title and author.

OLDER NELL (V.O.)
And the show goes on.

IRIS IN

The End

Suggest Beatles' song, "Octopus' Garden" while credits roll.