

Penny
by
Jack Wibbe

Read all of Jack's scripts at <https://threewibbes.wordpress.com/>
640 Realm Court West
Odenton MD 21113
r3aaa@yahoo.com
410 305 4633 home
443 654 7163 office

FADE IN:

INT. WEALTHY NEW YORK HOME, LATE 1930s - NIGHT

ALICE'S MOTHER, a woman in her 40s, runs from room to room;
ALICE'S FATHER follows.

ALICE'S MOTHER

I've looked through the house,
twice! The maid is checking with
the neighbors.

ALICE'S FATHER

We'll have to go to the police.
Alice doesn't do things like this.
Where on earth -

The mother enters the bathroom, and on the mirror, written in
lipstick, is the word "Susquehanna".

INT. WEALTHY HOME, 1930S - DAY

Four sets of frantic MOTHERS and FATHERS file into a dining
room. The fathers fix a few drinks.

ALICE'S MOTHER

Your boy Henry disappeared with my
girl Alice. George and Mary are
gone too.

GEORGE'S MOTHER

All at once, not an accident,
obviously. George's sister- can't
find her either.

ALICE'S MOTHER

Could those boys have abducted
Alice? Henry could go to prison for
this!

GEORGE'S MOTHER

You're not putting my boy in
prison, don't be silly. These kids
are up to something. Got a dollar
says it's your Alice thought up the
whole thing.

ALICE'S MOTHER

Alice?

GEORGE'S MOTHER

Not that I blame her. A week ago she was over at our house, crying her eyes out.

(softly)

Your husband's drinking again?

ALICE'S MOTHER

The market. It's been hard.

ALICE'S FATHER

What happens to our family, if the press gets hold of this? How am I supposed to show my face down on the Exchange?

ALICE'S MOTHER

It won't be like the crash, will it?

ALICE'S FATHER

For us, it will. Those society gals who have you over every month? Forget it. Alice's coming out party, it's all over.

ALICE'S MOTHER

She's so young. She can't do this to us!

ALICE'S FATHER

Not every state has civilized laws like New York.

TOM, a rich young man, enters.

ALICE'S MOTHER

It's like these kids are launching a revolution...Tom, thank God you're here. We were so close to getting that ring of yours on Alice's finger.

TOM

Mrs. Vandermeer, you have that note you found in your girl's room?

MARY'S MOTHER

Yes, that funny Latin word. She doesn't have a disease, does she?

TOM

It's not a disease, and it's not Latin.

MARY'S MOTHER

Susque -

TOM

Susquehanna. Good God!

HENRY'S MOTHER

My son left a note, same word.

ALICE'S MOTHER

My daughter wrote it on her mirror
in lipstick. Susquehanna.

TOM

Read this advertisement in the
Times. It's in all the big city
papers, from Philadelphia up to
Boston.

ALICE'S MOTHER

Marriage broker. Five dollars, no
waiting, no questions. Susquehanna,
Maryland.

GEORGE'S MOTHER

Oh Dear Lord!

HENRY'S MOTHER

Calm down!...So it's a place? A
town?

ALICE'S FATHER

Just across the border, I think.

MARY'S FATHER

Well I know for damn sure who can
find it. The police!

ALICE'S FATHER

You mean the Maryland police? Our
boys can't do a thing. We need
detectives. Boys who don't play by
Marquis of Queensberry.

(to Tom)

What happened with Alice anyway?

TOM

She went out to a saloon by
herself. Some people saw. I had
words with her about it. Then that
other boy showed up.

INT. THE SAME HOME -- DAY

Continuation. Tom goes downstairs to find four beefy DETECTIVES waiting impatiently.

TOM
You're all prepared?

One of the detectives holds open his jacket to reveal a gun and holster.

DETECTIVE
Like you said. You're sure about this?

TOM
Get down there, solve my problem.

The detective looks at his gun in disbelief.

EXT. NEW YORK TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

GEORGE and MARY, HENRY and ALICE, two rich couples in their early 20s, confer in front of a train. With them is George's teenage sister MARTHA.

GEORGE
Martha, stay home, we don't need you to be a witness.

MARTHA
Soon as they see you're gone, eight parents drag me in the parlor and interrogate me like I'm a German spy. I'd rather burn in hell.

HENRY
Two trains. George and I, we got the tickets.

ALICE
Two trains?

HENRY
Our parents hired detectives. Two trains, better odds we get away clean. We're ten o'clock, you're eleven.

ALICE

What if the detectives come now?
They'd have to be awfully stupid to
not figure out we came through
here.

GEORGE

Last chance to back out.

HENRY

So are we going to do this?

MARY

Lord, I can't believe it.

ALICE

We came here for a reason. Lots of
reasons. Susquehanna.

HENRY

Susquehanna.

GEORGE

Susquehanna.

MARY

Suck - Sus - Mary Land!

ALICE

(laughing)
Mary Land!

GEORGE

Mary Land!

He sees some beefy lads entering the station.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

They're here. Run!

EXT. OUTSIDE A MARYLAND TRAIN STATION, 1930S - DAY

HACKIE, a cabbie in his 40s, walks briskly across the crowded
platform, chased by his recruit, a young girl named DIANA.

HACKIE

Follow me, girly. You want a job in
the marriage business?

DIANA

I sure do. I'm a born romantic. Got
a letter from your boss right here.

He looks at her body like he's buying a horse.

HACKIE

Penny's the boss but she never met you. How's your legs?

DIANA

I beg your pardon?

HACKIE

Need good shoes. Gonna be a runner. Honeymoon Express hits town six times a day, loaded with folks want to get married. It's like a war.

DIANA

Jeepers. So, we get folks off the train.

HACKIE

Trains, buses, got cars now. Exactly 138 miles from New York. Boston girls too.

DIANA

How do I know who to go after?

HACKIE

Look for girls that look lost and boys that look guilty.
(to young couple)
Hey girly, you wanna get married?

A young couple turns; the girl, a prospective BRIDE, smiles.

BRIDE

I just met you.
(to her fiancé)
Johnny, I think we found our man.

EXT. A TAXI -- DAY

Hackie, Diana and the couple are in a taxi. Hackie, driving, sees the SHERIFF and veers violently onto a side road.

BRIDE

We're all gonna die!

HACKIE

Blast it, the sheriff was laying for me on Main Street, taking a little detour.

DIANA

But what you're doing, is legal.

HACKIE

Well, mostly... Elopement capital of the world. We do a thousand weddings a month, fifteen chapels.

DIANA

Sounds like quite a business.

HACKIE

Not just business. Penny, she's a romantic and so am I. Valentine's Day, gonna run your shoes off.

DIANA

Isn't this all kinda fast?

HACKIE

These folks want to move fast. Nine months later they send baby pictures. Some gals manage to pop out a baby in five, six months. Wish I knew how they did that. Do you know?

Looks back at the bride who keeps a poker face.

DIANA

We all fighting for the same folks?

HACKIE

We keep score: Penny's boss, I'm the cab driver. Got four cars.

DIANA

And you work for the ministers.

HACKIE

The ministers work for Penny, day preacher, night preacher. Penny paid for their diplomas.

DIANA

Must have been expensive.

HACKIE

These aren't exactly Harvard diplomas.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Quick look at the main street which is lined with wedding parlors with big garish signs such as MINISTER MARRIAGE LICENSE INFORMATION DRIVE IN. Kids play "the wedding game" on a street corner.

HACKIE (O.S.)

We do the ring, hair, flowers...
Don't tell a soul - getting air conditioning. Hotel be cool as a cucumber.

EXT. TAXI - DAY

Continuation. Hackie and Diana taking the nervous bridal couple to the chapel.

HACKIE

You see the sheriff, hide. About once a month, you're gonna get arrested.

DIANA

Arrested??

HACKIE

Penny bails you out Monday morning.

DIANA

Everybody calls you Hackie?

HACKIE

Cab driver. Mamma loved Shakespeare, my name is Gaius Julius Caesar Atkins.

DIANA

And Hackie it is.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Continuation. Hackie and Diana deliver the couple to the chapel. The bride GASPS as she hops out.

BRIDE

Praise be. Better than the Ferris wheel.

DIANA

Who was that woman took care of me at the chapel? That your wife?

HACKIE

That's the boss. Penny. Lost her man in the war, her son left to go work. She ain't got the heart to marry again. I keep asking. Got to stay on her good side.

They hurry to the chapel.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

My two goals in life: marry Penny, and keep the sheriff from shutting us down. You may need another job come Christmas.

EXT. THE DEPOT - DAY

Diana lassoes her first "couple", George and Martha. Diana throws bags in the trunk of a taxi.

DIANA

Welcome to Susquehanna, the Wedding Capital of the East.

GEORGE

Hey, wait, where did my -

DIANA

Don't worry, your bags are all in the trunk. Be at the chapel in no time.

MARTHA

We need to go back for -

DIANA

You had those three bags, all three in the trunk, don't you worry!

GEORGE

I'm not kidding. We need to go back -

DIANA

We got to get to the chapel, come on, quick!

They all jump in the cab.

GEORGE

But wait --

EXT. OUTSIDE PENNY'S CHAPEL -- DAY

Diana jumps out of the cab, runs up the steps; George and Martha are forced to run after her.

INT. PENNY'S CHAPEL -- DAY

Diana, George and Martha meet the THIN MINISTER at the altar. Penny assists.

DIANA

Young man, you'll be signing here -

GEORGE

Fine, but we need to go to the depot -

George and then the sister sign hurriedly.

DIANA

And miss, can you sign here -

MARTHA

But wait --

THIN MINISTER

By the power invested in me by the state of Maryland, I now pronounce you man and wife --

GEORGE

Okay, let me stop you there.

DIANA

Beg your pardon? We're almost done.

GEORGE

You just married me to my sister. I'm pretty sure that even in Maryland that's illegal. She's just here to witness.

DIANA

Your sister?

GEORGE

Give me that license that you used to marry me to my sister, so I can tear it up. I don't want to go to jail.

Martha grabs the document.

MARTHA

Wait, I want it for a souvenir. You were right, we're having an adventure!

GEORGE

(to Diana)

And then I want you to get back to the depot as fast as you have ever done anything in your life, and find my fiancée. She'll be the one screaming at the top of her lungs.

MARTHA

Her name's Mary.

GEORGE

And tell her this crap wasn't my fault. Otherwise I'll be sleeping out in your henhouse tonight. ...Drive nice and slow, give her a chance to holler it all out.

MARTHA

Don't I even get a kiss on my wedding day?

GEORGE

Oh cut it out.

EXT. HACKIE'S CAB - DAY

Mary, in Hackie's cab, is in a panic.

HACKIE

You said your name is Mary --

MARY

I need you to find my fiancé!

HACKIE

No sweat, we'll hop over to Main Street.

MARY

My fiancé ...

HACKIE

...is the most wonderful boy you ever met.

MARY

And we're going to live ...

HACKIE
...happily ever after.

MARY
But my mother ...

HACKIE
...just doesn't understand.

MARY
And my father ...

HACKIE
...threatened to kill him, arrest
him...

MARY
And if I can't have him ...

HACKIE
...you're absolutely going to die.

MARY
Oh please, please...

HACKIE
...please can you help me.

MARY
How could you know ...

HACKIE
...what I'm going to say when we've
never met? Sweetie, I've met you a
thousand times before. Speed,
speed, speed, that's how we get
that extra nickel.

MARY
Did you used to be an auctioneer? I
feel like a horse who's being sold
off.

HACKIE
So you kids thought this thing
through?

MARY
Me and George, we decided a month
ago. You're sure you can find him?

HACKIE
Penny made the rule. Whoever lands
the bride gets the wedding.
(MORE)

HACKIE (CONT'D)

Only way to stop cabbies from slugging it out in the streets.

MARY

I'm glad we're over the state line. For weeks it was a battle of detectives. Henry hired this sneak thief, got our birth certificates out of the files. Father hired a bunch of goons with guns - we saw one on the train, we had to hide in the toilet until he passed through. They were going to beat the stuffing out of Henry.

They hop out of the taxi and see George and Martha standing on the steps of the chapel.

GEORGE

Mary, this was completely not my fault!

MARTHA

Tell her the best part.

GEORGE

No, don't -

MARTHA

Preacher down here married me off to George. Got a license and everything.

Mary grabs the car and explodes in laughter.

MARY

You gonna marry her, then me, how many more wives you planning on?

George walks to Mary, cautiously; she kisses him.

MARY (CONT'D)

King Solomon.

INT. THE BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

The middle-aged SHERIFF talks to clergy including the fat BAPTIST MINISTER, storekeepers including a middle-aged merchant named DOTTY, a functionary named RAYNOTT from the state capitol, and a young deputy named JASPER.

SHERIFF

I'd like to thank Mister Raynott for coming up here. He's with the state legislature.

RAYNOTT

You're the sheriff here, correct?

SHERIFF

I'm not just the sheriff. I'm a deacon too. Marriage is something that a community builds. A boy wants to marry a girl, he goes to the father, the preacher, so they can tell him what the rules are. The whole town keeps an eye on em. Penny and this cab driver ruined the whole thing. Strangers come to town, nobody knows who they are, nobody knows if they're ready to get married. And they turn it into a circus. Wedding with ragtime music, wedding in the woods, on horseback, in a boat. Talk to your bishops, we're going to the statehouse, pass a law, shut this down.

DOTTY

They do bring in a lot of business..

SHERIFF

That's fine, if you're a shopkeeper. What about the ministers?

BAPTIST MINISTER

Haven't done a wedding in months.

SHERIFF

God called you to save souls. I arrested em a hundred times, doesn't do a thing. We need the state capitol to stop it. We're rounding up votes in the state Senate, we're only a few votes away.

The crowd breaks up; sheriff pulls Jasper aside.

JASPER

You sure got em riled up.

SHERIFF

Know how long it took me to get here? A year fighting the Kaiser, ten years shoveling manure on that farm, five years game warden. Finally made sheriff, next year the county judge is retiring.

JASPER

Old Man Denby? He's a crook.

SHERIFF

If I can scoot in there I'm set for life. But nobody's gonna back me for judge, while I'm the king of Sodom and Gomorrah. I look like a fool. I'm shutting down this marriage mill. Then when I'm judge we run this town my way. Might need a new sheriff, there, Jasper.

JASPER

Sheriff...

SHERIFF

My friends down Annapolis, rounding up votes to put this wedding nonsense out of business. We almost got the numbers. Then bye bye Hackie.

EXT, MAIN STREET -- DAY

Hackie is in his cab with a SECOND BRIDE and SECOND GROOM. The SHERIFF has pulled him over. The sheriff is armed, as he is in almost every scene.

HACKIE

Sheriff. Friday night, right on schedule. In kind of a hurry here.

SHERIFF

Hackie. Out of the car.

Hackie complies.

HACKIE

What is it this time? Broken light? Tires not inflated enough?

SHERIFF

You were freighting along at thirty miles an hour.

HACKIE

Well, that's the limit. You only told me a dozen times.

Sheriff handcuffs Hackie.

SHERIFF

New limit, twenty miles an hour. You can complain to the judge Monday morning.

PENNY, a woman in her 40s, arrives on foot.

HACKIE

Penny, it's not my fault!

PENNY

This is the fourth Friday in a row.

SHERIFF

Penny, you want to go to jail too? Move this vehicle or I'll have it towed away.

Penny kisses Hackie.

PENNY

See you Monday, sweetie.

She gets in the driver's seat and speaks to the bridal couple.

PENNY (CONT'D)

You relax, get to the chapel in no time. Let's see, this is the brake, right?

SECOND GROOM

Yes, ma'am. There's your gas. Want me to drive?

PENNY

Thank you.

SECOND GROOM

Are we still getting married?

PENNY

You sure are.

Penny and the groom get out and switch places.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE -- DAY

Alice's father and Tom enter the office to find the sheriff and Raynott. The father erases the sheriff's crime blackboard and writes ten names.

SHERIFF

That's where I keep shift orders -

ALICE'S FATHER

My daughter, Alice, came to your town, with some other young people from New York.

RAYNOTT

Any evidence they broke the law?

ALICE'S FATHER

Unfortunately, no. Raynott here says you want to put a stop to certain commercial activity in town.

SHERIFF

You're well informed.

ALICE'S FATHER

New marriage law in the legislature. You need ten more votes in the Senate, and we know who they are.

He points to the blackboard.

SHERIFF

You did all that from memory.

ALICE'S FATHER

I've done this before.

SHERIFF

Raynott is working on persuading the hard-nose types to see things our way.

ALICE'S FATHER

Well, I'm going to help you.

SHERIFF

You're from New York.

ALICE'S FATHER

I'm from the third largest bank in the country.

(MORE)

ALICE'S FATHER (CONT'D)

If I can afford to buy state senators at New York prices, I can make a purchase or two down here. You go after the moral crusaders, Raynott goes after the ambitious, and I go after the men who are greedy. Raynott already made one deal on a farm bill, so...

He makes a check by the names of two Senators.

ALICE'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Eight to go. Hope I can help bring some sanity to your town. That woman Penny, the ringleader. Does she have a mortgage?

SHERIFF

Hard times, everybody has a mortgage.

ALICE'S FATHER

Wonder which bank holds the note?

INT. PENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Penny helps Hackie open the mail.

PENNY

Letter from the bank. Got that marriage bill in the legislature. Says here if the law passes, they foreclose.

HACKIE

What do we do?

PENNY

Gotta pay em off, or they kick us out.

HACKIE

Those four kids at the hotel. They said their fathers were all bankers.

PENNY

They're doing it on purpose. They don't just want to change the law, they want to take my hotel, too!

HACKIE

So the mortgage, can you pay it off?

PENNY

We'd need a hot hot summer.

Hackie crosses to a chalkboard.

HACKIE

It's impossible. To survive the winter, we need a thousand weddings by November.

He writes 1000 at the bottom of the board. And 0 at the top.

INT. PENNY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Diana looks for Hackie, who is drinking lemonade.

DIANA

Um, Hackie? You saw Penny back in the office? She was crying.

HACKIE

Got a letter from her boy. Her son is out west, working. It's killing her. Every birthday, every Christmas, it's like losing him all over again.

DIANA

She wants him to come home.

HACKIE

Her man was killed in the Great War. She was a teenager with a baby. You got a baby wrong side of the blanket, folks treat you like they treat colored people. Twenty years now. Why don't you bring her a nice cold drink?

DIANA

Why don't you? Plain as day how you feel about that girl. Why don't you marry her?...Sorry.

HACKIE

I asked. I think she can't open herself up to get hit by a pile driver again. I was the one who told her son to go live his life.

(MORE)

HACKIE (CONT'D)

She still hasn't forgotten. I just gotta tiptoe around her.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hackie and Penny cook. He puts his arm around her.

HACKIE

Bobby's birthday. Should we send something out there...

He sees the dark look on her face.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

Don't know how many different ways to say I'm sorry when I'm not really sorry.

PENNY

Hackie, someday you'll have a child of your own, you'll know what it feels like when he's not there anymore.

HACKIE

I do know. I raised a child. Your son. You think I don't miss him?

PENNY

You know I'm grateful, raising him like he was your own. Then you ran him off.

HACKIE

I didn't run him off. You wanted him to stay, he needed to go. Live his life.

PENNY

You sided with him over me.

HACKIE

Birds gotta fly, Penny.

PENNY

I need another drink.

HACKIE

Another one? So tonight, I guess...

PENNY

No.

HACKIE
You're the boss.

INT. PENNY'S FRONT ROOM -- NIGHT

Hackie and Penny are dancing to a COUNTRY SONG.

PENNY
Radio tonight?

HACKIE
You need Fibber McGee and Molly.

PENNY
You're gonna take away my stories?

HACKIE
You need to laugh. You need to
laugh like nobody I ever met.

She stops dancing, her mood souring.

PENNY
Hackie, please don't.

HACKIE
Alright, fine.

PENNY
Anyway, a girl likes a good cry,
once in a while, just because.
Gimme Stella Dallas, One Man's
Family, Ma Perkins.

HACKIE
You took to your bed with the
vapors when they cancelled Clara,
Lu and Em.

PENNY
I forgot! Guiding Light, last week
that guy came charging in with a
gun! Lordy Lord, he can't kill her,
he just can't!

HACKIE
You sure -

PENNY
You gotta listen with me, tonight's
the scary part! Gonna have
nightmares!

HACKIE

Let's leave out the gin rummy
tonight. Just curl up on the couch
and listen.

PENNY

In the dark. I'll get a blanket.

HACKIE

Come look in the kitchen first.

INT. PENNY'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Continuation. Hackie serves two plates of chicken. Penny
sits.

PENNY

Is it over? It's been three days!

HACKIE

Just about done.

PENNY

Bones, garbage, carrot tops, tomato
cores, garlic. The kitchen smells
like dead people and feet. Dead
people's feet.

HACKIE

Demi-glance reduced with wine, try
it on the chicken. Just take a bit
for now, got something to show you.

PENNY

(eating)

Oh lordy Lord. You made this with
bones? Please tell me you made a
big batch!

HACKIE

And then finish it off with butter.
Enough butter to kill you.

PENNY

I want to marry this chicken.

He brushes a strand of hair out of her face.

HACKIE

I'm gonna wear you down. You gonna
marry me.

PENNY

You're a good cook. You're not that good.

HACKIE

Now the pepper.

Penny tastes a pepper. Hackie watches.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

Brace yourself.

PENNY

It's so spicy! I can't feel my tongue!

HACKIE

Try it with this stuff here.

He hands her a bowl of cheese.

PENNY

Is that cream?

HACKIE

Cheese. Try it together.

PENNY

Jesus. It's killing me.

HACKIE

I'll get you a handkerchief, your eyes are gone.

PENNY

Lord, it's addictive, can I have another? Slice up some more! It's like opium. More cream, sweetie!

HACKIE

Next, all the way from New York City.

Penny and Hackie scrutinize a pineapple.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

It's a pineapple. Sent for it from my buddy in the New York market, remember that girl from April? Now I know why she was fat and head over heels in love.

PENNY

Pineapple. Oh, yeah, those little peach-like things in cans. Awful ugly looking.

HACKIE

That junk in the cans - you ain't never had the real thing.

Whips out a machete.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

I use it to clear brush out back.
(evil voice)
First I chopped off her head.

He decapitates the pineapple.

PENNY

You're insane.

He cuts out a slice, peels and dices. Offers her a piece.

PENNY (CONT'D)

What's the big deal, I had it before -
(tasting)
Oh Lord, Hackie...

HACKIE

Gotta get em fresh. I was going to put them in the fancy salad, for the guests.

PENNY

This here's my hotel. All mine.

HACKIE

What about me? I bought the damn thing. Later on, you got some of this.

Hackie brings a dessert to Penny.

PENNY

What is that mess?

HACKIE

Plums, sugar, brandy, a little -

PENNY

Fine, you sold me. I'm gonna have to kick you out of the kitchen, or let out my dresses.

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

(tastes it)

Oh Jesus. My mouth is so happy!
What you making tomorrow?

HACKIE

What's it worth to you?

PENNY

Blackmail.

HACKIE

Wearing you down.

PENNY

(smiling)

Don't start with me.

Hackie opens wine for Penny.

HACKIE

I'm going to get you liquored up.

PENNY

Don't drink too much, the night is
young.

He leans over and kisses her.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

The thin minister has brought the Baptist minister to Penny's
place, where Hackie and Penny wait.

HACKIE

Reverend. Word has it that my
endeavor into the world of
matrimony has vexed you. I am
deeply troubled.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Can't remember the last wedding we
did.

HACKIE

How do you do things over your way?

BAPTIST MINISTER

The couple must come six months
before, meet several times with me
for instruction. They submit
musical choices for approval,
sacred music only. Bride and groom
must be baptized.

(MORE)

BAPTIST MINISTER (CONT'D)

Both must be virgins. Abstain from alcohol. Neither can be divorced. No dancing, no smoking, no rice. And this business of taking the girl's garter off of her...upper leg and throwing it in the air, it's obscene.

HACKIE

Reverend, clearly you're doing the Lord's work, keeping these children on the straight and narrow. I was wondering if the path was just a bit...too narrow?

BAPTIST MINISTER

I'm trying to protect them.

HACKIE

I need two ministers, daytime and nighttime. I need a thousand weddings by election day, to save the hotel. You'll make a living, with money left over for your charity work. But you may need to, um, broaden your standards just a bit.

Penny pulls Hackie aside.

PENNY

Hackie, you just perverted a Baptist minister! You're going straight to hell.

HACKIE

What you hollering about now?...A little ragtime at a reception won't kill him. This way he can eat this winter. If you want to save your hotel, you need Diana to help at the station, and you need two ministers to hitch em all up.

PENNY

Let him ease into it. What in the world am I gonna do with you?

INT. PENNY'S CHAPEL - DAY

A wedding with the thin minister. The bride is in labor:
LABOR BOY marrying LABOR GIRL. Hackie and Penny in the back.

PENNY

Dammit, Hackie, this girl needs a doctor, now!

LABOR GIRL

Come on, let's get on with it.

LABOR BOY

Keep breathing.

LABOR GIRL

Oh shut up.

THIN MINISTER

You sure like to cut it close. You sure you're not rushing it? We can wait until you're right there in the delivery bed and then -

The bride SCREAMS, grabs his tie and jerks it hard, slamming his head onto the desk.

THIN MINISTER (CONT'D)

...and I now pronounce you man and wife, please let go.

DIANA

How sweet to see an eager young bride!

Bride MOANS.

HACKIE

Get her over to the doctor double-quick.

She MOANS as another cabbie leads her out.

LABOR GIRL

You bastard!

LABOR BOY

I had two hours of this in the car. Please tell me you have some bourbon.

THIN MINISTER

My nose is bleeding. And there are two of you. Actually this isn't the first time I've written out a marriage license with blood on it.

Hackie walks over to the chalkboard with the 1000 on it, erases a 1 and writes a 2.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

Diana sits on a vibrating bed, entranced. Serious BUZZING noise. Hackie fascinated, Penny angry.

HACKIE
Scoreboard's up to 25!

PENNY
A bed that vibrates? It's just sinful!

HACKIE
Since when are you religious? Just give me some slack for once.

Diana is having a rapturous experience akin to Saint Paul seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus.

PENNY
Hackie, what if the Sheriff finds out?

HACKIE
This is capitalism - anything to bring more folks in! Down Baltimore they were selling a thing called a water bed, but the Sheriff would really lose his mind.

PENNY
Why are the lights dimming?

HACKIE
I still haven't figured out the motor. Tried an old sewing machine..

Diana, transfixed, takes a deep breath.

DIANA
Oh my Lord...

HACKIE
Sweetie?

PENNY
See? Hackie, this is too much.

BANG downstairs, lights go out, vibrating stops, motor grinds to a halt, Diana looks tragic.

DIANA
Why did it stop?

PENNY

See? There goes our fuse. Dammit
Hackie!

DIANA

(her voice a tad unsteady)
Hackie? Always been interested in
science stuff, let me know when
that boat motor thing is working
again.

She dabs her face with a handkerchief.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Hackie and Penny walk into the chapel. Fat minister, a SHAKY
BRIDE and SHAKY GROOM.

SHAKY GROOM

Oh Lord, oh Lord, I can't, I
can't...

BAPTIST MINISTER

Penny, got a boy with the colly-
wobbles.

PENNY

Boy, you need a drink?

SHAKY GROOM

God, yes.

PENNY

Gonna puke?

SHAKY GROOM

No.

PENNY

Gonna faint?

SHAKY GROOM

No.

PENNY

Gonna cry?

SHAKY GROOM

No.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Make an X where my finger is, I now
pronounce you man and wife. Done!

PENNY

You were very brave.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Penny, put him in that chair.
Should we give him a lollipop?

SHAKY BRIDE

Wait, is it over already?

PENNY

Usually we get a girl asking that
during the honeymoon.

The bride gives her a confused look. The chalkboard reads 59.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Diana chats with Hackie while he fixes the fridge.

DIANA

They're back. Four strangers. Doing
nothing. Watching our chapel.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

Continuation. A peek at the street shows that four detectives
are indeed watching Penny's place.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Continuation. Hackie fixes the fridge; Diana watches.

DIANA

The refrigerator?

HACKIE

Penny can't afford a new one.

DIANA

You know how to fix it?

HACKIE

This wedding thing was great before
the depression. All these brides
and grooms swimming in money. Now
things are tight.

DIANA

But, we're making money, right?

HACKIE

We're hanging on. But what happens when we get old? What happens if the sheriff figures out how to shut us down?

DIANA

He just might.

HACKIE

I can't live on taxi money if there's no traffic. Penny's too old to go back to farm country. We need this. Gimme that screwdriver. ...You may need another plan. You may need to leave. Go home. Where's the scoreboard?

DIANA

Any luck with that vibrating bed?

HACKIE

You're a sinful little girl.

Penny runs in.

PENNY

Come quick. ...Okay, this one wasn't your fault. I really tangled this up.

INT. THE CHAPEL - DAY

Continuation. Penny, Hackie and Diana enter the chapel to deal with three irate couples.

HACKIE

Well, how on earth did that happen?

PENNY

Diana had the flu, that whole week we were both booking mail orders. We got three couples for the Honeymoon Suite.

HACKIE

Okay, kids, no need to panic, I'm gonna do right by you. First off, all of you are staying for free. Second, we'll have a contest, winner gets the big suite.

FIRST BOY

Contest? I paid fair and square -

FIRST GIRL

Sweetie, it's one chance in three,
it's free either way. Let's play.

HACKIE

You girls sit. So, girls, why
should you be the one in the big
magic bed?

The girls sit in chairs. The boys stand behind.

FIRST GIRL

Huh?

HACKIE

First question, why did you run
away from home?

FIRST GIRL

Pappa hired a matchmaker, wanted to
hitch me up to the man with the
jewelry shop. Fifty six years old.
Yellow teeth.

SECOND GIRL

Six relatives and two lawyers
fighting over my dowry. Gave me
headaches.

THIRD GIRL

His grandmother is like a monster
out of the Odyssey.

PENNY

Bonus points, the girl knows her
Homer. So how'd you get away?

FIRST GIRL

Plain old ladder.

SECOND GIRL

Ran away from school.

THIRD GIRL

Faked being pregnant, rushed to the
hospital.

PENNY

Why'd you fall for that boy of
yours?

FIRST GIRL
Treats me like a queen.

SECOND GIRL
Sweet man, and he's loaded.

THIRD GIRL
(whispering, to the other
girls)
He's nice enough, and down south
there, he's like a stallion.

The other grooms look at Bachelor Number Three.

PENNY
Diana? Who's our winner?

DIANA
Got to go with the fake pregnancy.
Takes brass.

PENNY
Congratulations!

THIRD GIRL
What's so great about this bed?

DIANA
Got a great batting average in that
bed. You'll have a baby in no time.
It's magic.

THIRD GIRL
Well why didn't you say so? When I
got to the hospital, I found out I
really am pregnant, don't need no
magic bed....What do you say,
girls? Who wants the voodoo bed
with the baby magic?

First girl puts her hand up. Second girl grabs her shoulder.

SECOND GIRL
Go take that hill, soldier!

HACKIE
Three freebies.

He goes to the chalkboard and replaces a 102 with a 99. And sighs.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

DOTTY, shopkeeper, follows the sheriff.

DOTTY

This damn-fool law you want passed.
What do you have against those
people? It's not that man Hackie?

SHERIFF

Got nothing against Hackie.

DOTTY

It's not because he's living with
Penny? Twenty years, folks in this
town treated Penny like a whore,
cause of that baby.

SHERIFF

I know all that.

DOTTY

I don't know how she could stand
it. For a long time Hackie was her
only friend in the world.

SHERIFF

Got nothing against Penny. She's
had it awful hard. She's--

DOTTY

No need to tiptoe around it, she's
a war widow just like me. You
aren't brassed off about her
bastard baby?

SHERIFF

He's a good boy.

DOTTY

Or is it Diana? Hackie leading the
girl astray, no parents?

SHERIFF

Girl's got spunk, running away and
getting a job.

DOTTY

Isn't that what these other kids
are doing, run off, start their
lives? Getting married?

SHERIFF

You're getting me all tangled up.

DOTTY

You got yourself all tangled up.

SHERIFF

It's the principle. My job is a serious responsibility. Supposed to set an example.

DOTTY

The folks who come here are the kids who bother to get married. Some of em don't even do that. And they got guts.

SHERIFF

These are hard times. Whole country's in a bad way. People buckle down, dig out of it. These kids think life is just one big party. Frivolous and sinful.

DOTTY

That's the best thing about em. I'll bring you dinner tonight, like usual. But I won't bring you your peach pie if you think it's too frivolous and sinful.

SHERIFF

Alright, then.

DOTTY

So, you don't want the pie.

SHERIFF

I'll take the pie. It's just pie.

DOTTY

Yes. It's just pie. But I won't put the ice cream on top.

SHERIFF

No ice cream?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Penny enters the office to find the sheriff and the functionary from Annapolis, Raynott.

SHERIFF

Penny, I'm glad you come down today.

PENNY

Didn't sound like I had a choice.
You didn't arrest Hackie again?

RAYNOTT

Maam, I'm Franklin Raynott, I work
down in the capital. Got a few
questions.

PENNY

Questions?

RAYNOTT

You own this business yourself?

PENNY

I had to go to four banks before I
found one to lend me money. Even
then I had to have Hackie sign the
paperwork.

RAYNOTT

The Assembly is writing a bill to
tighten up our marriage laws. How
many marriages do you conduct here?

PENNY

In the last week? I'd have to check

-

RAYNOTT

Quite a few, I hear. Your
ministers, where did they study
theological doctrine?

PENNY

I don't recall --

RAYNOTT

Well, I'm asking you. I'm going to
ask this Hackie person as well. I'm
sure your answers will match right
up with his. ...I came all the way
here to make things easy for you.
Some of the hotheads wanted to make
you come to the capitol. Seems like
every day they add another Senator
to the cause. They're closing in -
any day now they'll have the votes
to pass the bill.

PENNY

What sorts of questions...

RAYNOTT

Nothing unreasonable. How many brides are under 21? How many are pregnant? How many have parental consent? Are you providing counseling? ...We can't just let people marry whoever they want, willy-nilly: that would lead to chaos, I'm sure you'll agree. Let's look at your chapel.

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Raynott questions Penny, pen and paper in hand. He looks at the chalkboard which says 143.

RAYNOTT

That girl you married off this morning, was she of legal age? How old was she?

PENNY

I don't know, I'd have to check the papers with the court clerk --

RAYNOTT

Miss, I'm not sure you're taking this seriously. Last month I was talking to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House down in Annapolis about this town, and this chapel you have here. You're making the whole state look foolish.

PENNY

These folks just want to get married -

RAYNOTT

Last month your preacher did a wedding out in a rowboat. Now I'm going to come back here every week, and you're going to tell me everything you're up to. And you're not going to leave anything out. Are we clear?...Be back tomorrow lunchtime.

He leaves. Penny starts to cry.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Raynott writes a check next to a senator's name.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Hackie and Penny put sheets into a closet.

PENNY

You don't understand. They're not going to quit until they shut us down.

HACKIE

They're not gonna shut you down.

PENNY

Hackie, you're not taking this seriously.

HACKIE

We'll come up with something, we always do.

PENNY

Promise me you're not going to wise off when this man comes to talk to you.

HACKIE

Absolutely not. You feel better now? Hold still.

He kisses her.

PENNY

It's not even my birthday.

HACKIE

It's...every time I see you cry...

She hugs him.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

I could get you some chocolate. Or a strawberry. Or a flower for your hair. ...If you weren't here with me, don't know how I'd get out of bed in the morning.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Diana is in a taxi with ALICE and HENRY. Jasper pulls them over. Sheriff follows at a distance.

JASPER
Alright, Hackie, step outside the -

Diana gets out of the taxi.

JASPER (CONT'D)
What - who let you drive a car?

DIANA
Got my license right here.

JASPER
(to Sheriff)
It's that girl works with Hackie.

SHERIFF
Don't make no never mind to me.

JASPER
But - you mean put her in jail all weekend with the drunks?

SHERIFF
Jasper, what did I tell you to do?

JASPER
Jesus, Diana is it? This ain't my idea.

Jasper takes her into the police car.

SHERIFF
Where are the handcuffs, Jasper?

Jasper glares at the sheriff.

JASPER
Got me some cherry pie at the station. I'll save you a piece.

DIANA
I need some girly things from my bedroom. Can you tell Penny for me?

SHERIFF
Jasper, where's your gun? Ain't gonna tell you again. ..And Diana? You tell Penny I'm talking to the prosecutor.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

One of these days Hackie's gonna get caught redhanded, get arraigned. And you're not gonna get him back Monday morning.

ALICE

(to Henry)

There's a dozen chapels in this town. How in the world are we supposed to find George and Mary?

INT. PENNY'S CHAPEL - DAY

Hackie and Penny discuss plans with Henry and Alice. Hackie is standing near the altar, expecting a wedding to happen any minute.

PENNY

Okay, once we get you hitched, we got a nice room waiting for you...

ALICE

We don't want to get married today.

HACKIE

What did you come here for?

ALICE

Tonight we want separate rooms.

PENNY

The other couple asked for the same thing, we'll do boy-boy, girl-girl.

HACKIE

Separate rooms. That's a change of pace. We pride ourselves on same-day service.

PENNY

Hackie! They want to go slow, go slow.

HACKIE

Your hotel.

ALICE

Giving our parents a chance to catch up. Them and their stupid detectives.

PENNY

You want to get caught?

ALICE

I want to give em a chance to come to their senses, and come to our wedding.

PENNY

Oh good Lord. You know they're gonna come down on you like a ton of bricks.

ALICE

All we got to do is say no. And stick to it, through all the threats. We crossed the state line, they can't stop us. They can watch us get married, or they can go back home.

PENNY

Detectives? The sheriff will go insane, arrest everybody. Son, you sure about this?

HENRY

Believe me, I'm just cooperating with the inevitable.

PENNY

The makings of a good husband.

HENRY

This whole thing with the separate bedrooms, sure wasn't my idea.

ALICE

Will his room be close to mine?
Case I get a fright in the night?

Hackie takes Henry off to show him rooms. Penny pulls Alice aside.

PENNY

Hackie has no sense. This thing with your parents. Is that the only reason you want to wait?

ALICE

(slowly)
You see, I'm totally sure about the boy.

PENNY

Then what's the...

ALICE
I'm not sure about getting married.
It all happened so fast.

PENNY
I know the answer. Hey, Hackie!
Crabs in the house.

HACKIE
Yes Maam.

ALICE
I beg your pardon?

PENNY
Crabs. The fish. The local kids go
out catch em for me. Ever had em?

ALICE
Had this crab-cake thing once in
Boston.

PENNY
This is different. Come on with me.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Continuation. Penny enters and pulls knives out of a drawer;
Alice follows.

ALICE
My, it's hot in here.

PENNY
This little town goes fast fast
fast, all day, all night. You folks
from New York are used to it. But
the rest of Maryland ain't like
this. It's too damn hot to run
around all day. So here's Lesson
One. Hot in here, right?

ALICE
Sure is.

PENNY
You drink beer?

Penny pulls a beer out of the fridge.

PENNY (CONT'D)
You're down here. Imagine it's
July.

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

You spent a whole day in the broiling sun, planting corn. You come inside, it's just as hot in there. You slow down, drink the coldest drink there is. Any colder, we'd have to sell it in cubes. Let me introduce you to National Boh.

She hands the beer to Alice.

ALICE

It's beer? It's so pale.
(drinking)
Lord. I see what you mean.

PENNY

Natty Boh. Hot day, it's a lifesaver. And we steam the crabs in it too. Makes em wiggle a little bit less.

ALICE

You steam em alive?

PENNY

Hey, that chicken you had for lunch didn't die of old age. So let's start collecting our crab tools.

ALICE

Silverware and such?

PENNY

Grab that hammer and some knives.

ALICE

A hammer?

PENNY

We spread out newspaper, smash the hell out of the crabs with the hammer. Eat the meat on the spot, a little butter. Can't use plates, you'd just bust em up. Some corn, potatoes, more beer...

ALICE

Sounds messy.

PENNY

I wash your clothes tonight, his too. Sleep in your skin, cooler that way.

ALICE
Sleep naked?

PENNY
Point is, you take a city slicker like that boy, throw him into a crab feast, get him all drunk and messy with a bunch of strangers, you'll see who he really is. And then you'll know.

EXT. CRAB FEAST ON THE LAWN - DAY

And Henry is the life of the party; townspeople laugh at his jokes and they all bash away at crabs and drink beer. Penny and Alice watch Henry.

PENNY
Things a little clearer now?

ALICE
Never seen him laugh like that. Sometimes he's been a little grim.

PENNY
All the nonsense with your parents, I'm not surprised. Now, I administer the test.

ALICE
The what?

PENNY
Would you want to be stuck in an elevator with that boy?

ALICE
Yes.

PENNY
Would you want to be stuck in a lifeboat with that boy?

ALICE
Yes.

PENNY
Would you want to be stuck on a long train ride with that boy?

ALICE
Do I get a sleeper berth?

PENNY

Okay, stupid question. Does he treat you with respect?

ALICE

Worships the ground I walk on.

PENNY

Girl like you, I ask questions, Hackie would marry you to a mountain goat if you had five dollars... Go bring your boy a beer, give him a kiss.

ALICE

Those detectives who were chasing us? They know about this town. Only a matter of time for they get here and find us. What do I do? Call the sheriff?

PENNY

Not our sheriff...You know? You came all the way down here, I think you should go ahead, get hitched. This time next year we may not even be here to help you.

Penny moseys over to the minister who is chowing down.

THIN MINISTER

Must say, these crabs are the real thing.

PENNY

Ain't allowed in the Old Testament.

THIN MINISTER

Neither is pork. My daddy was a pig farmer. Leave me alone.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Diana sits in a cell; Jasper on a chair outside it, playing an ocarina.

JASPER

Nine o'clock, still hot. Miss, I'm going to the store, get a sack of Co-Colas.

DIANA

I'll drink a Co-Cola with you.
Dotty bringing dinner later?

JASPER

Sure. I'm as sorry as I can be.
Sheriff told me you're in all
weekend. He'll have my hide if
you're not here Monday.

DIANA

So how come it's you I keep seeing
here in the jail? It's the sheriff
pushing this whole thing.

JASPER

These days the Sheriff spends so
much time in Baltimore, Annapolis.
He wants to be a big shot, run for
judge, play with the big boys in
the statehouse.

DIANA

So who runs the store? That boy
Orville?

JASPER

(conspiratorial)

Alright, just you and me. Sheriff
tells me and Orville, always wear
our guns. But Orville doesn't get
any bullets.

DIANA

No bullets.

JASPER

Three years in the third grade. Any
police work in town, it's me.
Drunks on Friday, groom gets drunk
and wrecks a hotel room, car wreck
on the highway.

DIANA

Sheriff trusts you.

JASPER

I'm good at it, folks like me. But
he wants me to run the town his
way. Shut down the chapels. I like
the town just like it is. So it's
pulling me this way and then that
way.

DIANA

Heard that song before. I was in a town that was dead. Daddy wanted me to stay home, take care of him. Spent most of high school in that town library. I heard about this place - got to be the craziest place on earth. Hackie and Penny - if I'd had parents like that -

JASPER

So you like this town?

DIANA

Jasper, there's some girl stuff I need to do, could you just --

JASPER

Oh Lordy. Um, I could just --

DIANA

Just give me a minute back here.

JASPER

I could just walk you over to the toilet in the office, got a sink, soap.

DIANA

Jasper, you're the bee's knees.

JASPER

You're not going to do something crazy in there?

DIANA

Like what? Hang myself with my under-crackers for a speeding ticket?

JASPER

I mean like scoot through the window.

DIANA

You gonna come watch me?

JASPER

Oh Lord no.

DIANA

Got a fresh towel in your cupboard?

JASPER

Sure.

DIANA

Penny brought me my things, in your office over there. Want to check the bag, make sure I don't have a Tommy gun?

JASPER

Now you're just making fun.

DIANA

I'm more dangerous than Bonnie Parker.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Penny and the thin minister chat.

THIN MINISTER

We did everything but bribe the legislature.

PENNY

What happens if the vote goes bad on us? Can't bribe the whole state.

THIN MINISTER

No instant weddings. Everybody waits.

PENNY

We'll be ruined! Goddamn sheriff. And all his crooked buddies in Annapolis.

EXT. CHAPEL - DAY

Penny walks a couple out into the street, and finds Raynott waiting. Penny puts on a brave face.

RAYNOTT

(to the bride)

Excuse me, Miss -

PENNY

Mister Raynott, I'm going to ask you not to bother our customers.

RAYNOTT

Alright. Miss Penny, how many of your couples have obtained parental consent?

PENNY

Well, we're not required -

RAYNOTT

Depending on the judge, and whether the girl is expecting, it may be required. Here's an easy one. How many weddings are attended by parents? Do their folks even know where these children are?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Raynott writes a check next to a senator's name.

INT. PENNY'S CHAPEL - DAY

Penny and Diana tidy up after a wedding.

PENNY

What brought you to this place?

DIANA

I was looking for a summer job, get away from my parents, make money.

PENNY

You're not leaving us in the fall? Assuming I still have the hotel?

DIANA

Hackie converted me. I love this whole thing. Romance on wheels. Someday I'm gonna get married. You know what I want?

PENNY

What's that?

DIANA

I want what you and Hackie have. I want what everybody in town can see, but you. You're so sweet, and so blind.

PENNY

I don't think I want this at all.
Hackie is out of control. Gets more
wild every day.

INT. THE HOTEL -- DAY

Continuation. Diana and Penny head upstairs, hustling through
the halls. Penny carries a bouquet.

PENNY

We finally broke 100. Let's check
your memory. Who are those people
in Room 2.

DIANA

Parents of Room 5.

PENNY

Are they trying to break them up?

DIANA

No, the father is thrilled,
elopement saved him enough money to
buy that car out there.

PENNY

Room 3?

DIANA

Irish girl. Had to give up her
parish. Having a rough time of it.

PENNY

I'll have a talk with her. Room 4?

DIANA

Need new bolts in the headboard.
Damn football player, broke the
bed. Young folks have no technique
at all.

PENNY

Only good thing, these boys usually
last thirty seconds in the saddle,
first time up. Letters?

DIANA

Two more saying we're hoors and
we're going to hell. ...Feller wants
to know if we can do a wedding in
Latin.

PENNY

Our minister? He can do Pig Latin,
maybe. Eer-ly-day, eloved-bay...

Diana looks at the bouquet in Penny's hand.

DIANA

And what you got there?

PENNY

Caught the bouquet again. Know how
many of these things I've caught?

DIANA

It's a message from Cupid. Stop
fighting fate and throw your own
bouquet.

PENNY

Diana. Don't.

INT. PENNY'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Penny finds Hackie and Diana in the kitchen.

PENNY

Hey, Hackie. It's time for you to
come and, you know, read to me from
that book you were telling me
about.

HACKIE

Book, what the...Oh good Lord. Book!
Yes, reading the book.

DIANA

You two are hysterical. I'll open
the office in the morning.

PENNY

You're an angel.

HACKIE

(whispering, to Diana)
Wearing her down. Think it's
working?

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Diana and Hackie sort dishes.

DIANA
You were reading a book with Penny?

HACKIE
Boy, you sure are nosy.

DIANA
She seems kinda perky this morning.

HACKIE
Well, we spent the night, but we
didn't spend the night.

DIANA
Huh?

HACKIE
Sometimes I go in to console her,
when she has a bad dream, don't you
know.

DIANA
Console her?

HACKIE
But I don't spend the whole night.
She has her room, I have mine. See,
after we're done -

DIANA
Consoling?

HACKIE
She has this thing she does. Lasts
two hours, like a royal wedding.
She goes in and out of the bedroom.
In and out with her glasses. In and
out, with her book, with her water.
Out to the bathroom, there's 45
minutes right there.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Montage, Penny and Hackie. For each line, the speaker is at
the table; the other is absent.

PENNY
And then, here we go, with the
"dammit, Penny, I got to get up in
the morning!"

HACKIE

Goes to get a cookie. Brushes her teeth again. Gets to be midnight, she's ready for bed. Wants the window open when it's cold, closed when it's hot. Or she wants me to do it for her.

PENNY

It's just a damn window! You'd think I'm asking for the moon.

HACKIE

She gets in bed, rolls over twelve times, each time she grabs more blanket, til she's wrapped up like a cocoon.

PENNY

And the man just will not let go of that damn blanket!

HACKIE

And that's when she's sober. She has a little too much wine, she sleeps across the bed, diagonally. And then thrashes around like she's being electrocuted.

PENNY

The way he tosses and turns.

HACKIE

Hmmpf. Got my own damn bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Penny and Hackie do dishes.

HACKIE

How's Diana working out?

PENNY

Fantastic, saved my neck. Meaning to talk to you about her. She's too young.

HACKIE

She's of age.

PENNY

She's my employee, same as you, I'm responsible.

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

She's fresh off the farm. There's a lot she doesn't know about life.

HACKIE

About life?

PENNY

About men. She needs her Mama. All she has is us. Everything she knows about romance, she's getting here.

HACKIE

You sound like you don't approve of what we're doing here.

PENNY

What happens when she wants to get married? She's gonna have some funny opinions about things.

HACKIE

You're saying I'm a bad influence.

PENNY

Darn tootin'.

INT. PENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

A horse VET and Diana sit at a table with a book. The doctor discusses anatomy. Diagrams included.

VET

Been delivering horses and cows for years. You want to know how all this works.

DIANA

My, that picture looks frightful.

VET

See, the womb spreads out into two horns, it's about 16 inches.

DIANA

Ee-gads.

VET

Keep in mind, sweetie, I'm a horse doctor. This here's a mare. Your womb ain't gonna be no foot and a half that-a-way.

DIANA
Well that's a relief.

VET
Now here's the chart for the stallion. With full tumescence his John Henry gets to three feet long for the whole thing.

The vet turns the page and Diana shrieks.

DIANA
Oh my God, what in the world...

VET
That's a horse. A horse! You ain't never gonna see one that big. I hope. You're not gonna get the vapors, are you?

She begins to examine the chart more quizzically.

INT. LOBBY -- DAY

Hackie, Diana and Penny sort mail. Hackie opens a box and pulls out a note. He reads.

HACKIE
See! We married this couple twenty years ago, still married! They went to the Pacific, sent us a wedding totem from the Mala'i tribe. Says it was a lot of trouble getting it through Customs, and don't open it in front of Penny.

Penny opens the box, pulls out a massive phallic totem.

HACKIE (CONT'D)
Says here, this is for good luck and fertility. See, Diana? It's a totem symbol, it represents -

DIANA
I know what it represents!...It's gigantic. Isn't it?

Hackie clears his throat.

HACKIE
It's okay, you can touch it.

DIANA

I'm not even supposed to be looking at it!

PENNY

What do I do with it, hang towels on it?

HACKIE

Keep it right on the altar, good luck.

PENNY

Hackie!

HACKIE

I'm kidding.

PENNY

...Some of these people are Baptists!

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

A naked couple (or rather the parts we see) holds hands in front of Penny and Diana. The thin minister is at the piano.

THIN MINISTER

Sorry, not gonna do it.

PENNY

They paid good money - they paid extra -

THIN MINISTER

I'm an artist. Learned the wedding music for just about every country on earth. Wagner, Mendelssohn. I am just not going to lower myself to play that song.

PENNY

You won't play Cheek to Cheek? Why not?

THIN MINISTER

Because they're buck naked!...Cheek to Cheek.

BRIDE

We must also consummate the marriage in public, outside, at midnight.

PENNY
The football field maybe?

BRIDE
And we need a witness.

PENNY
(resigned)
Of course you do.

DIANA
I'll go out there with em.

PENNY
Diana!

DIANA
We ask Hackie, he'll end up taking pictures for the paper. And after, we need to do something really nice, to get square with the Lord.

PENNY
Get this girl a blanket. No wool. Hackie, Diana's gonna get arrested!

DIANA
Where's the sheriff these days?

PENNY
Annapolis. Making trouble. So while the cat's away... Diana, did your mother give you a proper upbringing in the ways of the world...marriage, children, all that?

DIANA
Fair to middling. But I'm learning so much more, working here with you folks!

PENNY
That's what I was afraid of.

The chalkboard is up to 250.

INT. DINING ROOM IN A WEALTHY HOME - DAY

Seven of the eight parents sulk around a table. Mary's mother sits next to her husband, her head on his shoulder. George's parents sit far apart. Mary's sit together. Alice's mother is alone.

GEORGE'S FATHER

So what do we do? What do we think?

GEORGE'S MOTHER

Mary gave George all that socialist trash to read. If my father were alive he'd put a stop to this.

GEORGE'S FATHER

Don't be blaming this on Mary. George is a grown man. He saw the way you act, the way you treat our servants.

MARY'S MOTHER

And Alice, watched her father get drunk every night. Listening to all of you arguing about banks. And Martha, she's always been out of control.

ALICE'S MOTHER

I must confess. I'm even more worried than before. My husband has always been a hard man, so is Tom. And both of them have gone to Maryland already. I'm concerned that they're going to do something drastic.

MARY'S MOTHER

Let's put our heads together. What are these children doing down there? Why didn't they come to us? What do they want?

GEORGE'S MOTHER

You know what we know about those children? Nothing. Did you notice? Two years ago they argued with us about everything. And then a year ago they stopped. They gave up. And now we're going to go talk to them, and say it's time to come home, because...what?

MARY'S MOTHER

So who do we send after them? Does your husband even listen to you?

GEORGE'S MOTHER

At least now we know where they are.

(MORE)

GEORGE'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Once they get married, they could run to the four corners of the earth. We'll never see them again.

MARY'S MOTHER

I'm not letting my girl get married without me.

ALICE'S MOTHER

Let's all go. All seven of us.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Sheriff chats with Jasper and sorts mail. At the other end of the office, the PHONE rings. ORVILLE, the other deputy, runs in to answer.

ORVILLE

(very rapidly)

Susquehanna Sheriff's Office if you're calling about a marriage license the clerk is next door on extension double-ought three five how can I help you?...Yes, a 35 on the end of the number. Morning chief. Got yourself a whole lot of Western Unions there.

SHERIFF

Yes, Orville, they're from Washington. And they're all for you.

ORVILLE

For me? From Washington?

SHERIFF

Orville, why don't you tell me what you did out there on Delaware Road today.

ORVILLE

Dang, if that wasn't something! I did just what you wanted, chief!

SHERIFF

Did you, now?

ORVILLE

I see this big, gigantic car coming down the road. Had little flags on the front. Must be a rich boy, I'm thinking.

SHERIFF

Did you get their plates?

ORVILLE

I sure did! Funny plates, special-like, D-P-L.

SHERIFF

Is that so.

ORVILLE

They're speeding something awful. I used the lights and siren all together-like, like you taught me - got it right the first time!

SHERIFF

I couldn't be more proud.

ORVILLE

The driver - some nerve! Says "you can't stop this car, I have the minister in here!" It's a double score - another one of these damn ministers! Coming into our town to set up another wedding racket!

SHERIFF

And you locked him up in our jail.

ORVILLE

Darn tootin, just like you taught me. No need to thank me.

SHERIFF

Okay, it's all becoming clear to me now. Jasper, for the love of God could you go unlock that cell?

ORVILLE

Chief? You letting him go?

SHERIFF

Orville. He's not a minister like a preacher. He's the ambassador from the Prince of Banu Hatem. He was on his way to his embassy down in Washington.

ORVILLE

Oh my Lord.

SHERIFF

Which means you can't really arrest him. Or his driver.

ORVILLE

Oh my Lord.

SHERIFF

And now you're going to go apologize, take him to a hotel, and give him absolutely every damn thing he asks for.

ORVILLE

Yessir.

SHERIFF

I'll call the governor and call off the eighty state troopers who are tramping the countryside in the heat looking for the minister. Which is a good thing cause most of them gonna want to shoot you in the head.

EXT. SUSQUEHANNA TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Hackie and Diana wait with four HELPERS and a cab.

HACKIE

Remember, the telegram said they need to get married by midnight, or else the boy loses a fortune. It's gonna be close!

Train arrives; RACING BOY and RACING GIRL alight.

DIANA

Paging the Billings party, paging..

RACING BOY

That's me. My fiancée is right - hey -

EXT. TAXI -- NIGHT

Continuation. The four burly men grab the couple and throw them in a cab. Diana drives.

RACING BOY

What in God's name is -

HACKIE

You're the knucklehead who needs to get married, right? Did we grab the right girl? Otherwise we're sunk.

RACING GIRL

That's me. Thought you were white slavers trying to sell me to the Chinese.

They SQUEAL to a stop in front of the chapel. Jasper has been following in a police car.

DIANA

It's got to be in a church. Run!

INT. THE CHAPEL - NIGHT

Continuation. An ARAB DIPLOMAT and his DRIVER are fiddling with paperwork, with Orville.

ORVILLE

Yes, sir, Mister Ambassador. It's like it never happened. I hope you like it here in Hackie's hotel. It's on us. We'll get you on your way to Washington first thing tomorrow.

The racing couple runs in and prepares to marry. The Baptist minister awaits.

PENNY

Hackie, who are these people? This is all going too fast.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Got them? Sign here. You here. Penny, Hackie, just make X's, there's no time! I now pronounced you man and wife. Time!

DIANA

Well, my watch is a little fast, so...

HACKIE

Not you, somebody else!

BAPTIST MINISTER

Well, my watch goes all the way back to General McClellan, and it says 11:58. Mark the time on the license. Stamp it!

RACING GIRL

I love you baby. I think I'm gonna pee. Or puke.

DIANA

Put it in the book. 11:58!

Cheers. Western Union RUNNER enters, hands the groom a wire. Hackie erases a 216 from the board, writes a 217.

RUNNER

Telegram, sir.

RACING BOY

My uncle's up to his tricks again. We need to get back, fast.

HACKIE

Midnight train's leaving, you'll never make it. Diana, any of the taxis in?

DIANA

They're all over town.

ARAB DIPLOMAT

Hamid, get the car. Take this poor child to the train. We're stuck here anyway. Compliments of the Prince of Banu Hatem.

He glares at the deputy.

ARAB DIPLOMAT (CONT'D)

And drive as fast as you like.

Driver leaves. The diplomat makes sure he's gone.

ARAB DIPLOMAT (CONT'D)

My driver is a spy for the Prince. You know what I'd like, just once?

DIANA

Anything, your Highness.

ARAB DIPLOMAT

Don't tell anyone. A Natty Boh.

INT. PENNY'S CHAPEL-- DAY

Hackie points out the window and Penny looks.

HACKIE

See, we widen this window, people drive right up, they can get married without even getting out of the car!

PENNY

Sweetie, three hours in a car, girl is gonna need to pee. You're being silly.

HACKIE

I got it! Let's move the chapel so it's right next to the railway platform - we can marry em twice as fast!

PENNY

I just repainted three bedrooms right here. Don't make me kill you.

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Penny collapses in hysterics. The Baptist minister is in a kilt with enough fabric to sail the Santa Maria to the Americas. Hackie implores Penny.

HACKIE

They come from Scotland, they asked special, I'll pay you a bonus. I got the fabric dirt cheap.

PENNY

See, Hackie, this is how you always get me. I can never stay mad at you cause you make me laugh too much.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Hackie, after the service, your ass is mine.

The scoreboard says 289.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL -- NIGHT

A chivaree, drunks blowing horns outside a hotel, demanding to be let in for drinks; the naked bride throws a shoe at them from the window.

BRIDE

Trying to get a job done in here.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL -- DAY

Penny and Hackie watch a bride and her bridesmaids in Dodgers caps pose for a PHOTOGRAPHER.

BRIDE/MAIDS

Hey, Terry, dem bums are still in the league!

While their irritated groom stands to one side in a Giants cap. Penny takes Hackie's hand.

PENNY

What's with the hats?

HACKIE

B for Brooklyn. Dodgers and Giants. The Montagues and Capulets of baseball. Boy in the corner, that's young Romeo.

PENNY

You can turn just about anything into romance, can't you?

The chalkboard has a 392.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Fat minister talks to a white girl (SIOUX GIRL), and an African-American man pretending to be Sioux (SIOUX BOY).

BAPTIST MINISTER

Where you from, son?

SIOUX BOY

I beg your pardon -

BAPTIST MINISTER

Your family? Where'd they come from?

SIOUX BOY

Sioux. Indians. Gave me this tattoo.

BAPTIST MINISTER

White girl can't marry a colored man.

(MORE)

BAPTIST MINISTER (CONT'D)

I see you shaved your head, so the hair don't give you away. That was clever. You got a trade? You can feed this gal?

SIOUX BOY

Mechanic. Best you ever seen.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Police don't care about a marriage license, they see you in a car together, they beat the hell out of you. Then they come after me for the license - we're on thin ice with the law already.

SIOUX GIRL

This mean you can't marry us?

BAPTIST MINISTER

You got a car?

SIOUX BOY

Fix it up myself. Runs like a dream.

BAPTIST MINISTER

I marry you now, you leave town tonight.

SIOUX BOY

Got trouble up north. Keep heading south?

BAPTIST MINISTER

South? Don't be a fool. Go to Pennsylvania. The law's on your side up there. You're good with tools, I'd give Detroit a try.

SIOUX BOY

Thank you!

BAPTIST MINISTER

For this afternoon, stay in the car shed out back. Don't let anybody see you.

He erases a 452 from the chalkboard, writes a 453.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL - DAY

Continuation. The interracial couple hurries to the shed, but the sheriff steps out of a shadow and intercepts them.

SHERIFF

You slow down for just a second, son.

SIOUX BOY

Beg pardon -

SHERIFF

I'm the sheriff. And who might you be? Where you come from?

SIOUX BOY

Noah.

SHERIFF

Miss, is this man bothering you?

SIOUX GIRL

No sir, he's...

SHERIFF

He's what?

SIOUX BOY

I'm a mechanic. I'm fixing that car in the shed.

SHERIFF

Never seen you here before. Who's car is it?

SIOUX BOY

Hers. Sheriff.

SHERIFF

That so. And why is it in Hackie's shed? You weren't getting married, were you?

SIOUX BOY

Lord, no. Just got bad electric, fix it in no time.

SHERIFF

You know the law? No colored man can hitch up with a white girl.

SIOUX BOY

No sir.

SHERIFF

You know what happens to colored boys who mess with white girls?
...Just trying to help you, son.

SIOUX BOY

Just fixing a car, sir.

SHERIFF

You go do that, then.

Around the corner, Hackie and Penny are watching.

PENNY

(to Hackie)

It's still illegal! I'm gonna lose the hotel that much faster.

HACKIE

They'll be gone tonight.

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Raynott questions Penny again.

RAYNOTT

Miss Penny, how many colored couples have you hitched up in your chapel?

Her panic is growing.

PENNY

Colored?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Raynott writes a check next to another senator's name. The smiling sheriff now has all ten: all ten names now have checks next to them.

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Penny is holding an empty frying pan, starting lunch. Diana runs in.

DIANA

Penny! Come quick!

PENNY

What - I'm in the middle of -

DIANA

It's Hackie! Wrecked that taxi of his!

PENNY

Dammit!

DIANA

He drives like the Red Baron - can't stop him when he's got a new prospect.

PENNY

Hackie! Hackie!

They run out to the street.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Continuation. Penny and Diana run down Main Street, Penny still holding her pan. Hackie is on the ground motionless with a bloody head, being tended to by a doctor. The car has rammed into another.

PENNY

(hysterics)

Hackie! Oh please don't, oh please -

-

HACKIE

A kiss for Uncle Hackie?

PENNY

What - you goddamned mammy-jammer!

She slams her pan into the ground; it bounces a good 20 feet.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Doc, patch him up quick as you can so I can kill him!

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Penny and Diana begin a walk and talk...

PENNY

I'm just so tired... I'm totally buried here, do me a favor? Need new bottom sheets in 3, 13 and 14.

DIANA

I was wondering - all the beds have Navy blue sheets. That the new style?

PENNY

Night after night we got a girl loses her virgin. All the bleach in the world won't get the stains out. I went for the blue. I figure black sheets are a little too Whorehouse even for this town.

DIANA

How many of these girls are virgins?

PENNY

About fifty fifty. Girls these days.

DIANA

What's the score?

PENNY

Not even close.

DIANA

Hackie been talking to the folks in the statehouse?

PENNY

It looks bad. Folks outside of town think we're embarrassing the whole state. The law gives us one more month to keep the wheel spinning.

DIANA

I've been fixing that old veil we use. I need to borrow your head.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

Continuation. Diana puts a veil on Penny's head, puts in pins. Penny is beautiful.

DIANA

Oh, my.

PENNY

What?

They look in the mirror. Diana is in awe.

DIANA

It is absolutely ...Sorry.

But Penny is smiling at the mirror.

PENNY

It's okay. Never worn one before.

Hackie enters and stares.

HACKIE

Sorry.

PENNY

No, it's alright.

Diana scoots out. Hackie stands behind Penny.

HACKIE

Penny. I want to give you what you had with Bobby.

PENNY

Bobby. Nobody else saw what was in him. One of a kind. Then the war. When the baby came, the town threw me to the wolves cause I didn't marry. Swore I'd never get married. Never give them the satisfaction. I put on the act, the war widow. Never a smile. Inside, sometimes I'm screaming, I'm wasting away.

INT. THE CHAPEL - DAY

Baptist minister officiating, Hackie and Penny observing a bridal couple including a SCARED GIRL.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Dearly beloved, we are gathered -

PENNY

Hackie.

BAPTIST MINISTER

To join together - the last name -

PENNY

Reverend, take a minute.

(to Scared Girl)

Come here, sweetie. Let's talk.

HACKIE
What are you doing?

PENNY
Just hold your horses. Come here.

The girl follows her out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Continuation. Penny leads the girl to a table.

SCARED GIRL
I'm sorry - can't I get married
today?

PENNY
Hackie's like a train with no
brakes. So I have to hit the brakes
for him. Like when I see you come
through here.

SCARED GIRL
Me? What did I do? Can't we get
married?

PENNY
I see a lot of scared girls. I
don't give you a license till I
know what you're scared of. Are you
afraid of your family back home?
Or...afraid of him?

SCARED GIRL
Ain't never been in bed with a man
before. I haven't the slightest
idea...

PENNY
Like every other girl in the world.
So it's not the boy?

SCARED GIRL
Lord no, he treats me like a
goddess.

PENNY
All I need to hear. I'll get you
out there so you can marry that
boy. Tonight at supper we'll talk
about some girl stuff, you and me.
I suppose you couldn't ask your
mother about it?

SCARED GIRL

Lord, no...So it'll be okay?

PENNY

You'll be a little sore. Women are tough as a tire on a truck; if we weren't, the human race would be dead by now...

Girl exits. Hackie comes into the kitchen.

HACKIE

What did I do now?

PENNY

Hackie. Look at me. I know I told you to go out, get more brides and grooms. But you are not Farmer Brown putting the bull to the cows out there. These are people. They show up at our front door, you need to look them in the eye. See who you're dealing with.

HACKIE

I don't see what your problem is.

PENNY

Last year this town hitched up sixteen thousand couples. Eighty people every day, change their lives, forever. One of these ten-minute Whiz-Bang weddings turns into a mess, you know hard it is to get a divorce? They're trapped.

HACKIE

It's their choice.

PENNY

We're not a church, but it's our job to advise these people. They're children.

HACKIE

We're still way short of a thousand. The law says they're old enough -

PENNY

Okay, that tears it. Time for Room 12.

HACKIE

Room 12? Ain't seen em in two days.
Must be doing some serious
honeymooning.

PENNY

No, Hackie, they're not.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Continuation. Penny and Hackie find Jasper in the hall trying to chat up Diana.

JASPER

So you come from steel country?
You ever going back?

DIANA

Maybe a visit. I like it here.

JASPER

Maybe the law gonna shut down this
chapel.

DIANA

Maybe it's not just the chapel I'm
interested in.

JASPER

Maybe you have the makings of a
sheriff's deputy. Strap a couple of
six-guns on you.

DIANA

(smiles)
Maybe not.

PENNY

Jasper, can I borrow you for a
moment?

JASPER

Sure.

PENNY

And you can't be telling the
sheriff about this one. I'm
serious, Jasper.

Penny, Hackie and Jasper knock on 12. A grown man, DRINKING
BOY, answers with a sneer.

DRINKING BOY
We don't need anything.

PENNY
Jasper, you go on in there.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Continuation. Jasper enters, finds a very young DRINKING GIRL, resigned look on her face, a broken lamp and a pile of beer bottles. A mess. Penny follows.

PENNY
Put your pants on. Jasper, take
this man to the parlor for a chat.
Girl, you come with us. You know
where your license is?

The girl grabs the paper.

INT. OFFICE -- DAY

Continuation, Penny and the girl go down into the office.
Penny pulls open a filing cabinet.

PENNY
What's your name again?...Here we
are.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Continuation. Penny leads the girl to a table.

PENNY
I didn't send your records to the
clerk. Had a hunch. Here's my sheet
and yours. You got family you can
go back to?

DRINKING GIRL
Be easier with my aunt. Scranton. A
lot less yelling that way.

She pulls out a box of matches.

PENNY
You know what this is?

DRINKING GIRL
Box of matches?

PENNY

You know what an annulment is?

DRINKING GIRL

(enormously relieved)

Yes.

PENNY

Use the sink. All your troubles
down the drain. Don't set your hair
on fire.

The girl lights the two pages in the sink.

PENNY (CONT'D)

I'll put you on a train tonight.

The girl hugs her.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Get yourself a cold drink from the
ice box and sit here. I'll go
explain the facts of life to that
boy.

DRINKING GIRL

Give him this ring? He's not so
bad.

The girl goes and Hackie enters.

PENNY

Hackie. These kids have no idea
what they're doing. They do stupid
things.

HACKIE

You think they do any worse than
the people who think it through?
Nobody's ready to get married til
they do it. Nobody knows whether
they're marrying the right person.

PENNY

She's a child.

HACKIE

If that girl hadn't come here,
she'd be home waiting for her
father to pick her husband. The
girls who come here, they are
picking for themselves.

(MORE)

HACKIE (CONT'D)

They're like the pilgrims dodging storms on the Atlantic, the pioneers who dodged the Apaches. These girls must have wanted to get married so bad, to take those risks. Burn those bridges.

PENNY

That girl needs a bridge back to Scranton. On my dime. You gotta slow down.

HACKIE

We were at 660.

PENNY

Don't care, Hackie. Starting to hate the sight of this hotel.

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Hackie brings in a new couple, a VERY YOUNG GIRL and a MAN of 40, along with the girl's FATHER. Penny looks at the two men laughing and shaking hands. Then she looks at the girl, expecting to see signs of fear, but what she sees is worse: complete resignation. The girl looks up at Penny, and then down at her shoes again.

PENNY

Did you take a look at that girl?

HACKIE

Sure. Penny, they're in a hurry, I want to get them out the door.

PENNY

You took their money?

HACKIE

Did all the paperwork already.

PENNY

How old did they say that girl is?

HACKIE

Don't remember.

PENNY

She looks like she's thirteen.

He changes the board from 662 to 663 and smiles.

HACKIE

See? Everything's coming up roses.

Penny has had enough. She grabs a few things from the chapel and heads for the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Penny throws clothes in a suitcase. Hackie enters.

PENNY

Hackie.

HACKIE

Penny.

PENNY

I'm going to visit my sister. I took some money from the account.

HACKIE

Take what you want.

PENNY

My sister is having her baby, I'm going to help out, til she can manage. The hotel, it's all yours.

HACKIE

It's your hotel.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE JAIL - NIGHT

Dotty spots the sheriff leaving the jail and begins stalking him again.

DOTTY

I sent off to the catalog for a radio. I live for the radio, listen to my stories every night. And it up and broke on me.

SHERIFF

Is that so?

DOTTY

Girl needs a good cry once in a while. Got a radio over your place?

SHERIFF

Yes, Dotty, just bought a new one.

DOTTY

Well, you see? It's the hand of the Lord. Tonight when the shows come on, I'll come by your place with some fudge. Made me a new batch of jar whisky too!

SHERIFF

Um, actually -

DOTTY

I'll even let you pick the show!

SHERIFF

I was going to be tidying tonight -

DOTTY

Oh bushwaw, how much mess can one man make when he's never home? Whisky's a good batch. Dunk the fudge right in it.

SHERIFF

Just til you get your radio fixed.

DOTTY

(taking his arm)

Well, of course. Wouldn't dream of taking advantage.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Sheriff leads Dotty into the front office.

SHERIFF

Give me a minute to toss my shirts in the bin.

He goes into the back, where he lives. Dotty sticks her head into the back office and sees the blackboard with the senators' names on it.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Now the storekeeper is stalking the local JUDGE.

DOTTY

Your Honor. Got a question. Sheriff's gone to the capital, get that law passed, stop these two-minute marriages.

JUDGE

I know.

DOTTY

He's gonna slam down the coffin lid on the whole town. So how tight is that coffin lid?

JUDGE

What?

DOTTY

You're the judge, have you even read the damn lawbook?

JUDGE

Of course I have!

DOTTY

Well, what does it say? If some young girl in a jam comes down here, how does she beat that law?

JUDGE

Dotty, I'm the judge, it's not my job to help people break the law!

DOTTY

Not break the law, just stretch that e-lastic as far as it will go.

JUDGE

It's not my place! There's a thing called conflict of interest -

DOTTY

There's also a thing called relief. Whole town be on welfare. You too! Those court fees, everybody comes to court has their wallet out for you. All that stops come November.

JUDGE

Unless there's an exigent circumstance.

DOTTY

Exigent - what?

JUDGE

Exigent circumstance. Then I can make an exception.

DOTTY

Why don't you explain that one to me.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- NIGHT

Hackie looks out at the street through the bars of his jail cell. Diana walks down the sidewalk at night, sees Jasper. She smiles. Then she sees the sheriff and hides around a corner.

SHERIFF

I went to Dotty's house, fix her radio. Damn thing was unplugged is all. Women.

JASPER

Yeah. Women. Not very clever, are they?

SHERIFF

Tomorrow, first thing, get Hackie out of jail, take him to the courthouse.

JASPER

You arrested him again?

They approach Penny's hotel, the focal point for the Sheriff's torment. Windows are open.

SHERIFF

Well, Jasper, a golden opportunity. Penny's hotel, nice calm day, they got all the windows open, air out the rooms.

JASPER

Uh-huh...?

SHERIFF

Well show some initiative, go on over there, see what's going on.

JASPER

You mean peek in their windows?

SHERIFF

You are a sheriff's deputy.

JASPER

They're not doing anything illegal.

SHERIFF

Go check em out and we'll know for sure.

JASPER

You mean listen at their windows?

Alarm on Diana's face.

SHERIFF

See what they're doing, Jasper.

JASPER

Women live there. Penny's there.

SHERIFF

And that new girl Diana, I want to know what she's up to.

JASPER

I think she's the sweetest thing in this whole town. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. ...She's a girl. She's on the first floor. I ain't looking in her window.

SHERIFF

Jasper.

JASPER

Sorry, Sheriff. This one's all yours.

And Diana is in love.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Diana tracks down Jasper wearing a nice dress, near the jail.

DIANA

Okay, Jasper. You and the sheriff have been popping our windows long enough, and now I'm here for my revenge.

JASPER

Beg pardon? Revenge? Dear Lord -

DIANA

I want revenge on the sheriff, not you.

JASPER
What you gonna do to him?

DIANA
I'm gonna steal one of his
deputies. The one with a brain. The
heir apparent.

JASPER
Steal?

Diana quite decisively takes his hands in hers.

DIANA
I'm gonna take you to the picture
show and then I'm gonna kiss you
till you can't play your ocarina no
more.

JASPER
Dang!

DIANA
You got spunk, Jasper. You're too
smart to be helping the sheriff,
peeping in our curtains... Hold
still.

She kisses him.

JASPER
I hear the new Frank Capra is real
romantic.

DIANA
Not that we'll be watching it any
too hard.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Tom and four detectives look at Hackie's hotel.

INT. ROOM IN PENNY'S HOTEL - DAY

The New York kids play cards; Diana brings some soap. Alice
steps away from the window.

ALICE
No! It's Tom, he's here!

HENRY
Here? In Maryland?

ALICE

Right down there, he saw me! We have to stay in the hotel, we can't go out. He's got detectives with him.

DIANA

I'll bring you lunch and some things from the drugstore. ...Detectives outside my hotel. Penny's right, it's getting out of control.

Diana leaves.

MARY

Just think, the whole world is our oyster. Where do we go, what do we do?

ALICE

We just got on the train, didn't think, did we? What happens after we get married?

GEORGE

You mean a plan?

MARY

How about a destination?

HENRY

Well, I'm a banker, he's a lawyer.

MARY

If I'm going to run a house and make babies, I'm going to do it where there is art, music, culture. If my brain was just going to die of boredom, I could have stayed home.

ALICE

Whole point of running is to see the world. I want it all. The whole world.

HENRY

We don't have the money to see the whole world. ...Washington? Go in to politics?

GEORGE

Too hot, too many skeeters.

MARY

Chicago? San Francisco?

ALICE

The whole world is right there in New York. We could go back to New York. You could get a job in a minute.

MARY

Go back where our parents are?

ALICE

Maybe our parents forgive us in about a hundred years. I think things will thaw out once they have grandchildren.

MARY

You do like to plan ahead, don't you? You want babies?

HENRY

Passel of girls, maybe. I think they'd be less trouble than boys.

The girls look at each other and laugh.

HENRY (CONT'D)

George and I have been talking. I think reality is going to rear its ugly head. We'll be going back to New York.

ALICE

You two have been planning things?

HENRY

For a while now.

ALICE

Just the two of you? You need to stop doing that. You tell me, you tell Mary, what have you been talking about?

HENRY

Money. Survival.

ALICE

And what did you decide?

HENRY

Nothing. Not without you.

ALICE

Clever boy. ...Why does your father hate my father so much?

HENRY

You would need a graduate degree in finance to understand it.

ALICE

Explain it. Use small words.

HENRY

The crash, one bank tried to buy the other bank, second bank tried to destroy the first bank...

ALICE

Montagues and Capulets. Don't make their problems our problems. What about you, Martha? I told you not to come. We didn't really need a witness.

MARTHA

I wasn't going to miss this. Not nohow.

ALICE

You know your Daddy is going to put you in a cage when you get home.

MARTHA

That house is already a cage. He can't keep me there forever.

MARY

I went out onto the street this morning, buy a few notions. Forgot to bring a hairbrush, toothbrush. I realized...I don't know how much a bar of soap costs, a loaf of bread. At home when we needed something, we left a note with the help, and it appeared by dinnertime. I've never sewn on a button, never cooked food, washed a shirt...

ALICE

Same for me.

MARY

I don't know anything. Nobody ever taught me anything except how to be pretty and pleasant.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

We could be poor, you know. You boys have a plan for that?

EXT. THE STREET -- DAY

The four detectives loiter. Tom is with them. They calmly watch the hotel and discuss developments.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Continuation. Diana and Hackie inside, watching.

DIANA

They're back. Five men and no women, no brides. They're not customers.

HACKIE

I've got a bad feeling about this. Everybody stay inside tonight.

DIANA

Should we call the sheriff?

HACKIE

(ironic laugh)

Let's not. We can dodge the sheriff, we can dodge whatever this is.

DIANA

I think this is different. I'm scared.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE CHAPEL -- NIGHT

The four detectives watch from the shadows as Hackie cautiously crosses the street.

DETECTIVE

Hey, Hackie?

HACKIE

Who's that?

DETECTIVE

Yep, it's him alright.

HACKIE

What can I do for - hey -

The goons pick up Hackie, carry him to an alley, and throw him to the ground.

DETECTIVE

Word has it you're the one behind all this. You put those four kids in your taxi and disappeared. We want to know where.

Diana emerges from the front door.

DIANA

Hackie? Hackie!

Diana hears sounds of a FIGHT. She runs inside and reemerges with a frying pan. She searches in the dark, a slow search, as she follows the occasional noises she hears, until she finally turns the corner and finds Hackie, Tom and the detectives.

DETECTIVE

Don't worry, lady, we're coming to the hotel next.

A SHOT rings out. It's the sheriff, who followed the detectives and has fired into the air.

SHERIFF

Nobody move. I'm the sheriff in this town. Been following you all night. How many of you people are armed?...In this town there are two people allowed to carry firearms.

DETECTIVE

And who's the other one, Wyatt Earp?

A SHOT rings out, blowing the hat neatly off the detective's head. It's Jasper, from the other end of the alley. Orville follows with a bucket.

JASPER

Anybody comes for that girl is gonna get holes in his fancy New York suit.

SHERIFF

Guns in the bucket. Hackie, seems like wherever you go, trouble follows. But not for long. New law gonna be passed next week. You got about a month left.

HACKIE
(to Diana)
You were gonna take on four guns
with one frying pan. I love you
too, sweetie.

INT. PENNY'S PARLOR -- NIGHT

Diana sits by Hackie, her head on his shoulder. He has a black eye.

DIANA
What's the score?

HACKIE
We ran out of gas around 700.

DIANA
No word from Penny?

HACKIE
I don't even know where she is.

DIANA
We're not going to make it, are we?

HACKIE
Once Penny left, the whole thing
lost steam, I don't know where
anything is...

DIANA
Sorry.

HACKIE
The only way to save the hotel was
to keep em from passing that law.
So you have some sort of plan?

DIANA
Me?

HACKIE
Pretty soon she loses the hotel,
I'll be rooming in Dotty's
henhouse. You could go back home.

DIANA
Not going back home. Not going
anywhere.

HACKIE

Soon this town will be just another dumb old town like any other.

DIANA

What will you do?

HACKIE

I don't know. Nothing, I guess.

DIANA

Hackie. From the day I met you, you've been going a thousand miles an hour. Now...you're like someone I don't know.

HACKIE

There's only one thing about me you need to know. I'd rather have Penny than this wedding business.

DIANA

Does she know that?

INT. WORKING CLASS HOME - NIGHT

Penny sits with her SISTER who is rocking a baby to sleep.

PENNY

Here, I got the diapers all done -

PENNY'S SISTER

Penny, it's okay -

PENNY

No, I got it -

PENNY'S SISTER

Penny, it's really alright.

PENNY

You sure?

PENNY'S SISTER

This is my second one, I can do it in my sleep. Actually I have done it in my sleep. Seems like you're looking for a reason to stay. You can't just hide here. Like when your man Bobby died, you just went upstairs and hid for a month.

PENNY

I missed Bobby. Still do. And I miss my boy. And I miss Hackie.

PENNY'S SISTER

Well, you know where Hackie is, don't you? Right where you left him. Right in the middle of a mess. With your hotel. And your boy? Children always come home.

PENNY

It's been years.

PENNY'S SISTER

They always come home. Just like you came here.

PENNY

I wonder what that boy is up to?

PENNY'S SISTER

I bet he fell in love.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

George and Mary look out a window.

GEORGE

Baby, we talked about a lot of things. What our lives are going to be like...

MARY

Yeah, sure. Nice place in New York, a couple or three babies, settle into life in the city, the theater, the charities...

GEORGE

We skipped one. The big one. My father wants me to work for the bank. Ever been to your father's offices?

MARY

Yes.

GEORGE

Walk down those beautiful hallways, the gold doorplates. Lawyer after lawyer.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And they have more of them downtown. All the lawyers that money can buy.

MARY

Yeah. So?

GEORGE

You know who doesn't have any lawyers fighting for em? Colored folks who want to vote. Folks get arrested for peddling socialism. Folks on death row. Women working in factories. That teacher teaching Darwin. There's a law firm that does that kind of work.

MARY

You want to do everything your father hates. Is that why you're doing this?

GEORGE

No. I'm not going to make a life for our family that's all about not being my father. I really hope that's not what you thought I was doing.

MARY

Sorry.

GEORGE

This is what I want. If I do it, a lot of things you want may not happen. A lot of friends will stop talking to us. Getting on the museum board, the social register, not likely. Maybe we'll never be rich again. This is why I didn't come up to your room last night.

MARY

What? What are you talking about?

GEORGE

I didn't want to do...that, until you knew where I intend to go. Until you knew you wanted to come along with me. I thought you might back out. It means your whole life changes. Things are coming to a head tomorrow, you need to decide tonight. Sorry.

MARY
Hey. Either way.

She gives him a ferocious kiss and leaves.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Hackie in a chair, drained, his black eye fading. Penny enters with a suitcase, touches his face.

PENNY
Bouncing baby girl. Eight pounds of her. A real screamer. Tell me you're done with that blackboard, or I'm getting right back on the train.

HACKIE
It's over. The final score -

PENNY
I don't care. Let's have a long talk about this whole thing, and we'll see how long I stay in this business.

INT. PENNY'S SELDOM-USED DINING ROOM - DAY

George waits with Henry, Alice and Martha. Hackie waits with one-tenth his usual energy. Mary walks in, nods, smiles, and hugs George.

GEORGE
You're sure it's the right thing?

MARY
I have no idea. But let's do it.

HENRY
No sleeping together - what did we come down here for?

GEORGE
If we jumped into bed, there's no way our fathers would listen to anything. They'd be screaming murder. This way, we might get a word in edgewise before they try to round up a lynching party.

The eight parents enter. The detectives follow.

MARY'S MOTHER

Mary, Good Lord, are you alright -

HACKIE

They're fine. They've been in my hotel. In separate rooms. It was their idea. You're little girl is still a virgin.

Henry and Alice exchange panicked looks.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

Everybody sit, be civil. The detectives can stay outside... My house, my rules.

ALICE

Boy, if I haven't heard that one a couple of times.

The detectives glare at Hackie and leave.

HENRY'S MOTHER

Alright. Let's be civil.

HACKIE

How did all this start? You people all know each other? Go to all the same clubs, the same parties...?

HENRY'S MOTHER

Our husbands all work for different banks. During the Twenties we were thick as fleas. The Crash hit, Wall Street turned into a war. Families destroyed, friendships ruined, fortunes evaporate. We survived. But some things got broken along the way.

HENRY'S FATHER

Our most valuable assets are our children. We train them to rule New York so New York can rule the world. Instead, they did...this.

HACKIE

Did you say assets?

ALICE'S FATHER

Let me try again. We love our children. How are you kids going to eat?

ALICE

You're cutting us off? ...Sounds like a threat. The scary detectives were a nice touch. "We love our children."

ALICE'S FATHER

That's not what I meant...

ALICE

Yes it was...Henry and George are smart, they've got guts. What else do we need? Be nice to have our families behind us.

MARY'S FATHER

Girl hasn't heard a word we've said.

HACKIE

Good Lord. You folks with the daughters - has your girl listened to a thing you've said since she became a teenager?

MARY'S FATHER

Of course not.

HACKIE

Then what the hell makes you think she's going to listen now? Girls don't listen to advice. Ever. You know why? Most of the advice they get is dead wrong. A girl wants to be free, and the advice she gets is from people who want to keep her under their thumb. Boys too. Only thing a child listens to, is that voice in his head.

(looking at Penny)

When that voice tells him to go after the one he loves...

PENNY

(close to tears)

Hackie. Please. Don't.

HACKIE

Birds gotta fly. ...You fellas learned the classics in college? History of the human race. 5000 years, teenagers been trying to jump into bed with each other, and adults been trying to stop em.

(MORE)

HACKIE (CONT'D)

So far the score is Kids 5000,
Adults zero. You're going to beat
those odds? These kids had the guts
to come here, and the backbone to
stay out of each other's drawers
til you got here. They waited so
you could see em get married. If
you can come to your senses. They
gambled on you, even after you sent
men after em with guns...I'll be
right outside.

ALICE'S FATHER

And who are you again?

HACKIE

Taxi driver.

MARY'S MOTHER

(aside to her daughter)

Mary. I brought you my shoes.

MARY

You wore them at your wedding? Oh
Mama...

MARY'S MOTHER

I wore them when I conceived you...

MARY

The wedding?

MARY'S MOTHER

Honeymoon. Still had rice in my
hair --

MARY

You still had your shoes on -

MARY'S MOTHER

We broke a chair, we broke a mirror
-

MARY

Daddy??

MARY'S MOTHER

A night to remember. And here you
are.

MARY

(looking at the shoes)

I'm afraid to touch em now.

GEORGE'S FATHER

(aside to his son)

That communist law firm you've been talking to? I donate every year. Don't tell anybody or I might as well be in the same doghouse you'll be living in.

GEORGE

You knew.

GEORGE'S FATHER

I'm still smarter than you. But you've got a good heart. Must have got it from your mother. It's going to get you into all sorts of trouble. ...And now Martha.

MARTHA

Yes, Daddy? Time to get out the bullwhip?

GEORGE'S FATHER

I know what the other four are doing here. Why are you here? What is the matter with you?

GEORGE'S MOTHER

Why don't you let me try, dear.
(to Martha)

Even after this little adventure of yours, there are still young men asking after you. Young Andrew from that steel family, Richard's family is in the copper mines.

MARTHA

Copper. Are we talking about men or minerals? Andrew has breath that can kill at ten feet and Richard pokes me where I don't want to be poked.

GEORGE'S FATHER

We're going to find you a good match, in New York -

MARTHA

You want to pick someone for me?...I took a walk to the depot. I love trains! I can get all the way to Chicago for fifty-one dollars and a sack of sandwiches. Twentieth Century Limited. Sounds like fun.

GEORGE'S MOTHER
Please don't.

MARTHA
(serene)
I'm so glad we understand each other.

MARY
I'm going to go try these shoes on.

MARY'S MOTHER
Go break a chair, sweetie.

MARY
Mama!

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

Hackie and Penny meet in the hall.

PENNY
Hackie, you made me cry in public.
Baby, I'm so sorry...

HACKIE
What are you talking about?

PENNY
All this time I thought you were a
crazy man, just wanted to keep the
turnstiles turning as fast as
possible. I know you twenty years
and I don't know you at all. You
really care about those kids.

A wild look appears in her eyes.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Hackie, two Thursdays from now.
Marry me.

HACKIE
What?...Don't get all silly on me,
just because you're sorry.

PENNY
I don't -- I feel like I'm losing
my mind. ...Being unhappy all the
time is hard work. Exhausting.
(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

Just trying to get up in the morning, like I had a big old manhole cover sitting on my chest. Today, just now, the weight was gone.

HACKIE

Still not following you.

PENNY

I need your arms around me every night. I heard that voice in my head.

HACKIE

But you holler at me every day, you say those horrible things.

PENNY

Well it's only one day in ten that I want to kill you, probably beats the average. Being with you, it's like being that fat lady in a Marx Brothers movie. It's like the circus is in town. ...You were right. I need to laugh. A lot.

Diana joins them, carrying wedding paperwork.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Diana! Guess what?

HACKIE

I finally roped her and hogtied her.

DIANA

Do it today, got the forms right here.

PENNY

I want a proper wedding. A slow wedding.

DIANA

Do we know how to do one of those?

PENNY

Not every girl has to get married like it's an Apache ambush.

Diana is looking at a form.

DIANA

I assume you're not pregnant? Never mind. Sheriff's new law, you need to wait two days.

HACKIE

I've waited for this girl since the Great War. Twenty years.

DIANA

Well you just squeaked by then. Jesus, Hackie, you did it!

HACKIE

I'm moving into her room. The big bed.

DIANA

Swell! One more bedroom to sell!

HACKIE

Pretty soon we'll have plenty of room.

(to Penny)

This only works when we're together. You're the boss, it's your job is to keep me from doing crazy things.

PENNY

Well, I'm doing a terrible job, then. I'm doing this on one condition. Get rid of that damn blackboard, it makes you crazy.

HACKIE

Blackboard doesn't matter. We lost.

Martha and Alice approach.

MARTHA

That Diana girl says you own this hotel. You allowed to do that?

PENNY

You can in Maryland. Some states, need a man to sign everything.

MARTHA

And you're the boss here?

PENNY

I tell Hackie what to do. Sometimes he does it. It's an adventure.

MARTHA

Wonder what the law is, back in New York?

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Continuation. Penny and Hackie find the minister.

PENNY

One more thing. The Baptist minister. Just this once, you're going to let him run a wedding his way.

HACKIE

You mean -

PENNY

Yep, go to his office, let him explain all the rules to you, no brass bands, no dancing girls, a normal wedding.

HACKIE

The part where we both got to be virgins...?

BAPTIST MINISTER

I'm giving you a mulligan on that one. Wouldn't be the first time. But the rest is by the book.

HACKIE

You're enjoying this.

BAPTIST MINISTER

Like a thick steak. Revenge is so sweet it ought to be a sin.

INT. PENNY'S LOBBY -- DAY

Hackie, Penny and Diana, depressed, look out at a large group of couples.

PENNY

Sheriff's coming. To gloat. Don't give him a reason to arrest you - he wants all of us in jail. Cover up John Henry!

Diana throws a towel over the phallic totem.

DIANA

This is it. Our last day. Look at them folks. All they want is to get married.

PENNY

Well even we can only marry em so fast. Can we get to em all in time?

DIANA

Not by noon. Last-minute rush, it was too big. Their last chance at freedom.

PENNY

They say there's folks out west stole our idea. Wedding chapels in the desert. Place called Las Vegas.

HACKIE

Who wants to march across the whole country just to get to the desert?

PENNY

What happens to us now?

DIANA

The town dies. The chapels, the flowers, the hotels. I lived in an old factory town. Depression hits, the few smart people hit the road, and everyone else just sits there, waiting to die.

PENNY

Sweetie, how are we going to survive? I'll have to sell the hotel...?

HACKIE

We'll be broke. Still want to marry me?

She smiles and nods. They hold each other.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Continuation. Hackie and Penny look down the road, see worried shopkeepers tidying in front of empty shops, pulling in chairs and signs, boarding windows, locking doors. Dotty catches the sheriff walking toward Hackie's.

DOTTY
Sheriff, come here with me.

SHERIFF
Dotty?

DOTTY
Come on. Right here.

SHERIFF
We're in the middle of Main Street.

DOTTY
That's right, there ain't a lick of traffic. No brides, no taxis, no trucks full of beer and flowers. Nothing.

SHERIFF
Still dangerous.

DOTTY
There's Walter boarding up the hotel. Been there twenty years.

SHERIFF
Twenty five.

DOTTY
Lillian, sweeping the stoop on the dress shop. Not sure why, ain't nobody going in there all day. Probably just looking for something to fill her day.

SHERIFF
Where's Edna?

DOTTY
There's her shop. There's a fair chance she just caught a train out of here.

SHERIFF
Edna? Gone for good?

DOTTY
You could fire a cannonball down Main Street and not hurt nobody. ...Sheriff, I love you to pieces, so it pains me to tell you this. You got a surprise coming.

INT. PENNY'S LOBBY -- DAY

Continuation. The sheriff arrives at Penny's.

SHERIFF

Alright listen up. Assembly passed a law, new rules to get hitched. I'm going to be right here, check every license. Pull out the birth certificates, I want to see em. Most of you gonna get right back on that train.

JUDGE arrives.

DIANA

Your Honor...

JUDGE

Can I have your attention! I'm the judge here in town, spent all week looking at my law books. Turns out I can write a court order allowing folks to get married lickety-split like before, if there is a thing called good and sufficient cause.

PREGNANT GIRL 1

Good and sufficient cause?

JUDGE

It's called an exigent situation.

PREGNANT GIRL 2

Exigent - huh?

JUDGE

Are any of you girls pregnant?

PREGNANT GIRL 3

I beg your pardon?

JUDGE

If you're pregnant, you don't have to worry about beating the clock at noon.

(aside, to Hackie)

Hackie, you come to court in the morning, we'll do the paperwork crack of dawn before the sheriff can interfere.

DIANA

Does that mean we're back in
business?

HACKIE

Damn right it does!

The crowd CHEERS.

HACKIE (CONT'D)

So who's pregnant?

A girl puts her hand up.

PREGNANT BOY 1

Becky! The whole town can see!

PREGNANT GIRL 1

Oh, so NOW you're worried about my
reputation.

PREGNANT GIRL 2

...So if I'm pregnant, I can get
married?

DIANA

That's what he said.

PREGNANT GIRL 2

Then deal me in!

PREGNANT BOY 2

You told me you were a virgin.

PREGNANT GIRL 2

Are you just plain stupid? We got
to get married. We go back home
without a license, Daddy's gonna
get you for the Mann Act. You go to
jail, jackass.

PREGNANT BOY 2

I'm a virgin.

PREGNANT GIRL 2

Me too. You want to stay a virgin
for a year or two? Keep it up.
Hackie, can you get me a hotel room
with twin beds?

PREGNANT BOY 2

Okay, you made your point!

HACKIE

Why would we have twin beds here?

PREGNANT BOY 3

...Hey, Hackie, I'm pregnant too!

HACKIE

Um, sir, you do know that means you're expecting a child...

PREGNANT BOY 3

My fiancée, I mean.

PREGNANT GIRL 3

Thank you so much for volunteering me.

PREGNANT BOY 3

Well, I can't be pregnant, now can I?

PREGNANT GIRL 4

Um, sir, are you gonna test us to see if we're really pregnant?

HACKIE

Ma'am, I'm really just a cab driver. I'm not gonna roll you into the garage and look up your tailpipe.

The girl glances down, confused.

PREGNANT GIRL 4

My tailpipe -
(momentarily shocked)
Okay, deal me in! Pregnant, I mean.

PENNY

So they don't have to prove they're pregnant?

JUDGE

The law doesn't say. It's all up to me.

Judge smiles. Sheriff's face has fallen open.

SHERIFF

It took me months to get that law passed, and you undid it in a day.

PENNY

My God, Hackie --

She hugs him again, beaming.

On a bench a genuinely pregnant couple sits. He's content. The girl, with an angelic, virginal face and a sweet tiny voice, is worried, and enormous.

PREGNANT BOY 5

You know they'll take good care of you. My sister had four of em. Girls have babies all the time.

PREGNANT GIRL 5

Sure, easy for you.

PREGNANT BOY 5

The baby will pop out just fine, after an hour of yelling and screaming.

PREGNANT GIRL 5

Uh huh.

PREGNANT BOY 5

Just like when I put it in there.

PREGNANT GIRL 5

(smiles)

We did make an awful racket.

PREGNANT BOY 5

What do you mean, "we"?

She laughs and snuggles up to him.

PREGNANT GIRL 5

Oh shut up.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Outside, Hackie, Penny and the judge; a streetful of shopkeepers CHEERING and waving to him. He smiles and waves back, savoring the moment.

JUDGE

You weren't my first stop.

DOTTY

You make sure you send all those girls up to my store, Penny, you owe me one!

But she laughs as she says it.

EXT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Diana finds Hackie on the porch with the light on. Penny stands in the doorway.

HACKIE

Okay, Diana, got your pencil? Same ad in the New York papers, but add a line at the end. On the spot, same-day service if you're in a family way.

DIANA

You sure you want to do this?

HACKIE

You want to stay in business? This is how we stay alive.

PENNY

Hackie! You know what happens next?

HACKIE

Yep. We're about to have a population explosion.

PENNY

You're gonna have girls all across New York, dragging their boyfriends into the backseats of cars, bedrooms, parlors...

HACKIE

I thought you were all for romance.

PENNY

This is breeding people like rabbits!

HACKIE

The sheriff is still gonna try to shut down the town. Whole county goes back to raising chickens, corn, tomatoes. Where's your sense of romance?

PENNY

Dammit, Hackie, I thought we were gonna slow down!

They have a staredown, until Penny finally starts smiling. Sheriff arrives.

SHERIFF

I thought we shut you people down.

PENNY

All these poor girls, got knocked up.

SHERIFF

Town is as full up as it ever was.

PENNY

Sheriff, I'm like you, been fighting off romance for twenty years. Isn't it exhausting?

SHERIFF

Not sure I follow you.

PENNY

Me and Hackie. We're getting married.

SHERIFF

Bully for you, Penny.
Congratulations.

Sheriff walks off in a daze.

PENNY

...Diana - that boy Jasper? Works for the sheriff?

DIANA

Yeah.

PENNY

Our sheriff?

DIANA

Yeah.

PENNY

One good thing about the elopement game, we're never around when the hearts get broke. Don't let that boy run you through the wringer.

DIANA

Never had my heart broke before.

Penny considers this.

PENNY

Never had a broken heart, not once?
Saddest thing I've heard all day.

Diana leaves.

PENNY (CONT'D)

And you! Got the whole circus going
again with this baby ad.

HACKIE

I'm gonna save your hotel. I want
to be able to eat meat this winter.

PENNY

Well, I'm still pretty steamed at
you. I'm gonna go up, finish
getting all my dresses unwrinkled.

HACKIE

Well, that's an awful shame. It's a
beautiful night out there.

PENNY

Don't you start.

HACKIE

And I got dinner in the oven.

PENNY

What you making?

HACKIE

Well, if you're not interested. And
I got dessert in the freezer. It's
got banana, coconut, and - what was
it?

PENNY

What?

HACKIE

Pineapple. I'm sure Diana would eat
it right up....Good night, Penny.

He strolls toward the kitchen.

PENNY

Hackie, don't you go near that
freezer, it's mine! You're just
plain mean.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE CHAPEL - DAY

Black clouds hang over the town. Penny stands in the doorway in a simple wedding dress. A colossal THUNDERCLAP.

She sees a boy approach, running, BOBBY III. Two figures follow the boy in the distance, also running.

BOBBY III

Maam?

PENNY

Hello, sweetie, are you lost?

BOBBY III

I'm looking for somebody named Penny?

PENNY

That's me. Listen I'm a little busy, I'm getting married today.

BOBBY III

Wow. Um, I'm your grandson.

Shock on her face. She looks up from the boy.

PENNY

(using her Mom voice)

Bobby Junior, where the hell are you?

The boy flees. More THUNDER. The running figures approach: Penny's son BOBBY, and his wife SUE who goes to chase the boy.

BOBBY

Wow, some things never change.

Penny hugs her son long and hard, crying.

PENNY

Make me a bride and a grandma all in the same day? Sweetie, you look -

-

BOBBY

The bridge I was building out west, it's done. Next one is Philadelphia.

PENNY

Right up the road! You can take the train right down here!

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

I've got to get my grandma shoes on! I've got so much to tell you --

BOBBY

This part wasn't my idea. The whole sneaking up on you thing.

PENNY

Well who the hell came up with -

She figures it out.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Hackie, you get your butt out here!

Hackie appears in a suit.

HACKIE

Isn't it bad luck to see the -

She hugs Hackie. The boy reappears with Sue.

PENNY

Thank you!

(to the boy)

Sorry, sweetie, being a grandma came up on me sudden-like. Got a Co-cola for you in the ice box.

SUE

I'm Sue. Sorry about the ambush. You need any help?

PENNY

Yes, you can help me get my heart started again.

SUE

How about a cold drink?

THUNDER.

PENNY

Holy Jeppers, everybody get inside!

INT. CHAPEL -- DAY

Continuation. Hackie, Penny go into the chapel. The others follow bit by bit. Diana arrives at a run with Jasper. THUNDERCLAP.

PENNY

And here comes Romeo and Juliet, to
unite the families at war.

DIANA

Jasper here's gonna be the next
sheriff, I'm gonna see to it.

HACKIE

And there will be peace in the
land.

Penny at the window.

PENNY

Hackie. Look down Main Street!

THUNDER, and torrential rain. Sheriff enters the chapel
running, fancy uniform, Dotty on his arm.

PENNY (CONT'D)

I can't believe they're speaking to
each other. She went behind him
with the judge, wrecked everything
for him.

HACKIE

He doesn't know that. Maybe he came
to surrender.

SHERIFF

Felicitations on the day.

PENNY

Thank you.

SHERIFF

I mean it, Penny. You've had a long
hard road. ...Hackie...

Hackie and the sheriff exchange a look.

HACKIE

Didn't say a thing, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

Not even to gloat?

HACKIE

Not my way.

SHERIFF

Well, now she's roped you and
hogtied you. Serves you right.

DOTTY
 (to the Sheriff)
 Why don't you see if you can find
 us some seats, Hubert.

Sheriff heads down the aisle.

HACKIE
 Man's name is Hubert...You're the
 bee's knees, Dotty. If General Lee
 had you at Gettysburg, we'd be in a
 foreign country right now. You look
 happy.

DOTTY
 Course I'm happy. Weddings are my
 life.

PENNY
 You got plans for the sheriff.

HACKIE
 We outsmarted him once, he's gonna
 keep interfering with us. If you
 can keep him hopping, I'm thinking
 he'll be too busy to even try.

DOTTY
 Dotty's coming. He'll never know
 what hit him.

Bobby relaxes in the front row with his family. The minister
 arrives at the altar and Hackie takes his position.

HACKIE
 Um, Reverend? You and Penny are
 pretty firm about playing this one
 by the book. People are supposed to
 be virgins when they get hitched?
 This is Penny's son.

BAPTIST MINISTER
 Gracious. Um, hello.

HACKIE
 And this is her grandson.

BAPTIST MINISTER
 What on earth -- well, here's
 another one I won't be telling my
 bishop about. Like the Catholics
 say, ego te absolvo.

SUE

(to Bobby)

Wait til your mother finds out
she's gonna be a grandma again in
the fall.

BOBBY

How about we tell her after?

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

THUNDER, still. Penny turns over and over in bed until she is wrapped in a blanket, naked shoulders peeking out from beneath. Hackie lays next to her with no blanket.

PENNY

Hackie? Be a sweetie and open that window? I'm hot.

HACKIE

It's nice and breezy over here.

PENNY

I'm way behind on the laundry. I had to sleep in my skin. And that window is waaaaay over there.

She kisses him and runs her hand over him.

HACKIE

Dammit!

He gets up to open the window.

PENNY

Serves you right for tempting me with ice cream.

He returns and she kisses him again.

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE, NEW YORK COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

A young couple drives up to the hole; TEDDY and SWIMMING GIRL; the girl has a ribbon in her hair.

SWIMMING GIRL

Teddy, did you read the Times today? The new ad, Susquehanna?

TEDDY

Nope.

SWIMMING GIRL
Turn right here.

TEDDY
What, into the trees?

SWIMMING GIRL
That little lane, see it?

TEDDY
The road to the lake?

SWIMMING GIRL
The ad says we can get married on
the spot, if I'm expecting.

TEDDY
A baby?

SWIMMING GIRL
We're going for a swim in the lake.

TEDDY
Wearing what?

SWIMMING GIRL
It's a nice hot day, Teddy.

TEDDY
Oh.

SWIMMING GIRL
I love you, Teddy.

TEDDY
Love you right back.

SWIMMING GIRL
And once we're done with our swim,
we'll lay in the grass and let the
breeze dry us off. And we'll talk
about Maryland.

TEDDY
Okay.

SWIMMING GIRL
Just think. This weekend, a
thousand girls are taking their men
into their arms right now. Right
this minute...And after we talk,
we'll go for another swim. Just so
we can pound the nail home. Are you
up for a double-header?

TEDDY
(clears his throat)
I am now.

EXT. BY A SWIMMING HOLE - DAY

A pond with a beach and lots of grass, surrounded by trees. Teddy exits the car, goes around to the girl's door. She flips her shoes into the car, slides the ribbon out of her hair, gets a blanket out of the back seat. She smiles and takes his hand. They walk toward the water. She kisses him.

FADE OUT.

THE END.