

The Widow Daredevil

Written by
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The script for *The Widow Daredevil* was
an Official Selection of
The 2020 Beverly Hills Film Festival



FADE IN:

Early DAREDEVIL MONTAGE - (actual photos and clips late 1800s-early 1900s): in flickering sepia; a man in a home-made wing-suit-- leaps from the Eiffel Tower. A stunter dives from the Statue Of Liberty's torch. Then, years later a high wire walker works without a net. Then, grainy film of TEN ACROBATS all piled onto and all riding the same bicycle.

FRANK (V.O.)

Human beings have always been driven to impress each other and prove themselves through courageous acts of derring-do. Yes my friends, that spirit of, "*Look Ma, no hands.*" Has coursed through our veins since time immemorial.

MONTAGE CONTINUES: Vintage film of "THE HUMAN FLY" --a man scaling the crown of an early NY skyscraper. Then, grainy footage of a tireless swimmer cutting through the choppy English Channel. A HUMAN CANNONBALL arcs high into the air in a boom of dust landing on a net 100 feet away. Trapeze triple flips, a go-cart speeds down a rickety ramp and through a twenty foot loop-to-loop.

FRANK (V.O.)

Our story begins a long, long time ago. Long before people were blasting themselves out of cannons, shooting river rapids in barrels, or strolling the wings of stunt prop planes. No, our story goes back to a time when the Guinness Book was still the Guinness Pamphlet.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BAY CITY - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The sparkling Saginaw River is crowded with barges stuffed with fresh-cut logs, towed by dusty mules. The streets bustle with earnest TOWNSFOLK in a steady flow of penny-farthing high wheel bicycles, carriages and horses.

TITLE: Bay City, Michigan - 1897

NEWSIE

Extra. Extra. Great news everybody!
President McKinley enters the U.S. into Spanish-American War.

A NEWSIE quickly sells out the late edition. When the throng clears we discover DARLA BRADDOCK (16) a tom-boy.

Darla window shops with RITA (16) BETSY and a few OTHER FRIENDS. We are hearing (ADULT) DARLA'S NARRATION.

DARLA (V.O.)

My main concern in the summer of my sixteenth year, was how to spend all my time with Rita, my chucka-boo. In those days that's what we called our best girlfriend.

CHURCH BELLS CLANG, then a massive gust BLOWS through main street, spattering dust and debris. Men lose their hats. Darla and friends shield their eyes.

DARLA (V.O.)

Little did we know, we were about to set sight on the woman who would forever change our lives, and inspire millions.

A once fancy, now dilapidated STAGE COACH, rumbles in. The parched STAGE DRIVER halts the horses, choking on the stirred up dust.

STAGE DRIVER

Bay City, the end of the line.

He opens the coach and lends a hand to ANNIE EDSON-TAYLOR --a perfect picture of Victorian elegance; parasol, gloves, dress, tall flowery hat topped with an ostrich feather. Annie cautiously inspects her new surroundings, oblivious to the girls across the street, who chuckle.

RITA

Goodness me, what a throw-back.

DARLA

Uh, was that a stage coach or a time machine?

The stage driver slowly unloads the bags. Impatient Annie squeezes to the front of the line and grabs her own bag.

STAGE DRIVER

A moment Ma'am, I'm happy to oblige.

All are shocked as Annie easily lifts the over-sized bag and huffs away, unassisted. Darla is transfixed.

DARLA

She's stronger than Paul Bunyan.

BETSY

She looks like an ant carrying a bread crumb.

The girls laugh as Annie speed walks into the distance.

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Annie unpacks from CRATES that have arrived. Annie waltzes around her room as she puts away gowns, jewelry, shoes, hats. Perfumes, powders, potions, lotions, every imaginable Victorian cosmetic and womanly embellishment.

Then, Annie halts working as she hears a KITTEN MEWING.

EXT. ANNIE'S STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Gas lamps flicker. A few horses clop quietly by. Annie sets down a bowl of water on the ground. After a moment, a stray appears from the shadows and fervently drinks. Annie gently pets its head.

MONTAGE:

- NEWSPAPER OFFICE, Annie argues with an ink-covered TYPESETTER, who presents an ad for Annie's classes.
- Annie hangs posters for her school around town.
- Annie puts a flier in every door on every street.
- Annie discovers a vacant building. A sign on the door: "FOR RENT."

EXT. DARLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Returning home, Darla finds a flier on the door for "Ms. Annie's Charm School." Darla quickly crumbles and hides the flier. However, DARLA'S MOTHER approaches waving yet another flier plucked from the mailbox. Darla grimaces.

ANNIE'S SCHOOL - VARIOUS DAYS

- Annie enters the empty space carrying a FOR RENT SIGN.
- Annie refinishes hardwood floors, herself. She's woozy from chemicals, but powers through.
- TWO WORKMEN deliver a second-hand piano. In JUMP CUTS: Annie makes the poor lads set up the piano in virtually every nook and cranny of the empty place.

Finally Annie has them put the piano back where they originally suggested. She is pleased, they are exhausted.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE ANNIE'S SCHOOL - DAYS LATER

Darla and Rita and the other girls walk past Annie's school. They spy through the windows at Annie, who rapidly puts up wall paper, with the speed of a machine.

DARLA

Well, my parents signed me up.

BETSY

Mine too.

RITA

What are we supposed to learn from her?

BETSY

Persistence?

DARLA

I'm sure it's to help us find husbands.

RITA

Well, where's hers then?

The girls look depressed.

EXT. PUBLIC SWIMMING POOL - SUNSET

From behind a twelve foot tall iron fence, Darla, Rita and Betsy watch men and boys (wearing full cover suits) swimming in the public pool. Women are not allowed.

ANNIE'S SCHOOL - DAYS LATER

Opening day. Flowers are in vases, wood has been polished. Strung across the entrance a SIGN: "WELCOME STUDENTS." FAMILIES of lumber town society, bring their daughters to Annie. Annie welcomes each STUDENT inside.

ANNIE

(to various girls)

Chin up. Shoulders back. Mouth closed.

ANNIE'S SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - LATER

The girls are awed as Annie expertly plays a high tempo Mozart on piano, which underscores the following:

- In a grace class, Darla and the other girls try, but fail to walk with a single book balanced on their heads.

ANGLE ON: Annie walks confidently with a stack of books on her head.

- The girls watch, as a blind-folded Annie, quickly sets a proper, complicated dinner table setting. She is as fast as a sniper assembling a rifle.

- Around a campfire, Darla and the girls do needle-point. We see the girls' finished work in simple block letters reads: "A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOME." Annie reveals her needle-point a complete bible quote in calligraphy.

- JUMP CUTS of Annie dominating in Badminton. She spikes the birdie repeatedly, the girls are not fast enough.

- Annie leads language lessons in SPANISH, FRENCH and ITALIAN, wearing TRADITIONAL COSTUMES from each country as she teaches.

- WOODS TRAIL - Annie outpaces the girls in cross country running. Darla and the girls are starting to get irritated with Annie.

INT. GYMNASIUM - EVENING - WEEKS LATER

Annie's students, dressed in summer formal, sit rigid and silent in two rows of chairs. Annie patrols the lacquered floors, her wooden heels punctuate every step.

ANNIE

If a young lady's character becomes
besmirched by expressing certain, shall
we say... sinful emotions...

CAMERA WIDENS to REVEAL: Two rows of petrified TEEN BOYS wearing suits, seated opposite the girls.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Based on... impious attractions that
smolder and drive this young lady to
pursue horizontal refreshment... Such a
wicked imp can no longer be accepted into
a society of pure, chaste ladies. This
vixen-outcast will be forever regarded as
a fallen woman. A ceiling expert. Her
reputation forever stained.

Everyone is spooked. Then, Annie drops a needle on a PHONOGRAPH and kicks off a raucous square dance.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(square dance call)

A-FLING YOUR PARTNER DOWN THE TRAIL,
(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 WITH A DO-SI-DO AND THEN YA SAIL.
 KEEP ON DANCIN' WITH THE GAL YA GOT,
 SPIN HER ROUND, AND GO RED HOT!

The students hold each other at terrified stiff-arms-lengths as they robotically square dance. Then, Annie scoops up a fiddle and plays like a bluegrass legend.

DARLA (V.O.)
 Ms. Annie's talents were endless. In fact, she made an impression on our entire town.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Annie sings loud and piercing. Other PARISHIONERS cringe.

INT. BINGO HALL - NIGHT

With laser focus, Annie surveys multiple bingo cards at once. To OTHER BINGO PLAYERS' chagrin, Annie waves a hanky to signal Bingo.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

A small BARN is on fire. The men of the BAY CITY FIREFIGHTERS bucket and ladder brigade extinguish the blaze by passing sloshing BUCKETS made from leather.

DARLA (V.O.)
 Annie formed the first ever Bay City Ladies Auxiliary-- whose sole purpose was to assist the volunteer fire bucket brigade.

LADIES AUXILIARY
 (chant)
 Help, help, help. Help is on the way!

Annie and a group of OLDER LADIES burst into the barn wearing jackets that read: LADIES AUXILIARY. The fire fighters remove their helmets and take a knee. Annie and her gals proudly serve donuts and small cups of lemonade.

EXT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - LAWN

Annie teaches deep knee bends, burpies and all manner of old school acrobatics. A few students try somersaults. Annie is a machine, she can do unlimited.

Annie throws herself into somersault after somersault while the girls cheer louder and louder.

EXT. PARK - WEEKS LATER

A gazebo at the Fourth of July celebration, a mostly in tune version of YANKEE DOODLE DANDY fills the air courtesy of THE BAY CITY HIGH SCHOOL BAND. Annie joyfully waves sparklers with the other TOWNSFOLK.

LATER: A potato sack race. Annie is partnered with a Norman Rockwell-looking kid, BILLY HOLLERAN, whom we glimpsed at the square dance. The race begins and a surprisingly fit Annie and Billy destroy the competition.

DARLA (V.O.)

Ms. Annie and Billy Halloran crushed the competition in the yearly potato sack race. Potato Sack favorites; Mrs. Langtry and Doctor Coughlan came in a distant second. Annie and Billy were as happy as if they'd just won gold in the Olympics.

Annie and Billy celebrate their potato sack win in SLOW-MOTION, the golden sunlight all around them.

EXT. PAVILION - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

We're at a COTILLION where a made up Darla and Rita and the other STUDENTS subtly roll their eyes through the pageantry: Annie presents her girls in white gowns and satin gloves.

LATER: Darla and Rita stand in the crowd of debutantes. Darla looks upset. Rita turns to her.

RITA

Finding a suitor makes you nervous?

DARLA

I guess I just don't want things to unfold for me like how they did for my mother and father.

ANGLE ON: DARLA'S PARENTS. MR. AND MRS. BRADDOCK waltz robotically in the crowd. Mrs. Braddock musters a smile at Darla. Darla waves and smiles.

RITA

They seem happy enough.

Timid Betsy enters and delivers cups of fruit punch to Darla and Rita.

RITA (CONT'D)

Thanks Betsy.

DARLA

My mother wears herself ragged, eighteen hours a day, for what? Her only aim in life can't just be to cook the same ten meals on repeat. Could you see living that way?

BETSY

Completely boring.

RITA

I would go mad.

DARLA

And, why can't a woman work outside of the home? My mother scrubs and scrapes herself to sleep every night. My father comes home and reads his paper and complains. Is that all there is to look forward to?

RITA

No. ...That's if you're lucky enough to even find a husband.

Darla tugs at her corset as if it has bitten her.

DARLA

Ugh. These corsets! I feel like a tube of tooth polish being squeezed from the middle. I can't believe I've been sentenced to wear this portable torture chamber the rest of my days.

BETSY

I cannot fully exhale.

The ORCHESTRA finishes a song. Darla's parents bow to each other. Darla and the girls applaud and sip punch.

ANGLE ON: THE STAGE.

Annie bounds onto the stage and keeps the applause going. She smiles broadly and scans the crowd of logging elites.

ANNIE

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. You know, I have crossed this great continent eight times ocean to ocean. But, I am pleased to call Bay City, Michigan-- my new home.

Applause.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Yes. This appears to be my kind of gentry. Women in lacy pastel dresses. Men in waistcoats, top hats and cravats. Round headed children in pantaloons gnawing on pungent licorice bars.

The crowd is unsure how to respond.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I can't think of a finer place to settle down and live out my golden years, teaching the next generations of Bay City women: grace, charm, elegance!

People nod. Darla's eyes widen.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I was fortunate enough to be married myself for eighteen wonderful-- months. Sadly my husband lost his life.

(whispers)

Civil War.

People bow their heads. Tip hats.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Brought down by the musket's mighty ball. The Lord never blessed me with another husband. But, what could I expect? I was a widow and already twenty years old. How could I find a husband at that age?

Darla and girls look to each other, worried. Annie raises a drink, everyone toasts.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Here's to helping the next generation of young ladies acquire husbands!

Applause.

EXT. PAVILION - LATER

Darla, Rita and other debutantes are on stage in a receiving line and introduced individually to the large AUDIENCE OF LOGGING ELITES.

Each debutante is announced and then is walked around the stage, guided by her FATHER who then presents her. Her YOUNGER MALE ESCORT then joins and escorts her away.

Darla is paired with Billy.

LATER: Billy and Darla are waltzing-- Darla winces and tugs at her corset as if it's biting her.

BILLY

...Are you okay?

DARLA

I don't feel like myself in this costume.

BILLY

Well, if I may say, you look pleasant.

DARLA

Thank you. So, Mr. Holleran.

BILLY

Uh-- Yes, Ms. Braddock?

DARLA

Are you of the opinion that a woman should promise obedience to her husband-- him becoming in essence, her master. The law and religion giving him power to deprive her of her basic freedoms, rights and to dispense justice in the home?

BILLY

Well, jeez I dunno. This is my first one of these things.

DARLA

(chuckles)

Sorry, Billy... Just shut up and waltz.

They dance as Darla's focus drifts to Annie in the crowd; Annie is exhibiting perfect form and timing as she waltzes with a DECORATED MILITARY MAN. Darla laughs.

BILLY

What?

DARLA

Ms. Annie.

BILLY

What about her?

DARLA

(marveling)

I don't know. She somehow escaped. She's free. Here is a woman who is living her own way in the world. She fully supports herself, living as she wants-- that's something to be admired.

Billy hadn't thought of that. The dance ends. Darla and Billy bow to each other.

LATER: Darla, Betsy and Rita watch Annie, who mixes with the elite from logging society. Annie is shaking hands, making jest, enjoying witty and droll conversations.

DARLA (V.O.)

Ms. Annie had it all. She was eating surf and turf with sophisticates, she had her livelihood, standing in the community and a cat to come home to. What could possibly go wrong?

FREEZE: On Annie's joyful smiling face.

DARLA (V.O.)

A dangerous question to ask when things are going well.

EXT. STREET - EVENING - WEEKS LATER

Cool Fall evening. STRAY DOGS BARK as Annie walks through a dirty part of town. UNFORTUNATES in baggy and ragged clothes mill about. Annie passes the dreaded POOR HOUSE, complete with scorched front lawn, dilapidated shutters. A light rain begins to fall.

A GRUBBY GUY on a rickety porch swing nods 'hello.'

GRUBBY GUY/WINSTON

Evenin' ma'am.

He grins, but Annie doesn't dignify him with a response.

ANNIE'S SCHOOL - OFFICE - LATER

Annie is up late, crunching numbers on an abacus. She writes figures with a quill she dips in blue ink. Annie pushes the beads around and frowns at the results. Annie shoves the abacus to the ground where it shatters sending beads all over. Annie's cat runs for cover.

ANNIE'S SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Darla at the piano, other GIRLS observe. There are clearly fewer students than before.

TITLE: Autumn, 1899

Annie stands over Darla with a yard stick in her hand. Annie starts a METRONOME. Click, click, click, click. Darla plays "Piano Concerto No. 1," Tchaikovsky -- and misses a note. WHACK. Annie strikes her knuckles.

Darla takes a deep breath and tries again. Click, click, click, click. Darla plays and again fumbles the piece, Annie raps her knuckles-- it stings.

Other girls wince in sympathy pain. Darla's eyes filled with tears she and Annie have a stare down. Annie doesn't flinch, again starts the metronome. Darla plays, makes a mistake on purpose, Annie hits her. Darla hits the wrong note again, Annie hits her. Then again, Annie swings the ruler, Darla catches it.

DARLA

What good in finding a husband with swollen knuckles, no ring would fit.

ANNIE

(coming to)

Apologies Ms. Darla. Enrollment is down. Third term in a row, simply plummeting.

Rita steps forward, tentatively.

RITA

Perhaps you need to take out an ad?

ANNIE

I am running ads in every paper and pamphlet for fifty miles. The classes are no longer something people want.

DARLA

Ms. Annie, it's about to be the year 1900. Threshold of the new millennium.

RITA

Modern girls are not so interested in being decadent-- we're interested in having a voice.

ANNIE

I teach the *best* vocal lessons.

RITA

We don't mean elocution.

DARLA

We crave to be captivated, Ms. Annie. And, not by the flashy modern world of vocational labor.

Annie slams her hands on the piano.

ANNIE

Society has gone mad! You ladies are unredeemable and infectious.

RITA

Ms. Annie, we dream of freedom.

ANNIE

When I was your age, all I dreamt of were embroidered taffeta gowns shipped C.O.D. from Chicago. Next you'll be wanting to ride bicycles!

RITA

Vice President Roosevelt's oldest daughter Alice rides a bicycle long distances-- unchaperoned!

ANNIE

Riding astride on a bicycle jeopardizes purity and awakens sensual feelings!

DARLA

You're resisting the tides of progress.

Annie looks stunned as Darla pulls from her books, a Stanton/Anthony publication: "THE REVOLUTION."

DARLA (CONT'D)

Haven't you been keeping up with what's happening all over? Are you following Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, heads of National Woman Suffrage?

Annie grabs the rag and thumbs through disdainfully.

ANNIE

Pfft. Who are these extremists?

BETSY

Extremists?

RITA

Susan B. Anthony is a Quaker.

ANNIE

Good luck finding a husband-- "Susan B. Lonely."

DARLA

How can you say that when half of the entire population has no voice in the halls of legislation.

ANNIE

Let husbands do the voting for the family!

RITA

Not every woman wants a family.

Annie whirls like she's dizzy.

ANNIE

If you'll excuse me, Ms. Rita, I need to go to the cloak room and pass out.

Annie digs through REPORT CARDS piled on her desk.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Time for report cards. Darla, in Penmanship you get a B minus. Posture, you get a C minus. Respect for authority, D minus. Huh, only thing up this quarter appears to be your weight.

Darla's eyes flash red, then she and the girls storm out.

EXT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - YARD - CONTINUOUS

As the students leave, Annie desperately does somersaults on the grass. But, unimpressed, the students walk off leaving Annie alone.

EXT. RIVER WALK - SHORT TIME LATER

Still shaken, Darla, Rita, Betsy and OTHERS walk near the river.

Darla favors her hand which is red from Annie whacking it. Darla bends down and soaks her sore hand in the cool water. They all sit. Rita rolls a cigarette.

DARLA

I marvel at so much about Ms. Annie, I just can't understand this quirk in her.

RITA

How can such a smart talented woman be *against* woman's rights?

ALL GIRLS

(overlapping)

Yes. Precisely. I agree.

DARLA

She's not against women's rights, per se. She just comes from a different era.

BETSY

She comes from a different planet.

The girls laugh.

DARLA

She's out of touch, but deep down she just wants to be a part of something. And if you think about it from Ms. Annie's perspective; she's at a crossroads. She actually needs the times not to change for her livelihood to continue.

RITA

Too bad that the shifting societal values are incongruous with Ms. Annie's retirement plans.

Rita puts a cigarette in her mouth and flicks a MATCH.

(LITERAL) MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Annie flicks a kitchen MATCH and lights a candle. Deep in thought, Annie paces and confides in her captive cat.

ANNIE

I know on one paw, I need to embrace the times. But, on the other paw-- I can't understand the new generation. Haven't I always acted for the betterment of society, the world?

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Am I not to defend society itself from
impious degradation? You're right, Misty.
It is settled. I must act. I must save my
school.

EXT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - A FEW DAYS LATER

Flowers in vases, wood has been polished. Strung across
the entrance, a SIGN, this time it reads: "WELCOME
PARENTS." As the PARENTS stream inside, Annie stands
smiling at the door, welcoming each inside.

ANNIE

(to various parents)

Good evening. How do you do? Love your
hat.

INT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - LATER

Parents congregate for tea and biscuits served up by the
Bay City Ladies Auxiliary. Annie greets people as they
get tea, find their seats. Then, Annie takes the stage.

ANNIE

Welcome parents. I hope you're enjoying
the tea and social. Biscuits and jam by
my own Bay City Ladies Auxiliary.

ANGLE ON: Annie's crew of older ladies, waving.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Thank you ladies. Just a caveat, if there
is a fire, we will have to leave.

LADIES AUXILIARY

(chanting)

Help, help, help. Help is on the way!

The Ladies strike a heroic pose to polite applause. Annie
shifts to a serious tone and paces the stage.

ANNIE

Now, it's come to my attention that many
of you-- and this is by no means a witch
hunt... Many of you parents have not been
enrolling your daughters in the new
session. I'm looking at you Edna and
Ralph Pritchard.

ANGLE ON: The PRITCHARDS looking embarrassed.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(moving on)

And, I want to assure you all, that your girls will not only get schooled in grace and charm. No. They will receive the finest education available anywhere. Do you hear me back there, Silas and Caroline Grundy?

ANGLE ON: SILAS AND CAROLINE GRUNDY about to leave. They come back inside.

SILAS GRUNDY

We were just, uh shutting the door.

They sit back down. Someone coughs.

ANNIE

Now then. Time for show and tell.

Annie moves to something square-shaped, under a fabric. She grabs a corner of the cloth and dramatically unveils--

ANNIE (CONT'D)

A diploma. Ooooooh. I know a lot of you loggers don't get ta fancy one of these beaups up close and personal. It's from the Normal School in Albany. Pass it, just watch the greasy fingerprints.

The parents are not impressed, but humor Annie as they pass the diploma anyway. As they do--

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(said super fast)

Adams, Jefferson, Burr, Clinton, Gerry, Tompkins, Calhoun, Van Buren, Johnson, Tyler, Dallas, Fillmore, King, Breckinridge, Hamlin, Johnson, Colfax, Wilson, Wheeler, Arthur, Hendricks, Morton, Stevenson, Hobart...

People are unsure what that was.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

That's right, the chronological order of our Vice Presidents, thank you!

The Ladies Auxiliary golf clap for Annie. Then, Annie turns dramatically close to the stunned parents' faces.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

"AH, WHAT PLEASANT VISIONS HAUNT ME
AS I GAZE UPON THE SEA...

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 ALL THE OLD ROMANTIC LEGENDS,
 ALL MY DREAMS, COME BACK TO ME."

Annie points around the room, to see if there's any guesses. There aren't. A clock ticks. Finally--

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 Longfellow. As in Henry Wadsworth. The
 great poet of New England.

Annie sashays over to the tray of hot biscuits. Annie scoops up three big ones and juggles. The parents cringe.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 Hep, hep, whoa...

In order to make a catch, Annie lunges and accidentally bowls over the TEA POT STAND, launching it-- the BOILING WATER CASCADES out of the spout and arcs high in the air and showers the parents, scalding and getting them wet.

ALL PARENTS
 (overlapping)
 Agh. Ouch. Good heavens....

Having had enough, the parents get up to leave.

ANNIE
 Where are you going? We haven't mastered
 the mysterious Oriental art of Origami.

Annie rings a GONG. The Ladies Auxiliary start folding rando shapes. Ralph Pritchard steps forward, hat in hand.

RALPH PRITCHARD
 Honestly, Ms. Annie. We appreciate what
 you're trying to do, here. But ongoing
 classes are just-- too darn costly.

Other logger parents nod.

ANNIE
 Silly me! Did I forget to mention the
 returning student discount? Ha!

RALPH PRITCHARD
 Ms. Annie--

ANNIE
 Five percent off. Six!

SILAS GRUNDY
 Ms. Annie! This is a new generation. The
 girls just aren't interested.

Boom. This hits Annie hard. She remains stoic.

ANNIE

I'm not merely a headmistress, Mr. Grundy. I was vice principal in San Antonio! I could tutor any academic subject. I know you rustics can't always grasp the nuance of academia... Here, someone quiz me on the periodic table.

The parents awkwardly put on hats and wraps and exit past Annie, as the Ladies Auxiliary hang their heads.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Okay, there's helium and ya got zinc of course. And, good old nickel!

EXT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The parents hastily exit and Annie follows, looking sour.

ANNIE

Fine! Go on you anti-sophisticates. You pie eaters! You don't deserve the waltzes. Somebody mark down the date. Decency and civility have perished this day. I weep for this town!

A few parents turn around. Annie is desperately somersaulting on the lawn. The Ladies Auxiliary pick Annie up, and try to restore her dignity-- they brush her off and pull the dead leaves from her hair. Annie calms.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Aw. I'm grateful to have you-- my ladies.

The cozy comfort doesn't last. A FIRE WHISTLE is heard. With Pavlovian quickness, the ladies drop Annie on the ground, snatch up the biscuits, and run off.

LADIES AUXILIARY

Help, help, help. Help is on the way!

INT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - VARIOUS

- Annie strips the wall paper.
- Annie holds the door open the WORKMEN remove her piano.
- Annie turns off the gas lamps and leaves.

EXT. ANNIE'S SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Annie uses a skeleton key to lock the entrance and then hangs the FOR RENT sign back on the door. Darla is walking by as Annie is sweeping the porch, lingering.

DARLA

Ms. Annie. I'm so sorry.

ANNIE

I have nothing left. Dump me in some county alms house filled with moochers, hobos and the cholera. Heap on me a pauper's shame!

DARLA

Ms. Annie, please. We all feel terrible.

Annie takes one final stroll on the grass.

ANNIE

(reciting)

"OVER THE HILL TO THE POOR-HOUSE MY CHILDREN DEAR, GOOD-BYE! / MANY A NIGHT I'VE WATCHED YOU WHEN ONLY GOD WAS NIGH; AND, GOD'LL JUDGE BETWEEN US; BUT I WILL ALWAYS PRAY... THAT YOU SHALL NEVER SUFFER THE HALF I DO TODAY."

Big guilt wave washes over Darla while Annie walks off.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - MORNING - WEEKS LATER

Annie stands among a group of about a dozen UNFORTUNATES. They all face the local priest, REV. GEORGE PLUM.

REV. GEORGE PLUM

Everyone raise your right hand and repeat after me--

They all raise hands as Rev. Plum swears them in.

DARLA (V.O.)

Many states required the poor to give an oath "swearing to their lack of worldly goods and to their need for assistance," a ritual designed to weed out those who didn't want to publicly swear that they were poor-- this was one of the hardest things Annie ever had to do.

Annie's face is lifeless as she takes the pauper's oath.

EXT. STREET - LATE AFTERNOON - WEEKS LATER

Annie trudges in the snow, she's been walking a while, her cheeks, apple red. She's miserable. Then, she lights up at the SOUNDS OF YELLING AND MIRTH. Annie discovers Billy Holleran having a fun friendly snow ball fight with TOWNSFOLK. Billy calls Annie over.

BILLY

Hey! Annie! Come on, I need ya!

Annie, momentarily joyful, quickly scampers to where Billy hides behind an oak. Annie furiously makes several snow balls and stock piles for Billy who gets off some shots, knocking off someone's hat, playful stuff-- all are both laughing.

BILLY (CONT'D)

All right Annie!

Then, a smiling Annie is hit in the face with an ice ball, she snaps.

ANNIE

Arrrghh!!!

Annie lets all her frustrations out. Annie is firing a flurry of snowballs, nailing people in their groins, in their faces, with hard packed snowballs. She's throwing so fast, her arms almost blur. Billy tries to stop her.

BILLY

Annie! Annie! Stop!

Billy yanks Annie's arm, pulling her back to reality. Annie drops a snowball in horror as she scans the field of injured, laying on their sides and backs, holding their eyes. Annie has laid waste.

ANNIE

I'm... terribly sorry!

Annie hurries off into the night.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - LATER

Annie rushes inside the Poor House.

INT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM - LATER

Annie's gloomy room is a far cry from her previous elegantly appointed digs-- dark carpet, peeling brown wallpaper and a single cot and stool. Annie pours water for her cat, who is depressed too, it just lays there.

ANNIE

(to cat)

Ah, Misty. I see I'm not the only one struck with a case of the morbs.

Annie digs inside a trunk that overflows with gowns. Annie selects one that pleases her.

INT. POOR HOUSE - DINING HALL - LATER

In a chow line with grimy UNFORTUNATES, dressed in baggy, ragged and threadbare hand-made clothing, Annie looks completely out of place. She's in her rigid attire: gown, spotlessly clean white collar and cuffs. Annie keeps her chin up and a stoic grip on her rusty metal tray. The scruffy folks are not quite sure what to make of her.

ANGLE ON: a nearby table of cheerless POOR FOLKS who sip soup and gnaw on stale rolls with nothing on them.

POOR FOLK #1

That's that crazy teacher.

POOR FOLK #2

I heard her school closed down.

ANGLE ON: FRONT OF THE CHOW LINE - Annie finds Grubby Guy (whom we saw on the porch) now serving the meal. He's in a dirty apron. Annie grins after receiving her splash of soup. The Grubby Guy grins revealing a slew of missing teeth. Annie shudders, then turns to the table that was just talking about her. Annie bows as if before royalty.

ANNIE

Would it please your graces, if I partook in the pleasure of thine company?

The poor folks eat. They stare.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Can I sit? Please. Thank you. Thank you!

They clear a spot for Annie without saying anything. Annie unfolds her napkin in her lap and re-sets her silverware correctly. She corrects someone next to her and re-arranges their silverware, too.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Utensils are placed in order of use.
Forks on the left, knife on the right,
spoon on the right side of the knife.

The Poor Folks keep eating. To them, she's the crazy one.
Grubby Guy watches disapprovingly FROM THE SOUP LINE.

ANNIE (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Elbows. Elbows.

AT THE TABLE: A POOR LADY, with her elbows on the table,
quietly removes them. Someone slurps. Annie strikes her
tin cup with her spoon repeatedly.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

We. Do. Not. Slurp.

People get up and leave and Annie is alone once again.
The Grubby Guy comes over with his tray, he shoos a fly.

GRUBBY GUY

Ah, excuse me ma'dame. ...Are any of
these seats taken?

Annie gestures for him to sit anywhere. Grubby Guy sits.

ANNIE

Mrs. Anna Edson-Taylor.

GRUBBY GUY/WINSTON

(slurps)

Winston.

ANNIE

Well, let me tell you Mr. Winston, this
is the last situation I expected to be in
at this stage of life. I'm at the mercy
of public relief. Completely insolvent.

WINSTON

We got a lot in common. When I drink too
much lemonade, I get insolvent.

ANNIE

I mean, I should be basking in my golden
years. Instead, I'm supping dreary,
unpalatable slop, like Oliver Twist.

(impersonating Oliver Twist)

And, "no sir, I do not want some mo!"

WINSTON

Good. Cuz there isn't any more.

Annie tries to bite into her roll, it's stone stale.

ANNIE

I can't eat this bread, it's been embalmed.

POOR FOLK #2

I'll take it!!

A guy from the next table quickly snatches Annie's roll.

ANNIE

Look at me. I had a school, it folded.

WINSTON

Hey, I had a rash, it went away. There's a cycle to everything.

ANNIE

I'm totally lost! Like Jonah in the belly of the whale. I thought coming to Bay City would be a chance to start over. Now-- I'm surrounded by gnarly vagabonds who clearly do not know which spoon to use.

WINSTON

Yeah well, there's only one kind of spoon in the poor house, Ms. Annie. Just one kind of spoon. (Slurps.)

EXT. MAIN STREET - EVENING - WEEKS LATER

The mood on the streets is festive. A WEALTHY FAMILY takes a goose from a SHOP. Holiday decorations abound.

TITLE: New Year's Eve - 1899

EXT. STREET - LATER

Annie tries to keep her chin up as she nods good wishes to people. But, inside she's got the doldrums. A WOMAN comes out of a shop carrying many bundles and packages. Annie sees-- it's Darla. Annie "accidentally" bumps her.

DARLA

...Ms. Annie?

ANNIE

Well, I declare. What a *surprise*.

Darla and Annie embrace, Annie kisses on both cheeks.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Happy New Year. Right? Ugh, where does the time go? It's been a month of Sundays.

DARLA

I've thought about you over the last year or so. You've been an inspiration.

ANNIE

So, you've found a suitor!

DARLA

No. Your strength of convictions led me to be more involved in women's suffrage.

ANNIE

(disapproving)

Long as you're happy.

DARLA

I am, Ms. Annie. You know, you were the only example I had of a woman living on her own. You showed us girls we could do anything! I'm sorry I haven't been around much.

ANNIE

You've been as scarce as hen's teeth.

DARLA

You're still in Bay City, then?

ANNIE

Yes. Doing really well. I bought a home.

DARLA

Oh. Wow. Kudos. Which one?

ANNIE

That one.

Annie quickly points to the nearest NICE HOUSE. It's a Victorian mansion. Darla is not sure what is up, but doesn't want to invest more time here.

DARLA

Well, I really should get--

Annie looks forlorn. Darla feels guilty.

DARLA (CONT'D)

...Well, I'm sure you've got plans for the New Year tonight, yes?

ANNIE

Me? Many plans. Lots of options. Dance card, quite full, darling.

DARLA

Oh. Okay, good. Well--

ANNIE

Yourself? Have you plans this evening?

Darla can't lie, given the amount of bundles in her arms.

DARLA

We're having one of those intimate, impromptu gatherings at Rita's. Few friends, I know you're busy, so--

ANNIE

I'd love to come. What time? Where? When?

Annie subconsciously paws at Darla.

DARLA

The uh-- brick building, corner of Elm and Madison. Nine o'clock.

ANNIE

Ouch. Starts at nine? I'll have to get right home and get a nap in and start my ablutions.

DARLA

Well, we'd all understand if you can't--

ANNIE

I might stop by --if time permits. Ta ta.

Annie starts off, but Darla calls to her.

DARLA

Ms. Annie?

ANNIE

...Yah?

DARLA

(pointing)

--Aren't you going to go home to... nap?

Annie realizes she has to go into the home she claimed was hers. Annie doubles back toward the mansion.

ANNIE

You betcha.

Annie opens the mansion door, Darla still watches her. Annie waves, Darla waves. Annie takes a deep breath--

INT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Annie barges in, shocking a WEALTHY FAMILY eating goose.

ANNIE

Don't get up folks. I have a singing New Year's telegram. From your dear Auntie.

Annie makes up a song she sings as she moves awkwardly through the house to the back door--

ANNIE (CONT'D)

(singing)

IT'S NEW YEARS DAY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. THIS MESSAGE MAY SOUND FLAUNT-Y, BUT IT COMES WITH LOVE FROM YOUR AUNTIE...

Annie bolts out the back, the family is confused.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS - SUNSET

Annie scurries down the alley and hops on the back of a passing STREET CAR heading toward the bad part of town.

INT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM - EVENING

MONTAGE ANNIE GETS READY: Annie's cat watches as Annie digs under the cot, and opens a box filled with her womanly embellishments. Annie applies make up, powders, fake eye lashes, pomades, eye shadow, rouge.

JUMP CUTS: Annie tries a fake birthmark in a variety of locations, (chin, eyelid, tip of nose), finally lands on cheek. Annie puts her hair up in pins. Puts on stockings, chemise, drawers, corset, petticoat. Annie tries a variety of hats, an array of dresses. Annie tries on several pairs identical black ankle boots.

LATER: Annie looks fantastically ridiculous: a three-storey flower pot hat, gloves, mink stole, an obviously uncomfortable corseted extravagant floor length dress with cage and bustle. Annie turns to her cat.

ANNIE

Well, you're always pleasant to speak to, Misty. But, how I crave an evening of culture and civilized conversation.

Annie spritzes herself all over with perfume. Then, practices droll laughter as she exits. The cat sneezes.

INT. DARLA'S FLAT - LATER

Rita, Betsy and a group of YOUNG PEOPLE, (who look like steam punk kids of today) smoke cigarettes, drink brandy, and stand in groups. The door bell chimes and host Darla opens the door and is knocked backward at the sight of Annie.

ANNIE

Salutations...

Annie's face falls as she instantly realizes she's way overdressed. Annie self-consciously walks into the party.

BETSY

(quietly, but Annie hears)

What time's the Coronation?

A few titters.

DARLA

Um, everyone, this is Ms. Annie. Annie love, can I fetch you something to drink?

ANNIE

Prune juice.

Darla nods with a plastered grin and heads to the kitchen. Annie inelegantly squeezes into a tight circle and sticks out like a sore thumb. Annie nods hellos.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Say, did you all hear the latest news? That mining disaster in Wyoming? Thirty eight miners crushed to death. Oof. Imagine. Just being under there. Good gravy. Help! Ahhh! Happy New Year!

Awkward silence.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

On the bright side: easy burial.

Finally someone tries to cheer the mood.

RITA

Well, hey-- I can't believe we're about to start a whole new century.

People agree and toast. But, Annie brings it down.

ANNIE

Well actually... I and everyone else in society thought the 20th Century begins on January 1, 1901. A year from now. Technically.

Everyone knows Annie is right.

BETSY

Technically that's correct. Nice one.

ANNIE

The way to remember this is-- 1901 will be nine-teen-oh-wonderful. Ha ha.

Now bummed, the group disperses and Annie follows Rita to a phonograph. Annie flips through the stack of records.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Say, Rita, do we have "The Bird in the Gilded Cage?" That's a real nanty-narker.

Ouch. Annie is a cringey oldie.

RITA

Sorry, just modern quartet singers.

Annie looks disdainfully on Rita's choice of record and walks over to another part of the parlor where a game of "Pass the Orange" innocently breaks out.

Annie is not into this. She takes the Bible from the shelf and pretends to read. She fidgets and loudly clears her throat. After several intimate passes of the orange, she finally can't bear it any longer, and just as a man and woman are right on top of each other...

ANNIE

Fire! Fire!

Everyone jolts to attention and Annie swats the orange to the ground and stomps on it. Someone screams. Darla comes out with a glass of prune juice and pulls Annie back into the kitchen.

INT. DARLA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Annie flops down and fans herself. Darla is upset.

DARLA

What is wrong, Ms. Annie?

ANNIE

What's wrong? What's wrong??
 (pointing into party)
 Impure games. Devil music. Strumpets
 parading in short dresses.

DARLA

What?

Darla looks into the party.

DARLA (CONT'D)

Those are not short.

ANNIE

Showing ankle. Where are we, Paris?

DARLA

Ms. Annie, calm down. It's a party.

ANNIE

Whoo-pee. Everything I pride myself on;
 etiquette, manners and class have
 suddenly vanished. Let's face it, I'm
 stale and out of vogue.

DARLA

You? No!

Annie downs the prune juice like a shot and exhales.

DARLA (CONT'D)

Ms. Annie, New Year's is a fresh start.

ANNIE

For everyone, but me. Time to face the
 piper. I haven't been successful. I've
 failed. And, now I don't belong anywhere;
 not high class, nor low.

Annie slams into Rita who passes a plate of pickle hors
 d'oeuvres. Annie sees the pickles and hyperventilates.

RITA

Ms. Annie, would you care for a pickle?

ANNIE

A pickle?! A pickle??

The party screeches to a halt. Annie has everyone's
 attention.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Pickles are the epitome of low class! A pickle is nothing more than a ruined cucumber!

In hysterics, Annie shoves the plate to the floor and barrels out of the party, leaving everyone confused. Darla calls after her.

DARLA

Annie, are you okay? Are you okay, Annie?

INT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM

An upset Annie arrives at her room, surprised however, to find the door open. INSIDE: Rev. Plum with other Poor House Staff, go through Annie's things.

REV. GEORGE PLUM

Mrs. Taylor, you promised to turn in your worldly goods when you moved into this facility. I'm sorry, we'll need to confiscate these.

To Annie's horror, the STAFF and Rev. take all of Annie's embellishments away.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Annie crunch-walks through falling snow that gathers on her shoulders and hat. Make up runs down Annie's tear-streamed face. Her fake mole is running.

EXT. RIVER WALK - LATER

Sniffling through tears, Annie is presently perched on an embankment high above the river. Shivering, she gazes at her own shimmering distorted reflection.

Midnight strikes. New Years' celebrations and rousing drunken choruses of "AULD LANG SYNE" is faintly heard from all around. Juxtaposed over the celebrating, Annie is mesmerized by the water. Annie speaks low to herself.

ANNIE

Money is flowing away from me. Just like this speeding river. My faith is flowing away. My life is flowing away, just like this river...

DONG. The bell in the church tower begins twelve slow strikes for midnight. Annie puts her foot up on the railing.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

What if the river takes me away, too?

Annie swings her leg over the railing, then her other leg. She leans forward. Her fingers loosely grasp the rail, holding her from falling into the speeding water.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Take me river up Saginaw Bay, down through Lake Huron, to Lake Erie--

OVER THE FINAL CHURCH BELLS - we ZOOM INTO ANNIE'S MIND --

- We rapidly snake along the river, through the bay, we are sailing over LAKE HURON and into LAKE ERIE, we flow up to the NIAGARA RIVER and as the Church bells conclude, a wind blows.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

On to that great wonder--

BACK IN ANNIE'S MIND --WE ARE FLYING OVER NIAGARA FALLS AT NIGHT, LIT ONLY BY THE MOON. Annie snaps back to reality her Annie then grabs the railing tightly, struck with an idea. Overjoyed, Annie begins to cackle like a witch.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Yes. This is what I will do.

Annie climbs off the bridge and strides with new purpose back towards town. FIRE WORKS explode high over the river as celebration continues behind a reinvigorated Annie.

DIP TO BLACK.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

Alone, in her back yard, surrounded by snow-- Darla lights a match and tosses it into a metal bin, where she ignites her corsets. As they burn, smoke rises, Darla smiles.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - WASHINGTON, D.C. - MORNING

A MARCHING BAND plays "The Stars & Stripes Forever."

TITLE: Spring, 1900

Cherry blossoms are in full bloom on a crisp cloudless day. Red, white and blue confetti floats everywhere. The sounds of a parade fill the streets.

ON THE BOULEVARD: An array of WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE GROUPS march and carry flags, banners and signs.

ANGLE ON: CROWD, a small fraction of whom boo, but the majority cheer for women's suffrage.

One exuberant group on its way down the boulevard are dressed in fringe and twirl decorative rifles. A leader with a megaphone chants a slogan. As she gets closer, we see it's Darla --with a new shorter hair cut.

DARLA

Votes for women.

OTHER SUFFRAGETTES

Votes now.

RITA (O.C.)

...Darla!

DARLA

Rights for wom--

RITA

(yelling)

Darla. It's Rita.

Darla lights up at spotting Rita in the crowd. Darla hands her megaphone to a SUFFRAGETTE and rushes to the sidewalk to embrace Rita. They hurry away to escape the noise.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Beaming Darla and Rita walk arm in arm on a quieter street. The parade sounds continue in the background.

DARLA

So, have you come to join the movement?

RITA

Darla, I came to tell you that I'm worried. Everyone back home is worried.

DARLA

About what?

RITA

About Ms. Annie.

DARLA

Last I saw, she called us low class and ruined New Year's. What's she up to now?

RITA

We fear she's gone completely crazy.

DARLA

Again?

RITA

Really. We need you to talk to her.

DARLA

Why me?

RITA

You're the only one she relates to. And, now she's scaring everyone. For the last couple of months she's been-- obsessed. Talking all over town about her "plan."

DARLA

Plan?

RITA

Her plan to get out of the poor house and become a celebrity millionaire. She's putting everything she has left into it. Darla, she wants to climb into a barrel and ride the rapids of the Niagara River--

Darla covers her mouth, stifling a snicker.

DARLA

She has been known for tall talk.

RITA

It's not just that. Annie intends to continue on in her barrel and try to make the drop --over Niagara Falls.

Darla stops in her tracks.

DARLA

Sorry, what?

EXT. BAY CITY - STREET - DAY

Annie, looking classy but worn down, walks purposefully through town. Her arms are filled with rolled up tubes of blue prints and drawings and drafting tools.

LOCALS stare, point and whisper at her. Annie maintains her mantle of pride and respectability as she walks.

INT. BARREL MAKER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A barrel-chested BARREL MAKER shapes hot metal with hammer strikes on an anvil. CLANG, CLING. He drops the glowing shaped piece into a water bath, it lands with a sizzling HISS. DOOR BELL CHIMES and Annie enters. Seeing Annie, the Barrel Maker becomes irate.

BARREL MAKER
(Swedish accent)
Oh, no. Not again. Get out.

Annie unfurls schematics on the counter.

BARREL MAKER (CONT'D)
Are you mad woman? I said out.

ANNIE
Be reasonable good Barrel Maker. I can pay ye a tidy sum, yah.

BARREL MAKER
Did you yust make fun of me? For the tenth time, I won't take your money, yah?

ANNIE
It couldn't be simpler, dear cooper. I've already designed the barrel.

Annie demonstrates with a compass and ruler.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Oaken staves, bound by ten handmade iron hoops-- twelve inches at the head, thirty four inches middle and at the base--

The Barrel Maker scoops Annie's tools.

BARREL MAKER
I'm tryin' to do my yob!

ANNIE
Your yob?

BARREL MAKER
I don't need your sarcasm, and I don't need your drawings, lady. I told yah-- this is a suicide mission, I won't take part in it.

ANNIE
 (correction)
 In which you will not take part.

BARREL MAKER
 And, stop correcting my English.

ANNIE
 Grammar.

BARREL MAKER
 Argh. Get out devil woman!

Barrel Maker opens the shop door and tosses Annie's blueprints and stuff sending it clanging to the ground.

EXT. BARREL MAKER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The Barrel Maker slams his door shut. Annie bends down and gathers her things, ONLOOKERS chuckle and offer no help. Then Billy Holleran steps through the crowd, he and Annie acknowledge each other warmly as he bends to help.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - SIDE YARD - THE NEXT DAY

Annie has turned the side yard into her lab. She's covered the ground with her work materials; scraps of metal, wood, maps, drawings, buckets of water, yard sticks, rope, notebooks, books on Earth Sciences and a particularly massive tome: "Modern Bathymetry: Underwater Depths - Lake & River Floor Edition - Vol. 1."

Annie on her knees, clangs SOUNDING WEIGHTS together, they ring out loudly. Annie's cat twists its head at the odd sound. Annie dips the reverberating weights into buckets and observes the ripples and undulation in the water, Annie takes notes.

Annie is so deep in her tasks, she barely notices Grubby Winston escorting Darla to see her. Darla is saddened to find Annie in this frantic condition, still dressed in her Victorian best, hunkered on the ground among this mess. Winston nods and leaves the women alone.

DARLA
 Ahem. ...Miss Annie.

Annie looks up, matter of factly.

ANNIE

Oh, hello, Ms. Darla. You have a shorter haircut, I can't imagine a suitor would find it becoming.

DARLA

Still got the charms.

Darla takes Annie's hands and helps her to her feet.

DARLA (CONT'D)

I'm worried about you, Ms. Annie. I wanted to make sure you were all right.

ANNIE

Of course I am. Now, do you know where I can get my hands on welding equipment?

Darla's face wrinkles with worry as Annie pulls away and begins to take readings with a HOMEMADE BAROMETRIC CONTRAPTION --fashioned out of an egg beater crank, wires and a wet sock. Annie feverishly roams the yard and cranks the egg beater. Darla bobs and weaves to stay out of her way.

DARLA

Annie, Annie, why are you doing this?

ANNIE

Well, how else can I know the barometric pressure?

DARLA

No. Not, the readings. The stunt.

Annie puts the contraption down.

ANNIE

Because, of you.

DARLA

Me?

ANNIE

I finally got it. You and the girls were right. I need to embrace change, not push it down the stairs. If I want a different result, I have to do something different.

DARLA

Isn't this a bit extreme? What if you just rode the rapids, instead?

ANNIE

What attention would that attract?
Novelty acts don't get famous. I go over
the Falls in a barrel and then I can go
on world-class speaking tours! Tell of my
once-in-a-lifetime adventure. This
particular stunt that has never been
attempted. Loonies and nut cases have
been cramming themselves into barrels or
some other floating conveyance and riding
the rapids for years. But, no one... NO
ONE has ever shot the *Falls*.

Annie suddenly takes a full sprint across the yard and
hurls herself against an old mattress tied to a tree.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Unngh!

DARLA

...Annie!

Annie's knocked herself down and dizzy, but bounces right
back up and walks it off.

DARLA (CONT'D)

Annie. What are you doing?

ANNIE

(woozy)

Preparing for a 180 foot drop at 75 miles
per hour.

Annie jots notes. Darla follows her around the yard,
pleading.

DARLA

Aren't there any other ways to make
money?

ANNIE

Darning shirts? Keeping house? That's no
way to live out my days. My entire life,
I had wealth, lived around cultured,
refined people. I should be rubbing
elbows with the Vanderbilts,
Rockefellers. Not people like this.

Winston overhears as he takes out trash. He's hurt.

WINSTON

Hey, thanks a lot!

ANNIE

Sorry, Mr. Winston, I didn't mean you!

Winston slams the lid and goes inside. Annie shrugs.

DARLA

If this stunt is to secure your retirement, why not sell your memoirs?

Annie is swept up for a moment.

ANNIE

Ah, yes. My teaching *mem-wah*. Darla, did I ever tell you that I have crossed this great American continent--

DARLA

--From ocean to ocean,
eight times.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

--From ocean to ocean,
eight times.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Well, I have. I witnessed Indian attacks teaching across the Southwest. I was on a coach robbed by the villain, Jesse James.

DARLA

Those are incredible stories. You've kept meticulous journals of your teaching travels. Those would sell, Ms. Annie.

ANNIE

I may be getting old...er, but I'm not ready to sit on the porch and reflect. I still thirst for danger. Adventure.

DARLA

Why not try spelunking?

ANNIE

Darla, a journey over the Falls in a barrel, doesn't end in Niagara-- it'd take me to New York, London, Paris. I'd be the toast of Europe. No one has ever done this before.

DARLA

Did you ever think maybe no one has ever done it-- because it's, uh-- brainsick?

ANNIE

T'would be brainsick to attempt such a stunt with no research, no preparation. I, on the other hand, will scientifically eliminate every likely risk.

Annie dons a metal colander on her head and then dumps a pail of water over herself, then she scribbles in a notebook. Darla flops her arms at her sides.

DARLA

Ugh, Ms. Annie.

Darla paces, frustrated, but is suddenly halted when she takes a closer look at the yard. It dawns on Darla, the random junk actually represents a detailed plan and method. Annie has created testing stations for every weather and conditional possibility. Darla sees Annie's schematics; the exploded view/cutaway drawings of the barrel, drawings that show how Annie will fit inside, how she will be cushioned, how she will have straps to hold.

Darla flips through TORN OUT ALMANAC PAGES and MAPS OF THE NIAGARA RIVER, marked with longitudes, latitudes, depths, measurements and equations. There is a level of professionalism to all of it. Darla exhales sharply.

DARLA (CONT'D)

But what if something goes wrong, Annie?
What if you don't --come out the other side?

Annie ignores the question and pumps the well for more water. Darla puts her hand on the lever, stopping it.

DARLA (CONT'D)

When we were younger, I didn't understand you. But, I knew you were different. Before you came along, Annie I thought that I was doomed to be just like my mother. Like every other woman in this town, silenced. But, you came to town, and you were totally independent. You saved me Annie. I just want to save you, too.

Annie gives Darla a hug, then looks her straight in the eyes.

ANNIE

I'd rather be dead, than have no money.

DARLA

A grand exit, either way, huh. I can respect that. We should make our own choices with whatever hand we were dealt.

(beat)

I actually believe you can do it. If anyone can, you can. And, I think it would inspire the women's movement.

ANNIE

I am in it for the money. You can do the worrying about inspiring people.

DARLA

Annie, let me help you with this.

ANNIE

Well, it's about time.

Annie hugs Darla.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

And, don't worry about taking a break from the women's movement, because you're still participating in a different kind of woman's movement.

(corniest of jokes)

Specifically, that is to say, the movement of a single woman, over a waterfall, as it were.

Annie bursts into hysterics. Darla stares blankly.

DARLA (V.O.)

I wondered what I had gotten myself into, but I figured with my help, Annie might have a better chance at survival.

EXT. STREET - DAYS LATER

Annie and Darla are walking through town. Billy Holleran rings a bike BELL and approaches on a penny-farthing bike that bears a sign for "FLEMINGTON'S HARDWARE."

BILLY

Ms. Taylor. A Western Union for you.

Billy skids to a stop and climbs off his bike. He hands Annie the telegram and leaves his hand extended, hoping for a tip. Darla grabs his hand and shakes it too hard.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Yowch!

Billy rides off with a miffed expression. Darla turns to Annie. She reads the telegram and looks upset.

DARLA

Annie, is everything all right?

ANNIE
 (clearly lying)
 Yes, yes. It's nothing...

Annie folds the telegram and puts it away, when all of a sudden, she looks over Darla's shoulder and Annie's expression turns 180, to wide eyed awe.

DARLA
 Ms. Annie? What is it?

When Darla turns around and sees what Annie is gawking at, her jaw drops, too. Annie and Darla have wandered into an alley entirely filled with DISCARDED BARRELS.

DARLA (CONT'D)
 Oh. My. Goodness.

ANNIE
 ...By providence.

Annie approaches the used up barrels like they are the Holy Grail. Darla hangs back as Annie paces somberly through the sacred find, letting her hand occasionally touch a barrel as she passes.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 They are ...beautiful.

PASSERSBY give looks. They think Annie is off her rocker admiring and trudging through this pile of garbage. Annie sees a barrel she is interested in and waves Darla over.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
 Darla, give me a hand, here.

Annie hikes her dress and puts a hand on Darla's shoulder. Annie squeezes into the first barrel. TOWNSFOLK congregate and shake their heads and chuckle. A MAN ON THE STREET covers his SON'S eyes.

MAN ON THE STREET
 Avert your eyes from the troubled woman!

ANGLE ON: Annie stuck inside the too small barrel.

ANNIE
 Too tight, too tight. Out. Pull me out.

DARLA
 Ugh. I'm trying.

ANNIE
 You're very trying.

Annie flails as Darla helps her out of the tight barrel. Annie catches her breath, straightens her dress and goes back to pacing.

Annie gestures to Darla again. Darla helps Annie into another barrel this one is too big. Annie practically drops out of sight. Her slightly echoed voice calls out.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

...Too big, way too big.

Darla almost falls in as she fishes Annie out -- The growing crowd on the street watching now burst out laughing.

CROWD (ALL)

(Mocking laughter.)

Annie inspecting the remaining barrels like a drill sergeant might scrutinize troupes. In total sympathy, Darla stays respectfully back and bites a nail hoping Annie will find what she seeks.

ANNIE

A lady doesn't bite her nails.

Darla puts her arms at her sides. Annie stops pacing.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

--I think this one looks right.

Darla sees Annie has her hand on an old pickle barrel.

DARLA

Wait, don't you despise pickles, Ms. Annie? Didn't you once call a pickle the epitome of low class.

Annie squats down and rubs her hand on the wood. She likes the grain.

ANNIE

That is precisely why *this* is my barrel.

Annie bows to her barrel like Arthur before his sword.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I choose this pickle barrel because it has called me to it, so, I too, will transform inside this barrel. I am a cucumber and this is my sacred cocoon.

Annie stands up.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

And, it's also the correct size.

MAN IN CROWD

That barrel will be your tomb, nut-zo!

The crowd cackles then Darla chases them off.

DARLA

Get lost creeps!

CROWD/ALL

Whoa!

The crowd disperses as Darla lunges after them. Darla walks back to Annie, dusting her hands off.

ANNIE

Un-ladylike, but appreciated.

DARLA

Yer welcome.

Darla helps Annie inside the pickle barrel. Annie squats and fits.

ANNIE

Like a glove.

But, Annie is suddenly overwhelmed by the pickle smell.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Okay. You know what. That is some pungent pickle aroma. Get me out, out.

Annie gags as Darla helps her out of the barrel.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

We'll have to air it out.

Annie dry heaves as she and Darla drag the barrel away.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - SIDE YARD - DAY

As Billy and Darla look on, Annie dons a welder's mask and does the re-welding and reinforcing of her barrel.

INT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

By candle light, Annie meticulously and lovingly rubs her barrel with sandpaper, smoothing its rough spots.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - SIDE YARD - NEXT MORNING - VARIOUS

Annie steadies the barrel as Winston hand-drills an air hole.

LATER: Annie and Darla watch as Billy and Winston place a small anvil in the bottom of the barrel making it more sturdy and bottom heavy. Winston shoves the barrel, it wobbles right back into him, smacking him backward.

LATER: Annie and Darla pad the inside of the barrel with Annie's old mattress.

INT. POOR HOUSE - NIGHT

Annie applies layers of finish to her barrel.

EXT. BAY CITY HOTEL - WEEKS LATER

Billy Holleran pumps his flat bike tire with a hand pump. THREE VICTORIAN WOMEN who are short and all look alike walk past Billy, he regards them with curiosity as they enter the Hotel.

INT. BAY CITY HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

FRONT DESK CLERK flips through a register. The door opens and the THREE VICTORIAN LADIES enter. The ladies stop at the front desk, put down their bags and stare.

CLERK
...Checking in?

The ladies nod in unison.

INT. HOTEL - THE NEXT MORNING

Annie sits across from the three Victorian women who are Annie's size, shape and coloring: her sisters. All three glare at Annie with a dour disapproval. Only the eldest, Genevieve speaks. Annie sips tea.

ANNIE
Well, I was shocked when I got your telegram. I can't believe you actually came all the way from western New York.

Annie is so intimidated, she puts her teaspoon down incorrectly and quickly corrects.

GENEVIEVE

We couldn't believe what we have been actually hearing about our sister. And, now through the grapevine here in town-- That you've lost your senses, you've been harassing the local cooper and crawling around in garbage?

ANNIE

Okay, technically both are true, but you have nothing to worry about.

GENEVIEVE

A public suicide is nothing to worry about? Haven't you brought enough shame on the family? No one wants this.

ANNIE

While I have not yet aroused strenuous public attention... You're my family. Why can't you support me?

GENEVIEVE

We sent you money.

ANNIE

Til, it got to be begrudgingly given and I would have no more of it. I just want your support. But, you were always jealous that I got out. I saw the world and you squandered your life on the farm.

Genevieve stands up.

GENEVIEVE

Watch your tongue.

Annie gets right in her face.

ANNIE

I've always respected you.

GENEVIEVE

But, you've never respected yourself. Why is it, none of us have turned out so crass-- Why is it-- I'm sorry, can we-- why do I keep smelling a strong pickle aroma?

The other sisters sniff and look around. Annie realizes its her, on her clothes, her hair, etc.

ANNIE

Uh, that would be me.

The sisters are repulsed.

GENEVIEVE

Annie, you're nothing more than a cheap exhibitionist. Be reasonable, come home with us. Forget about doing any such stunts. You're 62 years old.

ANNIE

I'm telling people 42, can we not?

GENEVIEVE

You are forbidden.

ANNIE

And, what power have you to stop me? I'm a grown woman.

GENEVIEVE

Who acts like a child. If you won't come with us, you should know, we went ahead and alerted the Department of Police and the Mayor's Office of Niagara Falls. If you attempt to enter the water, you will be arrested and remanded to the state mental clinic for your own protection.

The sisters abruptly exit, Annie is stunned.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM - LATER

Annie lays on the bed, deflated, her eyes are filled with tears. Darla paces the room trying to pep Annie.

DARLA

Maybe there's other stunts you can do?
High dive? World record for somersaults?

ANNIE

...It's not the same.

Darla puts her hand on Annie's barrel, she sniffs it.

DARLA

(cheering her)

You know this barrel cleaned up well. Now it doesn't smell, hardly at all.

Annie just lays there, says nothing. Darla flops down in the chair next to her and leans in.

DARLA (CONT'D)

Your family just doesn't understand.

ANNIE

No. My sister's were right.

Annie sits up. She's crying.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Darla, I was fired as vice principal in San Antonio. I didn't exactly have all my what do you call them, credentials. So, I've been traveling all over just trying to find a place where I could share what I know. I lost a husband, but I knew I could help other girls find a man. But, everywhere I turn, I fail!

DARLA

You have never stopped being my teacher. Ms. Annie, you taught me how to have the guts to put it all on the line.

ANNIE

So, I am responsible for the haircut?

They laugh and embrace.

DARLA

Your family doesn't know your kind of courage. They don't know how much passion and knowledge and intelligence you possess. You've taught us more than anyone-- you taught us how to live in the world. You taught us to never give up.

Annie lays back and stares at the ceiling. Darla turns off the gas lamps and exits.

EXT. RIVER WALK - NIGHT

Billy and Darla stroll quietly, suddenly Billy blurts:

BILLY

No.

DARLA

(confused)

No? What do you mean, "no?"

BILLY

Years ago you asked if I thought a husband should be the master and ruler over his wife and I never quite answered.

DARLA
 (chuckling)
 Well, that's good to know, Billy.

They stop walking. Billy looks concerned.

BILLY
 Darla, it's just-- I was so happy to hear
 you were back. And, now you're leaving?

They look at each other, they care about each other, but
 there's too much in the way right now.

DARLA
 The stunt is on hold. Billy, I need to go
 back to Washington. And you should go
 back to work at Flemington's Hardware.

BILLY
 What about Annie?

DARLA
 I'm never worried about Annie. She'll
 find a way-- or a way will find her.

INT. POOR HOUSE - ANNIE'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Annie meticulously paints lettering on the side of her
 barrel: "ANNIE EDSON-TAYLOR - HEROINE OF NIAGARA FALLS.
 Annie admires her handiwork on the barrel, then turns
 down the gas lamp, and goes to sleep.

EXT. POOR HOUSE - NIGHT - MONTHS LATER

Just outside the POOR HOUSE on a cloudless cool evening.

TITLE: Six months later.

A parading troupe of sour faced CHURCH LADIES go up and
 down passing handbills to UNFORTUNATES.

CHURCH LADIES
 (overlapping)
 Beware of drunkards./ Drunkenness is the
 gateway to disease and crime and
 death./Beware of drunkards.

ANGLE ON: Fine leather boots with silver heels walking on
 cobblestones. A third footstep is heard and REVEALED: a
 silver tipped walking stick. We see silver cuff links,
 soft top hat, tails. This is red nosed, red cheeked
 showman/dandy FRANK M. RUSSELL.

Frank sees a SIGN the prudish ladies carry. ON SIGN:
 "LIPS THAT TOUCH LIQUOR SHALL NEVER TOUCH OURS."

FRANK
 (quietly re: sign)
 Halle-jumpin-lujah.

The ladies pass a handbill to Frank. He politely bows.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Wise words, ladies. Bless you.

After the ladies pass, Frank palms a flask. He swigs and pockets the decanter in a slick, practiced move.

POOR HOUSE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Frank bounds on to the porch and cranks a RUSTY DOORBELL, it CHIMES comically out of tune. Winston answers the door wearing greasy clothes, he looks Frank up and down.

WINSTON
 I'd bet a donut, yer here to see Annie.

FRANK
 How ever did you guess?

WINSTON
 I was tipped off by yer effete manner of dress. Follow me.

Frank enters under a clothesline drying long Johns.

FRANK
 Nice place.

INT. POOR HOUSE - LOOM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frank scans the UNFORTUNATES working several INDUSTRIAL LOOMS. A row of women work the foot pedals of the looms. Frank chuckles when he finds Annie, weaving at a speed four times that of the other WORKERS, who regard Annie with irritation. Frank approaches, tips his hat.

FRANK
 Mrs. Taylor, allow me to present my card.

ANGLE ON CARD: "FRANK M. RUSSELL, ODD ATTRACTIONS."

ANNIE
 What can I do for you, Mr. Russell?

FRANK

More like what we can do for each other.
I caught wind of what yer planning here
and I think it's a magnificent idea.

Annie stops working the loom.

ANNIE

It's nice to hear your support. But you
might be in the minority on that front.

FRANK

I might be the minority on that front.
Nonetheless, I wish to manage you.

ANNIE

And, whilst true, you do find me
suffering from the severest privation.
Who says I seek a partner?

Annie jolts at a sudden kink in the weaving.

FRANK

Well, I'll let you get back to your
important work. Or, you can hear me out.

Annie gestures to a seat. Frank whistles through his
teeth in short bursts as he flips his hat on top of his
walking stick and leans it against the wall. Frank sits.

FRANK (CONT'D)

With all due respect, as a promoter,
you're a dud.

Frank belly laughs and slaps his leg.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You couldn't rouse the interest of your
hometown. Heck, your own family, your own
flesh and blood won't support this
venture.

ANNIE

Could we stop listing the negatives?
(then--)
So, what would be your plan for dealing
with the authorities in Niagara?

FRANK

I'm a well connected man and loyalties
can be, shall we say-- *acquired*.

Annie rubs her chin.

ANNIE

I like what I am hearing.

FRANK

And, from a promotional standpoint, threat of arrest is not a liability, it's an asset...

Frank tosses his hands up, mocking a headline.

FRANK (CONT'D)

"Police Threaten Arrest of Widow Daredevil."

ANNIE

Okay, but let's never call me that, though.

FRANK

Fair enough.

Annie scans the dim, miserable sweat shop and ponders.

ANNIE

I want first class speaking engagements. I wish to live out my days in style and comfort, telling tale of my adventures.

FRANK

Done. All you gotta do, is get yerself on the other side of the Falls in one piece.

ANNIE

I can do that, Mr. Russell.

FRANK

October.

ANNIE

October?

FRANK

That's when millions of people will be in nearby Buffalo, New York to see a new invention called the electric light.

Frank stands and from ANNIE'S POV: a gas lamp is perfectly over his head in "light bulb" position.

FRANK (CONT'D)

The Pan American Exposition in nearby Buffalo, will be completely powered by alternating-current power transmission. Hydro electric energy from Niagara Falls.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Tesla will be there, President McKinley. There won't be more eyes on the Falls than in October.

ANNIE

An international audience!

Annie is swept up. Frank extends a hand. Annie hesitates.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Welllll, I could have decided to do it in October without your assistance, Mr. Russell. Before we become partners-- What are your opinions on alcohol consumption?

FRANK

Hardly touch the stuff.

Frank puts his hand over his heart, his fingers lightly "tink" his flask in his pocket. Annie knows.

ANNIE

Then, might I peruse any letters of reference? Testimony of former clientele?

FRANK

Of course! But, all my papers are on my property in Denver and by the time I either got them, or wrote for replacements, our time will have passed.

ANNIE

I'm sorry, Mr. Russell, I don't think--

Frank makes whistling sounds through his teeth and uses his walking stick to flop his hat onto his head.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

--What are you doing?

Frank bounds onto the crate and whistles and twirls his walking stick. Workers pause. Frank tosses confetti.

FRANK

Howdy do. My name is Frank M. Russell. The man who brought you the most explosive human cannonball! The most beguiling snake charmer! And the bloodiest sword swallower! But this act, outclasses them all. Step right up and meet the indestructible, indefatigable and totally seaworthy, Annie Edson-Taylor, Queen of the Mist.

ANNIE

...Oh, I like that.

Frank grabs a long piece of fabric still in the loom, but he drapes the excess fabric over Annie's shoulders like she's a Queen. People applaud and cheer. Annie easily slips into royalty mode: waving, laughing at nothing.

FRANK

In 1678, the first missionaries laid eyes on the Falls of Niagara-- They said her roar sounded like continuous thunder, and could be heard from twenty miles away.

Frank bends in close to captivated POOR WORKERS.

FRANK (CONT'D)

That untamable force of nature went unchallenged all those years, until now. As this heroic widow, at the age of--

Frank looks to a clueless Annie. He prompts again.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Ahem. Age of...

ANNIE

Oh. Uh, forty-two.

People laugh. Annie registers the burn and tries again.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Fifty?

People shrug, they let her have that.

FRANK

A woman of advancing years, to save herself from financial ruin, will climb into a barrel, face the blood stirring whirlpool rapids, then plunge 180 feet over the gargantuan monster of Niagara. Now, if Annie can achieve that, surely we can all handle our own petty problems.

Uplifted, the crowd bursts into applause. Annie is impressed with Frank's abilities. Frank looks out into nowhere, his face filled with the hope of a preacher.

FRANK (CONT'D)

That's right my friends, that pickle barrel will be delivering more than a plump retiree-- it'll be delivering hope.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Something in tragically short supply
 during these challenging times.

Frank takes off his hat, bows to Annie. A standing ovation; the crowd cheers and noisily slam the pedals of their looms. Annie and Frank shake hands.

CROWD/ ALL
 ANN-IE, ANN-IE, ANN-IE...

Annie yells to Frank over the crowd.

ANNIE
 October 24th.

FRANK
 Why October 24th?

ANNIE
 My birthday.

CLOSE ON: What appears to be the massive plume of mist at Niagara Falls. But, as we PULL BACK, we see that this particular plume is quite small in size, it's actually billowing steam from a resting LOCOMOTIVE.

WIDEN TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - BAY CITY - CONTINUOUS

Annie, her cat, Darla, Billy and Frank board a train. Frank pushes a dolly with Annie's barrel perched on it. Annie keeps an eye and a hand on her barrel, like it's a baby about to fall out of a carriage. TRAIN PORTER and other PASSENGERS give strange looks to Annie's barrel.

DARLA (V.O.)
 Mr. Russell arranged a promotional
 whistle stop tour; Bay City to Niagara.

As the TRAIN PULLS OUT, we see a hand-painted canvas ad detailing Annie's stunt, covers the CABOOSE.

MONTAGE:

- In Ann Arbor, a GROCERY STORE OPENING - Annie is rolled down the aisle in her barrel to applause from SHOPPERS.
- In another random town, Annie and Darla hang posters advertising the stunt.
- The locomotive is stopped, in the background: American Steel & Wire Company, Cleveland.

From the caboose, Annie and barrel chat with FACTORY WORKERS on a lunch break. Frank passes out fliers.

- Train passes a sign for Indianapolis.

- In another town. Billy and Darla put an ad in every door on every street. Frank walks with them, ringing a bell, wearing a SANDWICH BOARD AD for the stunt.

- The locomotive passes a sign for Pittsburgh, then goes under a covered bridge.

- In a tent CHURCH REVIVAL. Annie preaches fervidly. She reaches inside the barrel and grabs handfuls of water and splashes the CONGREGATION. They react as if receiving the Spirit. Frank, swoops in and passes a hat for donations.

INT. TRAIN CAR - SUNRISE

Annie and team sleep as the train rocks gently. A bump. Annie opens her eyes and tries to focus when she notices miniscule specs of water forming rapidly on the window, she jolts with a realization: it's the mist.

ANNIE'S POV - As the train glides slowly past, we finally get a glimpse, from a distance, of the stunning majesty of NIAGARA FALLS. Three mighty white curtains of water, towering 180 feet high, stretching 30 football fields in length. The sun slowly coming up over them. Only Annie is awake and only she enjoys this moment. In a peaceful greeting, Annie puts her hand on the glass as it gets covered in water droplets. Then, everything blinks to darkness when the train rolls into a tunnel.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIAGARA FALLS - MORNING

PHOTOGRAPHERS snap photos of Annie, barrel and Frank who float in a reception of WELL WISHERS and PRESS.

PRESS #1

Ms. Taylor, you're determined to shoot the Falls, aren't you frightened?

ANNIE

I have no fear, darlings.

Annie throws her arms in the air dramatically, annoying Frank. The crowd cheers, they love it.

PRESS #2

Many consider this a foolhardy trip, Are you really just contemplating suicide?

ANNIE

Not by any means. I am too good an
Episcopalian to do such a thing.

Crowd chuckles.

PRESS #3

Annie, what do you say to those who say,
you're just trying to make a buck?

ANNIE

Balderdash. There's nothing immodest in
the act, nor does it involve the life of
anyone but myself.

PRESS #4

Mr. Russell, Niagara Falls Police issued
a bulletin that, if Mrs. Taylor tries to
enter the water, she will be arrested.

FRANK

What kind of welcome to Niagara is that?

Everyone laughs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Let's put our cards on the table. Every
hotel in the area has been filled for
days. Every bottle of booze and every bit
of food has been sold. The Pennsylvania
and Ohio trains had to order extra coach
cars! Fortunes were made because of this
woman. The city should be kissing Annie's
feet. Besides, I'm certain the fine
officers of Niagara P.D. have better
things to do than go around arresting
little old ladies.

ANNIE

I'm forty-five.

Crowd goes awkwardly silent. Then--

PRESS #5

What about those who say you, Mr.
Russell, could be arrested as manager, if
Mrs. Taylor doesn't survive.

ANNIE

Can we stop saying "if I don't survive?"

Everyone laughs again. A FLASH and WE FREEZE, THIS IMAGE
of ANNIE is now FRONT PAGE of the NIAGARA FALLS GAZETTE.

HEADLINE: "AUTHORITIES THREATEN ARREST OF WIDOW DAREDEVIL."

MONTAGE:

- Frank signs paperwork with an INSURANCE AGENT.
- In a WAREHOUSE - Annie runs training drills, practices getting out of and into the barrel. Darla dumps buckets of ice water over Annie as Billy rocks the barrel violently. Annie's cat looks on with aloof confusion.
- In a PUB at night. Frank does a shot of whiskey. As the BARTENDER pours another round, we reveal a POLICE CAPTAIN drinks with Frank. Frank passes the cop an envelope.
- CLOSE ON a banner: "SEE THE BARREL THAT WILL GO OVER THE FALLS - 5 CENTS." Annie's barrel is on display in the Hotel Lobby as Frank collects coins from a line of TOURISTS. Darla enters, see this and is annoyed. Then, she tilts her head, something is off about the barrel.

CLOSE ON: BARREL: It reads, "Annie Edson-Taylor - Heroine of Niagara Falls" and above this in slightly bigger lettering Frank has hand painted: "FM RUSSELL - MGR."

Darla quietly fumes as we hear the roar of Niagara Falls.

EXT. NIAGARA RIVER - SUNRISE

TITLE: October 23, 1901. The day before the stunt.

Annie, Darla, Frank, Billy in rain coats, shiver in the mist. The barrel is on the banks. All yell to be heard.

FRANK

Billy, keep an eye out.

Billy nods and scans the horizon. Annie takes her cat out of a pouch and hands her to Frank. Frank lowers the cat into the padded barrel, it mews repeatedly.

DARLA

No. There's got to be another way.

FRANK

We have to test for Annie's sake. These rapids are merciless, they strike like a sledgehammer. Thirty feet deep. Currents forty miles per hour. We gotta make sure this barrel isn't gonna crack like a coconut, leaving Annie flopping around inside like a dead clam!

BILLY

This is the worst pep talk.

FRANK

Bottom fact, we have to test the barrel.
Otherwise, the insurance is invalidated.

ANNIE

Darla, I would never forgive myself if
something happens to Misty but I welded
the barrel myself, I know she will hold.

Darla and Billy exchange an incredulous look as Frank
screws the lid on. Billy hands Frank his bicycle pump and
Frank pumps air into the barrel.

DARLA

Heavens. What is the purpose of that?

BILLY

Pressurize the barrel.

Annie winks and puts a cork in the hole after Frank
finishes pumping. Two COPS approach from a distance.

COP

What are you folks doing, there?

FRANK

I thought you were on look out?

BILLY

Oh yeah. The cops are coming.

The police break into a run toward our group.

FRANK

Gadzooks.

ANNIE

Police. I thought you paid them off?

FRANK

Looks like someone else paid them more.

The cops blow their whistles. Annie and Frank quickly
heave the barrel in the water, SPLOOSH. It gets sucked
away instantly by the fierce currents. Muffled mews fade.

ANNIE

To the bottom.

Annie and team flee, followed by police, scampering down
the embankments, slipping down the steep gorge.

BASE OF THE FALLS - EMBANKMENT

The ground is rumbling as Annie and Darla, Frank and Billy and the Cops are soaking wet, slipping and sliding on the wet rocks, chasing after the barrel rolling in the foam. Billy hauls the barrel in, they unscrew the lid and the cat is inside, dazed and confused, but very much alive. Annie scoops her up and finds a cut on her head.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie was not arrested since she herself did not enter the water, but she was warned against trying tomorrow or ever. But for now, the barrel survived and so did the cat, the first test subject.

FLASH TO:

Annie posed with barrel and cat in the now famous PHOTO.

EXT. NIAGARA RIVER - THE NEXT DAY

Thousands flock the American and Canadian sides of the river bank where folks stand on rooftops, treetops, scramble down gorges, stand on each others' shoulders. Some make bets. Peddlers sell souvenirs, beer and pie. Wagons rattle in with farmers and their dingy families.

TITLE: October 24, 1901 - The day of the stunt.

Genevieve and Annie's sisters frantically search the crowd for any sign of Annie. Sister Genevieve walks in step with the local Police Chief who calls to his men.

POLICE CHIEF

Do not let her enter the water.

Eight COPS nod and split off in pairs to hunt. Annie's other sisters scan the crowd with opera glasses. Then, the crowd cheers and Genevieve spots Annie in her typical feather hat and gown and Frank lugging the barrel by the river, a few hundred yards away.

GENEVIEVE

They're over there. Annie, stop!

The Chief blows a whistle and signals his men to move in. Annie and Frank run but the police nab them. However, when Annie and Frank turn around, we see it's not Annie and Frank after all. It's Darla and Billy dressed as Annie and Frank with a decoy barrel. Genevieve and the sisters arrive, out of breath, confused.

GENEVIEVE (CONT'D)

It's not her?!

DARLA

Sorry, sis.

The crowd whoops. Billy takes a bow and hams it up. One of the cops elbows Billy as they march away.

EXT. NIAGARA RIVER - CANADIAN SIDE - CONTINUOUS

The (real) barrel is on wheels and wrapped up to look like a bassinet. Annie and Frank are arm in arm, dressed as newlyweds. They're facing a CANADIAN GATE GUARD who inspects paperwork.

CANADIAN BORDER GUARD

Quel est le but de votre visite? (What is the purpose of your visit to Canada?)

ANNIE

(perfect French)

Monsieur, nous sommes ici pour adopter un bébé. (Sir, we are here to adopt a baby.)

CANADIAN BORDER GUARD

C'est ton mari? (This is your husband?)

ANNIE

Oui, nous devons adopter parce qu'il est impuissant. (Yes, we need to adopt because he is impotent.)

The guard smirks and waves them through. Annie and Frank enter Canada with the barrel. Frank is clueless.

FRANK

Mare-see.

EXT. NIAGARA RIVER - CANADIAN SIDE - LATER

Two CANADIAN OARSMEN wait by their rowboat in a deserted spot on the river's edge. Frank, Annie and barrel arrive on the back of a FARMER'S WAGON. Frank pays the Farmer who looks on in confusion as the Oarsmen seize the barrel and put it in their boat. Frank helps Annie over to the rowboat. Frank and Annie climb in and they are off.

DARLA (V.O.)

The oarsmen rowed out to Grass Island, Annie had to go further upriver to avoid police which meant more time in the rough waters.

EXT. GRASS ISLAND - LATER

In the strong currents, even the burly Oarsmen strain to row and guide the row boat. Annie is intimidated at the water's speed and power.

OARSMEN #1

Fast water today.

Annie takes a deep breath as her barrel is loaded into the water and held in place. Frank lends a hand to Annie.

FRANK

Okay, hop in.

ANNIE

Turn around, first.

OARSMEN #2

Is she serious?

FRANK

As a gallstone.

The men look to each other. Then they realize she's serious. They all turn around. Annie is satisfied, stands in the reeds and takes off her dress, and in her simple under-dress, she climbs into the barrel.

ANNIE

You may turn back around, now.

Annie adjusts the mattress, grabs her straps, secures herself. Then she recoils at something startling.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Frank! It must have happened in the test, we got a leak down here. My feet are already wet.

FRANK

Well, the water shall keep you awake!

Frank screws the lid into place. Frank quickly pumps air into the valve hole using the bicycle pump. Frank plugs the hole with a cork. Knocks. Annie knocks. The Oarsmen nod and set the barrel adrift. It speeds away.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Oh. And, Happy Birthday!!

Frank toasts and swigs from his flask. He passes it to the Oarsmen who look concerned, they each swig.

NOTE: INTERCUT LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- On the river side, spectators wave small American and Canadian flags. Darla and Billy take their place in a massive crowd. Billy looks through a spy glass.

BILLY

Wait, I think I see it. There it is.

ANGLE ON: A long ways up stream, Annie's barrel bobs violently in the river, speeding toward the rapids.

- In Annie's barrel, near pitch black, we hear the slams of rapids and deepening water sloshing in the bottom of the barrel, Annie's breath, faint cheering of the crowd.

DARLA (V.O.)

Inside the barrel, Annie was aware of each part of her journey, because in her mind she made this trip many times. She braced for that first drop off of the river bed, thirty feet deep.

Annie screams as she's pitched, and thuds on the bottom.

- Frank watches from the Oarsmen's boat. They are anchored and surrounded by other CRAFTS there to watch. FRANK'S POV: Annie's tiny barrel dips out of sight.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie's final moments as the old Annie. Alone in the dark with her thoughts. She wrestled with the dragons of her past. There was no going back, certainly not to the poor house, nor to her rigid ways.

- From above, Annie's barrel careens down river and enters the deep rapids where Annie is flung hard into the foaming water and bounces off a rock.

- In the barrel, complete blackness is obliterated after the jolt and several pin holes of light enter over Annie's shoulder. Annie frantically plugs leaks with her fingers. WOOSH, she's shoved hard and spins, water and light come spraying in. Annie's feet, soak in a rising pool of freezing water.

- From above, we see Annie's barrel flipped and rolled.

DARLA (V.O.)

The ride was gut-churning. Then, Annie entered the whirlpools where the ride got even more turbulent.

- In the barrel, Annie rips pieces of mattress and desperately plugs holes, but it's no use, water and light continue to stream in. The water rises to her knees. Annie then flips endlessly. Her hands bleed as she grips the straps. She closes her eyes and holds on.

DARLA (V.O.)

A year ago, Annie was ready to end it all, but in this moment she found herself clinging with her might to stay alive.

- FRANK'S POV: Annie's barrel is almost to the edge. It looks miniscule as it is slapped in the violent currents approaches the gushing cataract.

- Darla and Billy hold on to each other for support. They watch with the crowd as Annie's barrel seems to pause then suddenly disappear over the edge.

- Annie screams like bagpipes being bear-hugged as she drops. The crowd cheers go away and Annie hears nothing but the booming roar of the Falls. Annie's barrel is sucked under the boiling emerald waters deep below the Falls.

- Then, thousands of onlookers search breathlessly for any sign of the barrel. Frank looks around. The Oarsmen look. Billy looks. Darla looks. The sisters, the police, reporters look. No sign. Hope fades as SPECTATORS take off hats and lower their heads. Darla's eyes fill with tears.

Then, Annie's barrel spits out of the foam like a cork. The crowd explodes with applause. Annie's team and the Oarsmen sprint down the gorge to where the barrel bounces in the waves. The oarsmen use a hook to pull the barrel in as Annie's team surrounds. They try to unscrew the lid, but it is bent.

DARLA

Come on! Open it up!

OARSMEN #1

It's bent! We need a saw.

OARSMEN #2

We need a saw over here. Hurry.

The crowd looks to each other helplessly. A frantic

moment. Then a TUGBOAT HORN is heard. A CAPTAIN sounds his horn, we see he's got a hacksaw in hand.

TUGBOAT CAPTAIN

Here!

The saw is passed quickly and carefully through the hands of the anxious crowd. The mass of people working silently together, passing the saw all the way to the Oarsmen who immediately get to work, cutting the lid off.

DARLA

Hurry. She'll run out of air!

OARSMEN 2

You don't want us to cut her head off, do you?

DARLA

Believe me, there were moments.

They finally saw the lid off, Annie flops around inside.

PERSON IN THE CROWD

My goodness, she's alive!

A wave of joy jolts the crowd as a limp Annie is pulled from the barrel. She falls to the ground covered in water, bruised and scraped. The oarsman slaps Annie on her back and she coughs water. Gasping, Annie opens her eyes as she hears cheers and bells on both sides of the river. Frank hands Annie a carnation, which he makes sure the cameras are getting it. Annie's Sisters push in and signal to the police to arrest Annie and Frank, but there's so much joy for Annie, the police end up dragging the sisters away. Then, through the mist overhead and all around, the rays of the sun radiate, forming a bright rainbow. Billy is overcome with emotion.

DARLA

You just made history. You're a hero.

Dazed, Annie raises her arms to roars from the crowd. The men wave their caps, and all the boats sound their horns.

DIP TO BLACK.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS HOSPITAL - LATER THAT NIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHERS, REPORTERS, POLICE and CURIOSITY SEEKERS surround the building. FANS hold vigil for Annie. A DOCTOR comes outside and the crowd falls silent.

DOCTOR

Good evening. Mrs. Taylor is suffering from severe shock. She has a three-inch cut in her scalp, back of the right ear. How or when she got it, she does not know. She complains of pain between the shoulders, but this is thought to be from her arms being thrown back during the plunge, as she had her hands in straps, which undoubtedly saved her from breaking her neck. She wanders in her talk, but there is little doubt that she will be in improved condition after a day or two.

The doctor lights a cigarette and walks back inside.

INT. ANNIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANNIE'S POV: EYELIDS OPEN SLOWLY, she focuses on Frank at the end of her bed, looking pressed and refreshed. Frank's got a plastered smile, and gives a thumbs up.

FRANK

Annie! We did it! We did it!

Annie looks bloodless, a bandage around her head. Frank looms over Annie holding the front page of the GAZETTE. Annie's eyes drift over the HEADLINE: "GREAT NIAGARA CONQUERED BY WOMAN" a sub-headline: "ALSO, PRESIDENT MCKINLEY ASSASSINATED - SEE PAGE 2."

NURSE

Can you hear me, Mrs. Taylor?

A NURSE wedges in to check Annie's vitals.

FLASH OF A MOMENT, when the nurse pours water over the lip of a pitcher. Mentally, Annie ZOOMS to the brink of the Falls, going over again. Spooked, she shuts her eyes, then passes out. Frank slithers in, snapping his fingers.

FRANK

Annie, are you awake? Annie?

ANNIE

Ungh...

Frank unfolds documents from his jacket pocket and places a pen in Annie's lifeless hand.

FRANK

I uh, just need a quick Jane Hancock on some insurance release forms.

Darla rushes in before Annie "signs" anything. Darla smacks the pen away.

DARLA
 Seriously, sir.

Billy delivers an armful of envelopes.

BILLY
 Telegrams are pouring in from all over the country, Ms. Annie.

Frank sniffs a "get well" arrangement. He snaps the head off a rose and tucks it in his lapel.

FRANK
 I have good news, everyone. A heroine's reception has been planned for Annie at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo.

BILLY
 Wow.

DARLA
 That's wonderful.

Annie lays motionless, Frank yells in her ear.

FRANK
 Blink if you are excited, Annie!

DARLA
 Maybe we let Annie rest for now?

GERTRUDE (O.C.)
 Haaaayyy...

FRANK
 Oh everyone, meet my wife, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE, mildly drunk and extremely tacky woman in pearls and high heels, barges in.

BILLY
 (quietly to Darla)
 ...He has a wife?

Darla shrugs. Gertrude totes a bottle of champagne and two glasses over to Frank.

FRANK
 Thank you, my dear.

They rub noses. Darla mimes gagging, Frank pops the cork.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Woooo!

GERTRUDE
Wooooohoo!

At the noise, Annie suddenly sits up and looks around.

ANNIE
...My barrel? Where's my barrel?

Everyone looks at the floor.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Where is it?!

DARLA
Well, you see--

FRANK
There is some bad news too, Annie.
Overnight, vandals raided your barrel.

ANNIE
What?

FRANK
Scoundrels. Cut the harness to strips,
pulled out bolts, the lid is just-- gone.

ANNIE
No, no!

Darla sits on Annie's bed and hugs her. Frank lights a cigar, Annie coughs.

FRANK
Many of them stole splinters from the
barrel, or crawled into it and carved
their savage initials inside.

ANNIE
You were supposed to protect the barrel!

FRANK
Didn't I? I put my own self in peril to
chase those barbarians away.

GERTRUDE
You all should be thanking Frankie. He
single-handed rescued the barrel.

ANNIE
Where is my barrel, now?

FRANK

It's locked in the safe in the hotel manager's office.

DARLA

We'll get it fixed right up. Don't worry.

BILLY

Absolutely.

Annie slumps back, zonked.

DARLA

That's right. You rest now, Ms. Annie.

Frank checks his watch and slams it shut.

FRANK

Welp, we best shuffle off to Buffalo.

Frank grabs Annie's wrist and pulls her up.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Upsie daisy... Rip Van Winkle...

ANNIE

Uhhnngh...

DARLA

Sir! Are you brainsick?

Darla steps between Frank and Annie.

FRANK

You think going over the Falls was the end of it? Now, the real work can begin. We have to go greet Annie's public now, strike while the iron's hot.

DARLA

Look at her, she couldn't sip broth.

BILLY

She has been through a massive trauma.

GERTRUDE

Really? Because I figured the water in the bottom of Falls was soft, ya know-- on account of all the air bubbles.

Everyone stares blankly at Gertrude. She sips champagne.

FRANK

Appearing at the Pan American Exposition was the entire point of the goddamn mission. Now, step back, young lady.

Darla stays put in between Frank and Annie. Billy steps in and stands with Darla in Annie's defense.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Pity, I can't even take the time I'd like to whoop your asses right now. Because if Annie misses this opportunity, she will never attain the fame she seeks. All this would have been for nothing.

Darla exhales, she and Billy share a look.

SOUND BRIDGE: "SEMPER FIDELIS" - John Philip Sousa.

INT. TRAIN CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Frank and Gertrude sip cocktails and canoodle. Darla and Billy sit protectively on either side of sleeping Annie.

DARLA (V.O.)

We had to go. This was Annie's moment to cement her status. To be on a world stage on the eve of her greatest achievement, even if she couldn't stay awake.

EXT. TRAIN - SUNRISE

Music continues as the train speeds toward Buffalo.

EXT. PAN AMERICAN EXPOSITION - GRAND MUSIC TEMPLE

CLOSE ON: The *actual* JOHN PHILIP SOUSA stoically leading his fifty-piece MILITARY ORCHESTRA.

MONTAGE of the vibrant Pan-American Exposition.

- Thousands of ATTENDEES fill the expo. Men in boaters, women in silk dresses. Modern gas cars, electric street lamps, colorful buildings, rose gardens, flower beds, the court of fountains and lattice-work terraces abound. A zeppelin hovers overhead.

DARLA (V.O.)

They'd brought in thousands of willow trees and monumental cedars.

(MORE)

DARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Endless manicured shrubbery, mosaics and
 sculptures lined the walkways.

- We FLY over a system of lagoons and interconnecting
 canals with gondolas and SINGING MUSTACHIOED GONDOLIERS.

- ANGLE ON THE ESPLANADE: a massive parade: BUFFALO BILL
 AND HIS WILD WEST SHOW march followed by CALAMITY JANE
 and GERONIMO, then a village of actual ESKIMOS, Jumbo the
 elephant, the ROYAL MEXICAN ARTILLERY does drills,
 followed by LADIES in ornate buggies, cheerful MATADORS
 and menacing COSSACK RIDERS galloping with swords and
 BOSTOCK the ANIMAL KING conducts a wedding of a COUPLE
 being married in a lion's cage.

- In the heart of it; sickly Annie in a drawn carriage, a
 regal looking set of banners reading, "QUEEN OF THE
 MIST," dangles on either side.

ANNIE'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Annie sits next to Frank who waves as if he were the
 star. Darla and Billy are behind Frank and Annie. Darla
 turns to Billy, puzzled as he licks an odd snack.

DARLA
 Billy, what on earth is that?

BILLY
 I just bought it from a vendor. It's a
 brand new dessert snack. On a stick.

DARLA
 What's it called?

BILLY
 They call it "Popsicle."

DARLA
 How is it?

BILLY
 Meh. I don't think it'll catch on.

ANGLE ON: Annie's barrel in its own separate smaller
 carriage being towed behind the main one. Annie looks
 back to check on her barrel, it looks as sad as she does.
 Annie waves then, Annie recoils with shoulder pain.

FRANK
 Come on, keep waving, they love it.

INT. PAN AMERICAN EXPOSITION - RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Under hot lights, Annie steadies herself on the banged up barrel. Behind velvet ropes at the head of a long line of WELL-TO-DO WELL WISHERS. Frank escorts two men in tops hats over.

FRANK

The mayor of Buffalo, honorable Conrad Diehl. Mr. John G. Milburn, president of the Pan-American Exposition, meet Anna Edson-Taylor, the Queen of the Mist.

Annie dramatically presents her gloved hand for a kiss. The Mayor and Milburn turn quizzically to each other, then each politely *shake* Annie's hand, instead.

MAYOR CONRAD DIEHL

Ahem. Whereas you have successfully conquered Niagara Falls bringing much recognition to the area, it is resolved, I present you, this honorary key to the city of Buffalo, New York.

The MAYOR'S ASSISTANT hands a HUGE KEY to Annie. A photo is taken, then Annie hands the key off to Darla.

JOHN G. MILBURN

Annie, you sure stirred up a lot of attention. Ready to have another go!?

He laughs heartily, Annie turns coldly to Milburn.

ANNIE

If it was with my dying breath, I would caution anyone against attempting to shoot the Falls. Unless one wishes to feel the utter dread of personal obliteration-- the feeling that entire natural world is being annihilated. Sir, I would sooner walk up to the mouth of a cannon, knowing full well it was going to blow me to pieces, than make another trip over the Falls...

Milburn is befuddled.

JOHN G. MILBURN

Okay...

MAYOR CONRAD DIEHL

Well, it was nice meeting you.

The MAYOR'S PARTY walks off awkwardly.

FRANK

Jeepers, if that's your idea of amusing wit and repartee, we're *doomed*.

Frank goes back to cheerfully bringing people over.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Step right up, folks!

INT. PAN AMERICAN EXPOSITION - RECEPTION HALL - LATER

LATER: Annie works her way through the long line of DIGNITARIES, VIPS, WELL TO DO LADIES. Annie briefly gets a second wind bantering with a STATESMAN. He bends in front of the barrel and gives a look like "Could I do this?" Annie corrects his form.

ANNIE

You could do it, Chancellor. Get your own barrel, though!

The STATESMAN and his party guffaw. Frank approves.

RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Annie is gray-- sweating, shivering. She greets the dregs of the line; CHEESY TOURISTS, SIMPLE FOLK, FARMERS who each pay Frank a dime to meet and greet Annie.

DARLA

Excuse me, Mr. Russell, would it be possible to afford Annie a brief respite?

ANNIE

My head is absolutely pounding.

FRANK

But Annie, these fine folks came all the way from Frankfort to see you.

MAN FROM FRANKFORT

Humph. I guess we stood in this line for three hours to meet an old lady crank.

FRANK

Sir, please come back.

ANNIE'S POINT OF VIEW: She's got double vision. And, TACKY PEOPLE stream in faster and faster til things blurs.

A DRUNK MAN yells:

DRUNK MAN

That barrel is more interesting than she is!

Everyone laughs and Annie hallucinates: the line of people stretches on for infinity. She hears their cachinnation as demonic, then everything spirals. Annie passes out. The crowd gasps as Darla tends to Annie.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie returned to the infirmary, where she slept for three days straight.

NIAGARA FALLS HOSPITAL - ANNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Annie sleeps in bed with her arm over her barrel. Darla sleeps in a chair next to the bed.

MONTAGE:

- A new day. Annie is looking determined. She re-sands the barrel. Rewelds. Refinishes.

- Annie's apartment, Darla presents Annie a circular package wrapped in paper with a bow. Annie opens it, it's a new lid for the barrel. Annie hugs it to her chest.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie and barrel were soon on the mend.

- Annie and barrel speak to a sleepy group of LODGE MEMBERS in suits, each of whom wear a fez with antlers.

DARLA (V.O.)

Frank got to his end of the deal, which was to help launch Annie to stardom. Fame and fortune from her stunt. We set out on a series of appearances, however, none of them were up to Annie's standards, or expectations.

- PHOTO STUDIO - Annie poses in her barrel. She holds a bottle of Dr. Killmer's unstrained cod liver oil. PHOTO FLASH and FINAL AD: Annie makes a puckered face and sips. TEXT: "I GET MY ZEST FROM KILLMER'S!"

- Next, Annie in her barrel stands like a mannequin motionless in a downtown DEPARTMENT STORE WINDOW. STREET KIDS make faces and try to make Annie flinch, mocking her as she absorbs the humiliation and remains as stoic as a Buckingham Palace guard.

- Finally we see Annie squatting in her barrel, which is presently suspended above an over-sized DUNK TANK. We are at a crowded COUNTY FAIR BOOTH. Frank juggles three baseballs and carnival barks.

FRANK

Step up and dunk a daredevil! Three balls, only a nickel! Who's got the urge to submerge? Allow me to demonstrate...

Frank winds up and throws an errant ball that nails Annie in the boob. The second ricochets and beans her in the head. And the third nails the target, dunking Annie to huge laughs. Billy helps a wet Annie back to her perch, Darla sorrowfully resets the target while Frank collects nickels and Gertrude hands out baseballs to the crowd of eager customers.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie imagined she'd be the toast of Europe. Instead she had no choice but to take any engagement that paid Frank the modest stipend. Even if the engagement belittled her and her magnificent achievement.

TRAIN - CAFE CAR - NEXT MORNING

We see ANNIE'S COD LIVER AD in the NEWSPAPER Frank reads. Frank pours liquor into his coffee and pockets his flask. At the table across from Frank; Darla and Billy play cribbage. A WAITER enters and serves breakfast.

WAITER

Here you go, folks.

Billy gets a small tray with a BOX AND BOWL OF CEREAL and small pitcher of milk. Billy pours.

DARLA

What's that you're eating there?

BILLY

New cereal. They just came out with it.

DARLA

What's it called?

Billy takes a bite and examines the label.

BILLY

Corn Flakes.

DARLA
What do you think?

BILLY
Honestly, I don't see it catching on.

ANNIE (O.C.)
Helloooooo...

Annie enters full of cheer, and plops down next to Frank, she pours tea. Frank keeps his nose in the paper.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Well. I slept like a prince. And now I am all ready to hear about some of those bigger speaking engagements, Mr. Russell.

FRANK
(in paper)
Tsk, round steak is eleven cents a pound?!

ANNIE
Ahem... Mr. Russell?

Frank slowly lowers the paper.

FRANK
We just did several engagements, Mrs. Taylor. And, I got you in the newspaper. *Again.*

DARLA
So, you could hear her. I hate when people do that.

ANNIE
Well, with all due respect, no one would confuse a back-page cod oil advert for an exclusive in the Ladies Home Journal--

FRANK
I wish I had better luck booking engagements for you. I fear America just doesn't know what to do with you, Annie.

DARLA
What does that even mean?

ANNIE
Mr. Russell means the rules of play have changed.

(quoting)
(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

*"Though those that are betray'd do feel
the treason sharply, yet the traitor
stands in worse case of woe."*

DARLA

Hamlet?

ANNIE

No.

FRANK

Believe me, I share your frustration. But
at this point, I'm no longer optimistic.

BILLY

When were you optimistic?

Frank motions to the waiter for the check.

ANNIE

Well, at this point, I'm going to have to
demand some kind of remuneration.
Anything. Something. Ching ching. Open
that wallet. But, shield your eyes folks,
we don't want to see the moths fly out.

Frank is offended.

FRANK

Seriously? And, who do you think has been
paying all the expenses since the day
that this black hole opened? Meals,
entertainment, trains, carriages, hotels,
blacksmiths...

BILLY

Harness maker...

FRANK

Harness maker, night nurse, day nurse,
apothecary. I fought the barrel vandals--

ANNIE

Again with the barrel vandals.

The oblivious waiter enters and hands Frank the check.

WAITER

And, how was everything, folks?

Everyone plasters on grins, fakes they aren't fighting.

ALL
 (overlapping)
 Oh, good. Fine. Thank you. Enjoyed it.

Frank pays. The waiter exits. Back to the fight:

FRANK
 And, out of the goodness of my heart, I
 stayed through your nonstop complaining.
 Endured endless back talk.

DARLA
 Okay. Hold on--

ANNIE
 Listen here you half-baked John
 Barleycorn. Maybe, if you didn't spend so
 much time "bending an elbow," and more
 time booking me first class appearances--
 I wouldn't be in this unpleasant
 financial situation.

FRANK
 First off... Anyone that comes in contact
 with you for five seconds, is immediately
 going to need a stiff drink. And, your
 cash flow quandary was in full swing
 before I came along!

ANNIE
 Oh, go boil your shirt!

Frank stands and tosses confetti in the air over Annie.

FRANK
 Step right up and meet the most self-
 tormenting seek-sorrow in the world. A
 blunderbuss among us. An impossible
 fussbudget, and a perfect hypochondriac.
 Watch in horror as she draws endless
 vexation to herself and any poor soul
 unfortunately lured into her unending
 vortex of misery.

Annie gets up, gets in Frank's face.

ANNIE
 You sir, are nothing more than a dead-
 hearted, white-livered, skinflint
 manager, void of any principle of honor.

FRANK
 Shut your bone box. You insipid old sauce-
 bag.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

You are driving me to the verge of financial and mental melt down. I'm the one who should seek remuneration. I quit.

ANNIE

You can't quit. We have a contract.

FRANK

You sure you want to provoke a promoter? Fine. Maybe I'll publicize a few things.

ANNIE

Pray tell, my good man. Like what?

DARLA

Look, why don't we all just--

ANNIE

No, no. Come on. Like what, please?

FRANK

How about the fact that you were fired as vice principal in San Antonio?

Billy pours more Corn Flakes, he's loving this fight.

ANNIE

How could you possibly know that?

DARLA

...You were?

FRANK

It's true, look at her face.

ANNIE

My face always looks like this. Did you talk to my sisters?

FRANK

Finding out where my clients come from is just another form of insurance. Who is the real charlatan here? Does the mind not pause to examine the preposterous notion that Ms. Annie's private *pianie* lessons paid for first class steamship voyages?

Frank sits down as if he's rested his case.

ANNIE

Bottom fact, I did the stunt! I am owed a fair payout.

FRANK

When we get back to Niagara. I'll cut you what's owed to you and then we will dissolve this cursed partnership.

ANNIE

Fine.

FRANK

Fine.

Billy sips milk from the bowl, that was a good fight.

INT. TRAIN CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Annie, Billy, Darla and Frank ride in silence.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie was feeling good that she stood up for herself with Frank and I was feeling good that we were finally back in Niagara

A CONDUCTOR passes through the car.

CONDUCTOR

Niagara Falls, next and last stop.

Darla looks out the window, but her look of relief turns to fear when they slowly roll past FLAMING TORCHES. Billy wakes up and sleepily takes off an EYE MASK.

BILLY

...What is this, now?

OUT THE TRAIN WINDOW: We see the platform is swarmed by a MOB OF WHACKOS AND CRACK POTS with sticks and rocks. They clearly intend to harm Annie and her team.

FRANK

...Stay inside the train everyone.

DARLA

For once, I agree with Frank.

Annie and her crew hunker down in their seats. The crowd waves torches and begins to pound and kick the train car.

CROWD/ALL

(overlapping)

Come out, Ms. Taylor! Give us Annie!
(Howls, Whistles)

The ENGINEER blows the locomotive horn in a desperate attempt to dispense the crowd but it's no use, CONDUCTORS and TRAIN PORTERS use shovels and sticks to clash with the fearsome mob. The crowd launches eggs at the train that splatter and run down the glass.

ANNIE

I feel like I'm dreaming.

DARLA

I wish you were.

BILLY

Okay, does that guy have a bike chain?

FRANK

Sad thing is: it's our biggest crowd yet.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

FLORENCE KERSHAW, the Police Chief's wife leads a group of COPS, PRESS and PHOTOGRAPHERS from Buffalo and Toronto toward the train.

FRANK

The police chief's wife is head of the local Humane Society. She must've heard we tested the barrel stunt on the cat.

BILLY

Or seen the picture we put in the paper.

FRANK

Right.

Darla notices the mob pushing past the Cops and Porters and going for the door to the train car.

DARLA

Billy!

Billy leaps into action and blocks the door, but he's getting out muscled. Darla grabs the oversized KEY TO THE CITY OF BUFFALO and tosses it to Billy. Billy snags the oversized key and jams the door, freezing it in place.

FRANK

That won't hold for long!

The crowd pushes, the key bends. Billy and Frank throw their weight against the door as the crowd pushes harder.

NOTE: INTERCUT LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING:

CLOSE ON: A long black sinister looking HATCHET. We see that this hatchet, raised high in the air, as thunder rolls. This is the hatchet of CARRY A. NATION, imposing six feet tall, flowing black skirt, granny glasses and bonnet.

Carry leads her "Home Defenders Army" a group of women, fifty strong, dressed in black. They carry stones, bottles, hammers and Bibles. They move toward the platform.

ON THE TRAIN - Annie and team watches in terror.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You've made the big time, Annie.

DARLA

That's Carry A. Nation.

ANNIE

"The Kansas Saloon Smasher."

BILLY

Why do they call her that?

OUTSIDE THE SALOON - Carry shouts to the men in front.

CARRY A. NATION

Clear out of the way gentlemen. I am going to break up this den of vice.

Carry signals and she and her team smash through the bar like termites, PATRONS run for cover as the tavern is reduced almost immediately to a pile of glass and rubble.

BILLY

Okay. I see now.

DARLA

Why is the temperance movement protesting Annie?

FRANK

Publcity.

The REPORTERS and PRESS begin to follow Carry. Florence, the Police Chief's wife becomes irate.

FLORENCE KERSHAW

What are you doing here, Carry? This is not your protest. Do you need the attention or maybe you just can't resist a captive audience?

CARRY A. NATION

As the saying goes: "Is this is a private fight or can anyone join?"

PHOTOGRAPHERS ignore Florence and take photos of Carry.

ANGLE ON: a slanted sign above the bar "ALL NATIONS WELCOME, EXCEPT CARRY." A hatchet chops the sign in half. It lands at Carry's feet. Carry moves past cops, who get quickly out of her way.

BILLY

Oh great, the cops are afraid of her.

FRANK

She's half mad, just like you, Annie.

CARRY A. NATION

Come out, Annie. Answer for your sins.

ANNIE

Anna Edson-Taylor does not like being threatened.

DARLA

Annie, just sit tight.

CARRY A. NATION

I've never performed a hatchet-tation on a train. But I'm willing to do so.

The CROWD laughs. Annie removes the giant key.

DARLA

Annie, what are you doing?

ANNIE

I didn't back down to Jesse James, I defeated Niagara, I'm not backing down now. Come on barrel.

Annie storms off the train, clearing the crowd with her barrel as a battering ram. Billy and Darla and Frank share an "oh no" look and follow Annie into the fire.

BILLY

Okay, did she just talk to that barrel? What am I even doing here?

ON THE PLATFORM-- Darla, Billy, Frank and diminutive Annie and her barrel face off against Carry and the mob.

ANNIE

I don't seek atonement from anyone!

Annie slams her barrel down and faces the mob with no fear-- she paces up and down, disapprovingly.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

"Pitifullest thing out is a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass."

Annie points around the crowd to see if there are any guesses. Finally, a voice from the back--

HOME DEFENDER LADY (O.C.)

...Mark Twain?

Annie peers into the crowd.

ANNIE

Yes. Who got that? Don't be shy, you were right.

The crowd parts and a stern looking HOME DEFENDER LADY in the back raises her hand, (a rock in her hand.)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Adventures of Huck Finn. See? You're smart. What's your name, love?

HOME DEFENDER LADY

...Uh, Peg.

ANNIE

Okay. Peg. Nice to meet you. I'm Annie. See? Isn't it nice to connect?

Peg, the Home Defender Lady nods, bashfully. Annie turns to the crowd.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

But, Peg's not thinking for herself right now. Nor being mindful of consequences. None of you are. Instead you're consumed by a dreadful blood lust. You all are.

The group looks at each other, they are.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

So, what's the end game here, folks? What is it going to take, to make you the big strong people you need to be? Hm? Bring me out on a pole? Tar me and feather me? Tie us all to mules and slow drag us?

BILLY

Uh, can we stop planting ideas?

CARRY A. NATION

Come off your high horse, Taylor, you're no moral leader. You're out for money.

The mob moves in. Annie and her crew are crushed by torches and protestors from all sides. Billy is punched and throws a few back. Darla gets in a vicious cat fight. Frank runs for cover. In the melee; Carry flings her hatchet, just as Annie raises her barrel. The hatchet gets sunk in the barrel, saving Annie's life.

ANNIE

Thanks barrel!

Annie struggles to remove the hatchet from her barrel, then she herself, is hurled to the ground. The barrel with hatchet goes rolling away, knocking torches down, catching random areas of the boardwalk aflame. The barrel lands at Frank's feet.

FRANK

Don't worry. I'll protect the barrel.

Frank pulls the hatchet loose and hurries off with the barrel perched on his shoulder.

ANNIE

No, Frank. Come back!

Annie watches through the fight and flames as her barrel floats away with Frank on a sea of people.

INT. JAIL - LATER THAT NIGHT

Annie and Carry are bandaged up from the fight. Carry sits and reads her bible, Annie paces back and forth across the dank cell.

CARRY A. NATION

My thirtieth arrest.

CLOSE ON: Inside cover of Carry's bible she's penciling in the 30th notch, in a field of marks.

ANNIE

You should at least get your own room, at this point.

They laugh.

CARRY A. NATION

Annie, I think we're a lot alike.

ANNIE

Why? Because we've both done hard time?

CARRY A. NATION

I used to be a teacher, too.

ANNIE

I can totally see that.

CARRY A. NATION

My husband also died, yours again was--

ANNIE

War. Shot down by the musket's mighty ball. Died 400 days later. Yours?

CARRY A. NATION

My Charles was addicted to liquor. That's what started this whole thing. At his funeral, I threw myself on the ground and I swore, I'd defend as many men as possible from a drunkard's fate.

ANNIE

Well yeah... After my husband's funeral, I did some light traveling and lived off cash my sisters sent. So, I can see the similarities.

A GUARD approaches, his inner fan shows through.

GUARD

Ms. Nation. Could I trouble you for an autograph?

She's been there, done that. Carry nods. He hands a pencil and paper to her through the bars.

GUARD (CONT'D)

...To, Curtis.

Carry signs and hands it back to him. Annie puts on her glasses and cracks her knuckles, gets ready to sign, also. But, the guard just turns and leaves.

CARRY A. NATION

Where was I? Yes, I was obsessed; I gave speeches, led marches, wrote letters. Whatever it took to keep even a drop of alcohol out of a man's mouth.

(MORE)

CARRY A. NATION (CONT'D)
 I became a roaring lion, smashing joints,
 I intended to make all hell howl!

Carry goes back to reading her bible. Annie gazes out the jail window at the electric lights of the city.

ANNIE
 I did what I was supposed to do. I just
 thought I would be enjoying my reward.

CARRY A. NATION
 The reward is the fight.

Annie understands. Then the Guard calls out.

GUARD/CURTIS (O.C.)
 ...Mrs. Taylor, fetch your belongings.
 You've been sprung.

The guard unlocks the door as Annie nods goodbye to Carry and gathers her things.

ANNIE
 Curtis, you want that autograph, now?

GUARD/CURTIS
 I'm good.

EXT. JAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Annie exits the jail and finds Darla and Billy waiting. Both are bandaged up from the fight. Annie hugs them.

CLOSE ON: Boiling chicken noodle soup is ladled carefully into a thermos.

TITLE: A few weeks later.

WIDEN TO:

INT. BACHELOR APARTMENT - DAY

Annie hands the thermos to a BUSINESS MAN who puts on a hat and exits.

DARLA (V.O.)
 Frank and barrel were gone and Annie
 started working day to day, cooking and
 cleaning apartments.

Annie removes the soup kettle from the WOOD STOVE. Annie notices the body of the wood stove has a barrel shape.

MONTAGE:

- Annie cleans another small apartment, she uses a new invention, A VACUUM CLEANER. However, she's distracted when she notices the vacuum body looks round and tall, like her barrel.

DARLA (V.O.)

But, even though she was using new modern inventions like vacuum cleaners and laundry machines, nothing could keep Annie's thoughts from the past.

- In a wealthy home's LAUNDRY ROOM, Annie washes clothes, in a 1900 THOR LAUNDRY MACHINE, it too, looks like a barrel-- on wheels. Annie affectionately touches the laundry machine. Annie's EMPLOYER catches Annie caressing the machine. Annie blushes and gets back to work.

- on a STREET - DAY, Annie carries groceries. She thinks she sees FRANK PUSHING HER BARREL. She chases the guy down and grabs him from behind by the jacket, the man turns around horrified. It's a completely DIFFERENT GUY. Annie apologetically backs away.

EXT. PINKERTON HEADQUARTERS - MORNING

Darla and Annie walk in a crowded quad; the bustling headquarters of the Pinkerton Detective Agency. We see a SIGN WITH AN EYEBALL LOGO and motto: "WE NEVER SLEEP."

DARLA

Do you think it's wise to spend money on a detective right now?

ANNIE

I've got a little stream of cash trickling in, on the regulars. Come now, it's not like I'm eating cat food.

Darla tilts her head.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I'm not, I swear. I just tried it that one time out of curiosity. It was good though.

DARLA

Annie, I know you can do anything.

ANNIE

But--

DARLA

Why can't you give this up?

ANNIE

Once I have my barrel, I can do my speaking engagements the proper way. And, it's mine, it's not right he has it.

DARLA

No, you're right.

The ladies trudge up a massive staircase.

INT. DETECTIVE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Darla and Annie sit opposite a PINKERTON DETECTIVE in a starched Arrow collar, pressed suit, suspenders and tie.

ANNIE

First of all, sir-- when this case came up, I decided right away it was a Pinkerton case through and through.

A SECRETARY pours waters for everyone and exits.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Well, is that so?

ANNIE

I'd be a fool to bring a job of this of this magnitude to some two-bit hawkshaw. As I told my associate Darla here, Pinkerton's-- no one else.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

We are proud of our reputation. As you know we attacked and disbanded Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. So, I'm sure we can help with whatever you need.

ANNIE

I just hope you have the man power.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

We have over 2,000 agents, ma'am.

ANNIE

Well, I need you to immediately put every single one of them on high alert.

Darla pulls Annie back to her seat. The detective opens a notebook and picks up a pencil, then smiles sweetly.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Okay, let's get to the bottom of this caper, shall we? What kind of case do we have? Stolen jewelry? Cheating husband?

ANNIE

Grand-theft barrel.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Barrel theft? K, let me roll up my sleeves! So, what's all in the barrel?

ANNIE

Well... nothing.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Nothing?

DARLA

Used to be pickles.

ANNIE

Right. Used to be pickles. Now, empty.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

I see.

(taking note)

Pickles. Now empty.

(then)

Any idea, the estimated value of this once full, now empty, pickle barrel?

ANNIE

Ballpark?

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Sure. Why not.

ANNIE

One hundred million dollars.

DARLA

Annie, we found it in the trash.

ANNIE

That's true... But, it's a national treasure, now. It's bound to wind up in the Smithsonian Institution.

The detective closes his notebook and rubs his temples.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Why did he stop writing?

(to detective)

Why did you stop writing?

DARLA

Look, Annie is a stunt woman and she used this barrel for her stunt, her manager--

ANNIE

Whose name cannot be mentioned.

DARLA

Right, her manager, guy-- stole the barrel and now we want you to find him and help us get the barrel back.

ANNIE

And, in the arrest of this knave, you have full discretionary power to be as aggressive and punishing as possible. Carte blanche, no holds barred-- if you gather my inference.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

I think I do. So... you want me to find an empty barrel. And then beat up a mystery guy with no name? That about it?

ANNIE

Fine. His initials are-- also too difficult to for me to utter. Darla write it down. Actually, make it even easier for you detective; just look for the most detestable vile snake you can find. Apologies to snakes.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

Why don't you just get a new barrel?

DARLA

This particular barrel has significance.

PINKERTON DETECTIVE

You seem nice, but I don't think we're the agency for you. I'd be laughed out of here if I took this case. How about a nice souvenir pencil?

The detective smiles sweetly.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Outside the detective's office, Annie stuffs DOZENS OF PENCILS into her purse.

ANNIE

Ugh! What a phony!

DARLA

Annie, maybe this is a sign, to move on?

ANNIE

Never! Something always comes along!

Annie and Darla bump into jail guard Curtis, now in plain clothes, suit. Curtis drops a stack of papers and Annie recognizes him as he bends to pick them up.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

...Curtis?

CURTIS

...Yes?

ANNIE

Annie Edson-Taylor. You arrested me a few months back. The riot?

CURTIS

Right, hiii.

They shake hands like old friends. Curtis sorts his pile of messy papers and looks overwhelmed.

ANNIE

What are you doing here, Curtis?

CURTIS

Just applied for a job.

Darla hands Curtis more papers he's dropped.

DARLA

As a secretary?

CURTIS

A detective! Thank you very much.

ANNIE

How did it go?

CURTIS

Not so hot. They told me, "Check back in six months."

ANNIE

Sounds promising.

CURTIS

They told me that same thing, six months ago.

Annie, Curtis and Darla all stroll toward the exit.

ANNIE

Say Curtis, do you carry a roscoe?

CURTIS

A what?

ANNIE

A zip. A rod. A jimmy.

DARLA

...A gun.

CURTIS

Gosh ladies, no. Well, I've a got a starter pistol from when I ran track. I'm just a part time jail guard for the county. Oh, and also a notary public. If you have documents you need ratified--

ANNIE

But, Curtis-- you always wanted to get in the PI and detective game, haven't you?

Behind Curtis's back, Darla shakes her head "no" at Annie.

CURTIS

Of course!

ANNIE

And, if you had a successful case, under your belt-- that'd reflect favorably when you check back in six months.

CURTIS

Why, yes... I suppose.

Annie looks Curtis up and down. Out of Annie's view, Darla shakes her head "no" at Curtis.

ANNIE

Curtis, my boy. I have a case for you.

CURTIS

I'm in.

Darla drops her head.

MONTAGE:

- Curtis, looking quite serious and mysterious, rides the train and sips an orange juice. He's writing notes.

- Meanwhile, Annie scrubs a floor, her shoulder hurts.

DARLA (V.O.)

So, Annie worked 15 hours a day, 7 days a week and lived on little so she could afford to pay travel and daily expenses for Curtis Ringwood, private eye.

- In JUMP CUTS: Curtis inspects a variety of DOCKS, DELIVERY BAYS, ALLEYS, in search of Annie's barrel.

- on a DOCK Curtis accidentally crowds tough LONGSHOREMEN who intimidate, making Curtis uncomfortably shuffle away.

DARLA (V.O.)

The hunt for Frank and the barrel was virtually impossible-- because barrels were everywhere. However, call it providence, luck, tenacity, or the universe letting Annie have a moment, Curtis actually reported some good news.

- Annie opens and reads a WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM.

CURTIS (V.O.)

Dear Mrs. Taylor. Good news, I traveled to Chicago because I saw an ad for a vaudeville show that piqued my interest... The critic said it was a barrel of laughs. And, sure enough, it was a show about you and your stunt.

EXT. CHICAGO THEATER - NIGHT

A rainy night in Chicago. Curtis is in a trench coat and carries roses. "QUEEN OF THE MIST" is on the marquee. Curtis gets in the ticket line as we faintly hear Frank from inside.

FRANK (O.C.)

Human beings have always been driven to impress each other and prove themselves through courageous acts of derring-do. Yes my friends, that spirit of, "Look Ma, no hands." Has coursed through our veins since time immemorial.

Curtis buys his ticket and hands it to the TICKET TAKER.

TICKET TAKER

Welcome back, sir.

We trail Curtis through the lobby, down a corridor, and up more stairs to the mezzanine. Curtis enters the theater, a lively crowd. Curtis takes a seat in a balcony. Frank continues on stage below.

FRANK

Our story begins a long, long time ago.
Long before people were blasting
themselves out of cannons, shooting river
rapids in barrels, or strolling the wings
of stunt prop planes. No, our story goes
back to a time when the Guinness Book was
still the Guinness Pamphlet.

Audience laughs. Curtis laughs, too. But then remembers he's there on business.

INT. THEATER - LATER

ORCHESTRA PIT: a BAND plays a turbulent, riff.

ON STAGE: Frank wearing way too much stage make-up and rouge, crazy blue eye shadow, lipstick, fake grease paint eyebrows... is with Gertrude, who is dressed up like Annie, with fakey gray wig and flowery hat.

Gertrude squats in the actual barrel with her head sticking out, as it is rocked by pulleys operated by stage hands.

THE WINGS: SCRAWNY STAGE HANDS are dragged around by massive ropes.

STAGE: Blue painted waves made of balsa wood are positioned upstage and downstage of the barrel, giving the illusion of being "in the rapids."

Buckets of water are thrown on Gertrude.

FRANK

Annie was riding the delirious rapids of
the mighty Niagara River--

GERTRUDE/AS ANNIE

WaoohOhhhhh!!!

FRANK

Was it a destiny with death?

CURTIS (V.O.)

...I have attended the show a few times. From the looks of it-- it is in fact your barrel as you have meticulously described; the hatchet scar, vandalized interior, new lid. I intend to confront Mr. Russell and his beautiful companion the alluring Gertrude, at this evening's performance. I will reclaim your barrel and report back with the good news soon. Privately, your investigator, Curtis Ringwood, Jr., Notary Public.

In the audience: the crowd hoots and howls. Meanwhile, Curtis takes a stealthy position in an aisle by the stage door. Curtis adjusts the flowers, we see a STARTER PISTOL hidden in the stems.

ON STAGE: Frank glimpses Curtis moving in, but continues--

FRANK

And, what could I do? Annie was my life long friend. She was also my teacher.

GERTRUDE/AS ANNIE

(violently rocking)

I'm doin' this all for you Frankie poo!

FRANK

Poor weary-brained Annie, was going over Niagara Falls in barrel, risking her life all to win my affections.

Frank gives puppy dog eyes to the audience, they swoon.

FRANK (CONT'D)

And then, KA-BOOM!

The STAGE HANDS pull hard on the ropes. Gertrude is tossed, more water is splashed on her from the wings.

GERTRUDE/AS ANNIE

Ahhh, I am falling now!

Gertrude tips in the barrel and spills onto the floor, Frank swoops into Gertrude/Annie and gives her mouth to mouth. The crowd "woops."

FRANK

Yes! I saved Annie's life, she would have drowned without me.

Curtis moves through the crowd keeping an eye on the barrel and Frank. The BAND swells.

GERTRUDE/AS ANNIE

You're the single greatest American who
ever lived, Frank M. Russell.

As the crowd gives a standing ovation, Frank and Gertrude bow. Frank blows kisses to the crowd and bows again. Then, Frank looks back over to where Curtis was and now Curtis is gone--

CAT WALK - CONTINUOUS

Curtis walks on a shaky 20 foot high cat walk, roses under his arm. Applause and the BAND can be heard faintly below. Curtis sweats and shakily shimmies on.

CURTIS'S POV - he's high above the stage, Frank and Gertrude are below taking a final bow. They head toward the DRESSING ROOM.

CURTIS

(whisper to self)

Don't look down.

Curtis looks up: it is vertigo inducing-- towering ceiling with long cables and lights everywhere.

CURTIS (CONT'D)

Oof. Don't look up, either. Ponderous.

Below, a stage hand yanks a rope, a red curtain comes barreling by Curtis almost knocking him off balance, but he manages to hang on.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Curtis approaches the dressing room with his roses. He hears a bath running. Curtis is surprised to find Gertrude covering herself with a towel.

CURTIS

A thousand apologies, miss--

Curtis glimpses Frank coming up fast behind him in the dressing room MIRROR, but Curtis is too slow and it's too late. Frank swings his silver tipped walking stick, smacks Curtis across the neck, knocking him out cold.

GERTRUDE

You said you weren't gonna hit him!

Frank kicks the flowers that were in Curtis's hand -- the starter pistol and a pair of handcuffs spill out.

FRANK

Would you shut up and trust me for once?

GERTRUDE

Is that a starter's pistol?

FRANK

Come on!

Frank puts one of Curtis' roses in his lapel. Gertrude throws on a robe. Frank grabs the barrel and all escape through the STAGE DOOR.

EXT. STAGE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Gertrude and the barrel pile into Frank's Oldsmobile Curved Dash. Frank starts it up.

GERTRUDE

Why can't I ever drive, Frankie?

Frank pulls out and blending into a steady stream of cars, wagons and horses. We hear him as they drive off.

FRANK

What? Women are ill-suited for the road!
They are far too emotional! Dammit! You
distracted me!

A-oogah! Frank honks, almost hits a horse. Then drives erratically away.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie would never see Frank or her barrel
again.

INT. ANNIE'S YARD - WEEKS LATER

In JUMP CUTS: A dusty, scratched cat collar is placed in a hole in the ground. Annie places her cat, wrapped in a sheet, into the hole as well. Annie shovels dirt and covers the cat.

DARLA (V.O.)

That fall, the first creature to go over
Niagara Falls in a barrel, the cat that
served as Annie's test pilot, the cat she
found as a stray, passed. Annie was truly
alone and felt all was lost. Yes, she
proved she could do the impossible, but
it had not yet yielded a reward.

Later, Annie sits reflectively in a chair next to a fresh mound of dirt under a tree that sheds falling leaves.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS, NY - DAY

Cars, electric lights, now, only a handful of horses.

TITLE: Ten years later.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie, had finally made peace with the Falls. While she never made her fortune, she could rest in the fact that she was the only person to go over the Falls. But, Sometimes unexpected developments occur-- Someone else was going over the Falls in a barrel.

INT. POOL HALL - DAY

A crew of DRUNKS and LOUDMOUTHS crowd this smoky pool parlor with red velvet wall paper and busty waitresses serving pints of beer.

DARLA (V.O.)

It was a man named Bobby Leach. A barker and circus performer who also did some stunting in his day. He owned the local pool hall and was his own best customer.

A ring of REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS surround BOBBY LEACH, a loudmouth, who swills beer and racks pool balls.

REPORTER #1

Bobby what made you want to do this?
Being first is no longer an enticement.

BOBBY

But, I'll still be the firs MAN to go
over the Falls!

People cheer.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

And, I wanted to prove, that I could beat Annie Edson-Taylor. Doesn't matter what I did, locals always mention her! I navigated that river 'undreds of times. Swam the whirlpool rapids in me bare arse.

People laugh.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I parachuted from the Upper Suspension Bridge over the Niagara River. I could fart the national anthem backwards! Wouldn't make a defference! No matter what I did, I 'ad to 'ear bleddy Emmets comin in 'ere, yakkin about Annie Edson-Taylor.

Bobby mimes being a "woman." And, everyone laughs.

REPORTER #2

Bobby. You think you can survive going over the falls in barrel?

BOBBY

Anything a woman can do, I can do better.

Bobby breaks, lots of balls go in. Cameras Flash.

JUMP CUTS: Several newspapers feature stories about Bobby and his upcoming attempt.

REVEAL: Annie at home, is looking through the newspapers about Bobby, she's upset.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie wanted to put the Falls behind her. There's always one more hurdle it seemed.

INT. LADIES VOICE MAGAZINE - OUTER HALLWAY

Annie and Darla (both ten years older Annie 73 and Darla about 30) walk through a rosy pastel painted hallway decorated with framed back issues of LADIES VOICE MAGAZINE.

TITLE: July, 1911

DARLA

Oh, so now you care about the women's movement?

ANNIE

I'm simply trying to clear the air about that parsimonious, pettifogger, Frank. The grand-theft barrel. And, Bobby Leach. That, that leech! Oh, that's good! Write that down.

DARLA

I don't have a pen. Try to calm down.

Darla and Annie sit down on dainty WAITING ROOM CHAIRS amidst plants and delicate end tables. Annie boils.

ANNIE

Well, that's just what Mr. Bobby Leach is - a bloodsucker leech. Draining my achievement of all meaning. All this press coming out for him. Ten years later and I'm practically a footnote. A man comes along and he gets all the notice. Now, he's the sweetheart of the Falls! Not by a jug full!

DARLA

Annie. Breathe.

ANNIE

Most articles about Bobby, don't even mention me. Yellow journalists!

A female ASSISTANT opens the office door.

ASSISTANT

They will see you now.

ANNIE

Through those doors, Darla. I will finally put it all behind me.

DARLA

Atta girl.

Darla and Annie and walk INSIDE: the inner office of LADIES VOICE MAGAZINE; it's all MALE REPORTERS, sitting on desks, smoking. Darla and Annie are crestfallen.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIAGARA FALLS - DAY

Annie at a clapboard hut for autographs, near the Falls. Painted on the front it reads: "MEET THE ORIGINAL NIAGARA FALLS DAREDEVIL." Darla is at the ready with a camera and they have a REPLICIA BARREL nearby.

ANNIE

So what Bobby Leach does to me... So, I shall do unto him. I will leech off his moment, his worshippers will learn the truth! "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?!"

Annie points at Darla. Darla fiddles with the camera...

DARLA

Uh... Hamlet?

ANNIE

No. Stop guessing Hamlet for everything.

As TOURISTS pass, Darla barks.

DARLA

Step right up. Get a photo with the original Niagara Falls daredevil!

An eager OLDER TOURIST COUPLE approaches, checks out the literature.

OLDER TOURIST #1

Hi, we came into town to see the first man go over the Falls, tomorrow. Is this connected, in some way, to that?

ANNIE

Well, ahem-- slight correction in what you said, there sir. While it is technically true; Mr. Leach will be the first man to go over the Falls in a barrel. But I have already done it. And, I am a woman.

OLDER TOURIST #1

So wait. What. I don't get it.

ANNIE

The way you're saying it, it makes it sound, you know, like I never did it.

OLDER TOURIST #1

Like you never did what?

ANNIE

Go over the Falls in a barrel.

OLDER TOURIST #2

Wow, so you're gonna do it, too?

ANNIE

No, I did do it.

OLDER TOURIST #2

He inspired you?

ANNIE

No, I inspired him. I said I did it, ten years ago. Open your ears, stupid.

Darla swoops in and directs attention to the barrel.

DARLA

Say, why don't we take a look at the barrel over here.

OLDER TOURIST #2

(genuine interest)

Ah, okay... so, that's the barrel that went over, huh? Harold come look.

ANNIE

Well. Actually, the real barrel was stolen.

DARLA

Yeah, technically, we have to say this is a near exact replica.

OLDER TOURIST #2

...Oh.

DARLA

How about a picture folks, two bits.

OLDER TOURIST #1

We don't want a picture anymore.

They put the literature down and walk off. Then a hard gust of wind blows and knocks Annie's clapboard hut over.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS - SUNRISE, THE NEXT MORNING

We're high above the Falls and we can see thousands line both sides of the river at day break.

TITLE: July 25, 1911

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS - LATER

As Bobby goes over in his phallic shaped metal craft, Annie and Darla watch, lost in the crowd of thousands.

- People are celebrating and cheering. For Annie the sound has gone away and she just watches people cheering in slow motion.

- Later, Annie watches as Bobby is pulled, alive but badly broken from his craft. Bobby clearly is terribly injured, covered in blood and barely conscious-- but he's being held up by his team. They raise Bobby's arms in the air. The crowd roars and Annie closes her eyes.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS - BOARDWALK - LATER THAT MORNING

MONTAGE:

Annie and Darla walk on the boardwalk. Annie looks around, and frowns at the ugliness. Niagara is a tourist place now. We scan a flashy assortment of cheap MOTELS, BARKERS, BRIC-A-BRAC SHOPS, CARNIVAL GAMES with cheap blinking lights, GAMING PARLORS and TAVERNS.

Later, Annie confronts a gaudy melting wax figure of herself. Annie stares sadly face to face with "herself" for a long contemplative moment.

Later, Annie and Darla walk and get lost in a sea of cars, bikes, horses and people.

EXT. WOODS - TRAIL - LATER

Annie and Darla hike toward an authentic TUSCARORA INDIAN VILLAGE. TRADITIONAL INDIAN LONG HOUSES - large wood frame buildings covered with sheets of elm bark, form a barrier around the village. The TUSCARORA, men in tanned deerskin, cloth, and animal fur, the women in wrap around skirts and leggings decorated with fringe, are selling hand-made crafts: corn husk dolls, basketry, carvings.

Darla and Annie try on beaded bracelets. Darla purchases some for Annie and herself. Darla and Annie regard a circle of WOMEN ELDERS sitting around a fire.

ANNIE

Those are the elders.

DARLA

They are in charge?

ANNIE

Yes. They choose the tribal council.

DARLA

So, that's why it works so well in tribal lands. Women have the right to vote.

Darla goes to the register and pays while Annie wanders to a painted sign above some trinkets that explains the story of LELAWALA a young girl sent over the falls in a canoe to appease the God of the Falls, Hino. Annie overreacts, knocking over displays.

ANNIE

That's it, Darla. Darla! This is it, I found it. This is why I'm cursed. It's all right here in black and white.

Darla finds Annie upset and reads the SIGN out loud...

DARLA

(reading)

"Our Native ancestors would send fruit and wild game over the Falls in canoes to appease Hino! The God of the Falls. When that didn't appease Hino, they sent a young Native girl, Lelewala." So?

ANNIE

So? That's why I'm doomed.

Annie paces and ponders.

DARLA

Annie, you think upset the spirit of Falls--

ANNIE

Yes. I've robbed Hino of his sacrifice by surviving.

A young NATIVE CLERK approaches.

NATIVE CLERK

Nah. Don't worry. It's just something we tell the tourists-- helps sell bracelets.

He winks and smiles and sets out a new basket of bracelets.

ANNIE

Wait. Really?

NATIVE CLERK

Yeah, in fact, in the original story a maiden went over and was *saved* by spirits. To us the Falls represent life, only to your people does it represent death.

Annie is moved by the perspective.

DARLA

So, your tribe never sent a virgin over the Falls in a canoe filled with food?

NATIVE CLERK

Sorry how would a god be pleased that we went ahead and wasted a perfectly good canoe, food, and a woman?

LATER: Annie and Darla stroll through the Native village. A mother carries a baby on a cradle board, canoes are carved, people are in harmony with the land; operating simple small game traps, tapping trees for syrup and grinding nuts into flour.

LATER: Annie and Darla are invited for a meal of corn cakes, beans, squash, berries, rabbit and fish. After dinner, Annie and Darla have feathers put in their hair by YOUNG NATIVE WOMEN as Annie beguiles everyone with her story of the falls.

LATER: A game of lacrosse is played by YOUNG NATIVE MEN. Annie and Darla watch and cheer on the man who sold them bracelets.

LATER: At sunset, Annie and Darla hike up a narrow path next to the Falls.

ANNIE

When the French came, they asked the Tuscarora if they could use these trails, and the Natives agreed. Because the French paid the Natives to carry their equipment up the trails and they gave food and goods for their families.

DARLA

Then what happened?

ANNIE

Then, the British came and they carried their own equipment with covered wagons. They didn't ask, they didn't share. So, the Tuscarora took their trails back.

DARLA

Always something with white men.

Darla becomes winded on the steep trail, however, Annie motors on with boundless energy. Darla shakes her heads and trudges on after her.

DARLA (CONT'D)

Ms. Annie wait up!

INT. CAVE OF THE WINDS - SUNSET

Annie and Darla wander up a steep trail behind the Falls. The roar is intense. They enter a winding stone hall that wraps to a cave that has primitive paintings of human figures on the cave walls going up 20 feet, it's almost sunset and the last golden rays of sun shine into and warm the cave. On the opposite wall, a window looking into the sheets of falling water from behind.

Annie and Darla admire the cave paintings. ANGLE ON DRAWINGS: They depict primitive Native life.

DARLA

How come none of these drawings have horses in them?

ANNIE

Because, there were no horses in North America til Europeans brought them. They also brought bananas, wheat, sheep, cows--

DARLA

And, slavery.

Annie shushes Darla and walks to the wall of water and gazes. Annie is hurting, Darla tries to comfort her.

DARLA (CONT'D)

You will always be the first.

ANNIE

I will never be recognized for what I did *because* I am a woman.

DARLA

Annie, whether you like it or not, you are a part of this movement. For your stunt, for the thousands of girls you have taught and inspired. The millions of people who have read about you. You're a link in a long chain, how can you not see that?

ANNIE

No matter what happens, I'll just always need to prove myself.

DARLA

To the world?

ANNIE

To myself.

MONTAGE:

IN JUMP CUTS: Bobby Leach is front page news on - The EVENING STAR WASHINGTON DC, THE SAN FRANCISCO CALL, THE TACOMA TIMES, THE NEW YORK TIMES, the full color covers of LIFE MAGAZINE and SATURDAY EVENING POST. Bobby and his barrel are featured in ads for CREAM OF WHEAT and COCA-COLA.

DARLA (V.O.)

Then, a downpour of press coverage and media attention rains down on Bobby Leach. The exact kind of attention that Ms. Annie craved but did not receive.

EXT. MIDWAY - SIDE SHOW - DUSK

Annie skulks alone through the buzzing crowds on the gaudy MIDWAY. A SIDESHOW with flashy lurid acts: the attendees are greasy coal miners, farmers, drunk sailors and toothless ruffians. Each pays their dime to see: THE BEARDED LADY, FISH BOY, THE HAIRLESS MAN, and SIAMESE TRIPLETS playing tambourines and singing.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie took work in an unsavory side show. She figured at least she'd see the world and tell her tale of her adventure.

INT. TENT

Annie sleeps in cramped quarters with other side-show performers.

EXT. NY STATE LEGISLATURE - EVENING

Darla outside the State Legislature for NY. She and her suffragettes joyfully bring in boxes and boxes of signed papers. PHOTOGRAPHERS SNAP PHOTOS as 600,000 signatures are delivered.

The suffragettes happily deliver box after box of petitions--

EXT. NY STATE LEGISLATURE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Darla and thousands of her fellow suffragettes carry lanterns, and walk arm in arm. They sing, hum and chant.

INTERCUT: DARLA RALLY/ ANNIE SIDESHOW/ BOBBY SUCCESS

LATER: Darla addresses the crowd.

DARLA

See what woman has accomplished in terms of suffrage in Australia, New Zealand, Finland, the Scandinavian Countries and here in our own states; Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah.

Applause.

DARLA (CONT'D)

And, today we delivered a petition with over six hundred thousand signatures to the New York State Legislature. And, even though we only needed two hundred thousand signatures to be considered. Our petition was still ignored. So tonight, we rally!

Applause, cheers.

DARLA (CONT'D)

We are here tonight to take stock of the woman's emancipation movement. What does it mean to be free?

SIDESHOW: Under tinkly lights, Annie strolls past BOOTHS displaying; a blue-ribbon 8 POUND POTATO. Another, A PEANUT WITH SEVEN NUTS INSIDE. Bucky, the world's smallest RACCOON.

DARLA (V.O.)

A free woman should choose her own destiny. A free woman lives her own way in the world. That's something to be admired.

- WITH BOBBY: Bobby and his phallic barrel are at a red carpet, black tie affair.

- SIDESHOW: Next to a tent that has a dog with two tails that jumps through hoops we find Annie, hardly drawing lines at her shoddy exhibit, "The Heroine Of Niagara."

- IN JUMP CUTS: Bobby does first class tours of Canada, the US and Europe. He's at lecture halls, museums.

DARLA (V.O.)

But we are confined as much by our own societal norms and pressures as we are by state held power.

RALLY: PROTESTORS join arms at the appearance of POLICE, clubs in hands. And, then a second line of officers on horseback form a perimeter around the women.

SIDESHOW: Annie arranges her silverware correctly before eating a humble meal in a MESS TENT, other SIDESHOW GEEKS look at Annie like she's nuts.

DARLA (V.O.)

In the words of writer Emma Goldman...
"The import is not the kind of work woman does, but rather the quality of the work she furnishes. Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself..."

SIDESHOW: We see glimpses of Annie's embarrassing act, a sparse crowd, drunk people passed-out. Annie is on a dimly lit stage with a cheap replica barrel.

DARLA (V.O.)

"...To learn to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities. Women can do this by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity..."

Annie steps up on platform and dons leather straps. Annie then crawls into the barrel backwards on all fours. The crowd howls.

WITH BOBBY: Bobby is now in UK, having the luxurious journey Annie wanted. Bobby mixes with ROYALS, is being given medals.

RALLY: Darla reads from her speech notes.

DARLA

"...By freeing herself from these busybodies, moral detectives, jailers of the human spirit. What will they say? She must free herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation. True emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul. Freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches..."

FLASH BACK - Ten years ago. The moment Annie's barrel goes over the Falls.

JUMP CUT: Annie throwing her hands in the air in victory.

MATCH CUT: To a propped up and bloody Bobby Leach, throws his hands in the air after going over the Falls.

DARLA (CONT'D)

"...It is, therefore, far more important for her to begin with her inner regeneration, to cut loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions, and customs. Only that, and not the ballot, will set woman free, will make her a force for real love, for peace, for harmony; a force of divine fire, of life-giving; a creator of free men and women..."

The SUFFRAGETTES cheer for Darla, it's climactic. Then the POLICE move in. The cops rip the protest signs from the women and tear them in half. Darla is arrested. Darla and many of her fellow PROTESTORS are beaten, punched, thrown to the ground, and dragged violently away.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

A bruised and bloodied Darla and her beaten SUFFRAGETTES are cuffed to the bars, hands over their heads.

DARLA (V.O.)

We were beaten and manacled over our heads. Forced to stand all night long.

INT. ANNIE'S SIDE SHOW TRAILER - NIGHT

Annie receives her payment from the GREASY SHOW MANAGER, it's a few coins.

INT. JAIL - CELL - MORNING

Darla has a journal on her lap. We see Darla notch her first arrest in her journal like Carry Nation did.

EXT. JAIL - NEXT DAY

Darla, in street clothes, is escorted out of jail by a COP. Darla is picked up in a car by her husband, Billy. Billy greets her with hug and hands her a TEDDY BEAR.

DARLA

(re: bear)

What is this?

BILLY

It's a brand new kind of toy they just came out with. It's called a Teddy Bear.

DARLA

It's cute, thanks.

BILLY

I just don't know what you're supposed to do with it.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS - DAY

The Falls in daytime. Tourists flock.

DARLA (V.O.)

Everyone laughed at Annie before she was a hero then they grew angry at her for daring to do what they themselves could never do. Annie finally left the road and moved back to Niagara Falls, determined to not fade away.

EXT. NIAGARA FALLS - BOARDWALK

Annie sits at a table on the board walk. She's blind now and wears a turban and is giving Tarot Readings.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie lost her sight, but never her vision. She lived out her days giving tarot readings by her beloved Niagara Falls.

Annie clutches a GULLIBLE TOURIST's hand.

ANNIE

Oh, no. I feel a great danger is ahead if you're not careful. I see-- I see the color green...

The Gullible Tourist pays Annie, she pockets the money.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie also sold ten cent booklets that told the story of her life and journey.

- LATER, Annie sits surrounded by a crowd of GEEK TOURISTS who find her fascinating.

ANNIE

You know, I've traversed this great country ocean to ocean, eight times. I've seen tornadoes, hail storms, maelstroms-- Indian attacks when traveling 'crost the Southwest.

GEEK TOURIST #1

What kind of work were you in, exactly?

ANNIE

School teacher.

People are perplexed.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

This one time, I was a passenger on the Wells Fargo Stage in Missoura-- but, it wasn't rough terrain that made it unbearable, it was --outlaws.

Annie has everyone's rapt attention.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Like fast moving storm clouds-- we were suddenly overtaken. Snorting steeds and clicking pistols on every side of us. When we were finally forced to a halt, it was none other than the gang of Frank and Jesse James.

All are impressed. Someone whistles.

GEEK TOURIST #2

Did they rob you?

ANNIE

When Jesse James heard I was a young widow, about to lose my home to the bank, he reached into his own purse and gave me fifteen hundred dollars.

GEEK TOURIST #3

You're pulling our legs. Jesse James gave you money?

ANNIE

The exact amount needed to pay off my home, in fact. Mr. James simply told me to make sure I received a receipt from the man from the bank.

GEEK TOURIST #4

What happened?

ANNIE

That evening, confident I wouldn't be able to pay, the banker came to put me in the streets. He was quite surprised when I handed him the cash to pay off the deed. The banker angrily gave me a receipt and stormed back to the bank. To his surprise Jesse and his gang were waiting half a mile down the road, they ambushed the banker and stole their money back.

People are blown away.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Okay, now who wants to buy my life story booklet? Ten cents. Step right up...

Annie sells several of her life story booklets.

Thousands of PEOPLE CHEERING, HATS tossed in the air.

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

TITLE: August 18, 1920

DARLA (V.O.)

August 18, 1920-- the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution is ratified guaranteeing woman's suffrage.

CLOSE ON: A BOX WALL PHONE with mouth piece and hand held speaker dangling at the side. It CLANGS.

DARLA'S HOME

Darla now in her 30s looking like flapper. Darla cranks the magneto on the side of the PHONE BOX and lifts the ear piece to her ear.

Darla's with other SUFFRAGETTES waiting anxiously for good news. Darla throws her arms in the air and celebrates as everyone passes champagne.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A small gathering. We catch up again to Darla's narration, she's delivering the eulogy for Annie. Billy, Rita, Betsy, are among the crowd giving Annie a send off.

DARLA

Annie Edson-Taylor got the reward she never expected. She had proved herself to herself. She inspired millions. She was a peerless genius of incredible vision. When Bobby Leach went over the Falls, he broke two knee caps and his jaw. Annie didn't even break a nail.

Annie's coffin is taken out of the chapel by six OARSMEN.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - YEARS LATER

It's years later-- autumn, Darla is now middle aged, riding a bicycle with flowers in the basket. Riding on a smaller bike next to Darla: DARLA'S KID DAUGHTER. Darla's daughter takes her hands off the handlebars.

DARLA'S DAUGHTER

Look ma! No hands!

Darla screams playfully then they both laugh. They ride onto a serene grounds where they park their bikes and pause near a gravestone. Darla's daughter places flowers on Annie's grave.

DARLA (V.O.)

Annie had everything it took to be a daredevil except she was born 100 years too early and a woman. Annie never gave up and she taught us that if you can't change the world, the next best thing is to teach people how to live in it.

TITLE: Anna "Annie" Edson-Taylor died April 29, 1921, at aged 82.

TITLE: Local residents gave Annie burial next to fellow daredevil Mr. Carlisle D Graham (1886 - 1905.) Both are buried in the "Stunter's Rest" section of Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls, New York.

FADE TO BLACK.

CLOSING TITLES:

TITLE: Between 1901 and 1995, 15 daredevils went over Niagara Falls.

TITLE: Only 10 survived.

CUT TO:

IMAGE: The real Annie and her real cat, posing with the real barrel in the now famous PHOTO. We stay on Annie for a bit, then the MUSIC and PICTURE FADES TO BLACK.

THE END.