

MYSTERY AT LAKE MOLUSKA

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FADE IN

Maine. A girls' camp in the woods. Summer. Now.

INT. GIRL'S CABIN - MORNING

An eight-bunk summer camp cabin in New England.

Girl's clothes, bathing suits, sports gear litter the cabin.
Beds are unmade.

Eight GIRLS, campers 10-12 YO, scream at something SO.

GIRLS
(scream)
Eeeeeeee!!!!

MEL runs in.

Melissa "Mel" Purkey is a girl 17 YO. She's athletic from
wrangling horses and has a Kentucky accent. She wears riding
pants and a counselor's T-shirt, "Camp Molunkus - STAFF".
She gets clumsy when flustered.

MEL
Criminy, who's getting murdered?

Girls point under a bed.

Mel peers under the bed.

A big RACCOON hisses at her.

Mel jerks back and flops on her rump.

MEL (CONT'D)
Oh!
(flustered)
OK, let's not panic...

HAILEY
Let's scream some more!

Hailey is 12, the smart-aleck and natural leader.

Girls scream theatrically.

GIRLS
(scream louder)
Eeeeeeee!!!!

Mel dusts off, still wary of the raccoon.

MEL
Hush, y'all. You're not helping.

HAILEY
I'll get Mrs. B!

GIRL 2
I'll get Ben!

GIRLS
Ben, yeah!

Some GIRLS rush out the door. Mel wonders: Who's Ben? APRIL lingers.

April is 10 YO, the youngest camper, homesick and clingy.

The raccoon creeps from under the bed. Mel backs up.

APRIL
Do they have raccoons in Kentucky?

MEL
Oh, yeah. Thoroughbreds. We run a
'em every year before the Derby.

APRIL
Is that true?

Girls rush in.

GIRLS
Here comes Ben!

BEN enters with a homemade capture noose.

Ben Cabot is 17 YO, handsome, scruffy, has one earring. The camp handyman, he wears a camp T-shirt and tools on his belt: flashlight, multi-tool, wrench.

BEN
Make way, ladies, make way! Where's
the fire?

Mel points to the raccoon.

MEL
Go get 'em, Crocodile Hunter.

Ben sizes up the raccoon, readies his capture noose.

BEN
Girls, out!

GIRLS obediently clatter out the door, peer in. Mel is chagrined: they don't obey her.

BEN (CONT'D)
You're the new Sharon, the horse
herder? Ben.

MEL
"Equestrian Counselor." Watch he
doesn't bite a hole in your other
ear.

The raccoon scuttles under another bed. Ben signals Mel to
lift the end of the bed. Leery, Mel grabs on.

BEN
You got a name?

MEL
Yep. Girls, any bets on who eats
who?

APRIL
Ben'll get 'em.

Ben readies the noose. Pulls a flashlight from his belt.

SHOT: Raccoon eyes gleam in the darkness.

BEN
Come on, Chuckles... Stay put, Fatso.
Not gonna hurt you... Now!

Mel heaves up the bed. Ben drops the noose over the raccoon's
neck and slides it tight. The coon HISSES.

The coon flops against Mel. Spooked, she drops the bed --
on her foot!

MEL
Ow!

BEN
Open the door! Coming out!

GIRLS fling open the door. Ben drags the raccoon backwards.

The raccoon PEES while it's dragged.

GIRLS
Ewww!

Ben drags the raccoon out the door, watching for the girls.

EXT. GIRL'S CABIN - MORNING

BEN
Back up, girls, he'll bite. Rabies
shots are no fun.

Girls scamper aside, but creep up again.

HAILEY
You're hurting him!

BEN
Naw, he's got thick fur around his
neck. Like grabbing your hoodie.

Ben lets the raccoon settle down and the girls study it.
Mel limps out, foot sore.

MEL
You won't kill him, will you?

BEN
(scoffs)
I never kill anything. He's just
hungry. You girls aren't hiding
food, are you? Put a Snickers bar
under your pillow and you'll wake up
with a skunk or fox on your face.

GIRLS
No, Ben.

MEL
They're smart girls. They know the
rules keep everyone safe.

MRS. B arrives.

Mercedes "Mrs. B" Breckinridge is 50 YO, a sturdy matron,
Camp Director. She wears a neat track suit and always carries
an iPad and phone.

MRS. B
Is this your new cabin mascot? He'll
take turns sleeping on your beds?

GIRL 2
Ooh, can we?

MEL
No.

MRS. B
Where will you release him, Ben?

BEN
Down by my swamp. Lots of juicy
frogs to hunt. Can I borrow the
truck?

Mrs. B waves assent. Ben leads the raccoon away gently --
but slowly.

HAILEY

Can we go with Ben? We want to see
it run off.

MEL

Nope. Y'all have Crafts before Riding
Lesson.

GIRLS

(groan)

Mrs. B checks her iPad, peers into the cabin.

MRS. B

She's right, girls. Off to Crafts.
Melissa, you'll have to mop up that
urine.

MEL

Yes, Ma'am.

Mel goes inside the cabin.

Ben, leading the raccoon, signals April. Girls run.

BEN

What's Lullubelle's name? She
wouldn't tell me.

APRIL

Mel. For Melissa.

BEN

Mel...

HAILEY

Do you like her?

BEN

Who knows?

Ben leads the raccoon off. Hailey frowns after him.

APRIL

There's still Johnny Depp.

Hailey flicks her arm and storms off.

INT. GIRL'S CABIN

Mel mops the floor, grumbling.

MEL

Steve Erwin gets all the glamorous
jobs and what do I get?

Ben enters, hunts under beds.

BEN
He leave any presents -- Mel?

MEL
I'm mopping it up.

But, hey, he learned my name.

Ben reaches under a bed and pulls out a mangled bird.

BEN
No, here.

MEL
Ew.

Ben waves the bird at her. She fends him off with the mop.

BEN
Dinner. Yum-my.

MEL
Double-eww! Get lost!

Mel turns and knocks over the bucket. Water sloshes everywhere.

Whirling, she swings the mop -- but Ben runs out the door
LAUGHING.

EXT. STABLES - MORNING

A corral before a barn.

Eight campers are mounted on horses. They wear bike helmets.

Mel fumes making final adjustments. It's taken a loooong time to get them saddled.

Two girls are comfortable. The rest are nervous. April's horse acts up.

MEL
Pull his head close, April. Show him who's boss. Don't shilly-shally.

HAILEY
(snickers)
"Shilly-shally?"

Some Girls snicker.

MEL
(under her breath)
Finally.

Mel pulls on a proper riding helmet. She wears riding boots.

She mounts JOLLY ROGER, a big spirited horse. Handles him easily, rides around the girls' horses.

One touch on April's horse and it settles down.

MEL (CONT'D)
Don't yank on the reins, tug gentle.
No sudden moves or noises. Horses
spook at the least little thing. A
survival instinct. OK, follow me,
nice and orderly.

Mel tugs April's horse first into line behind her.

Mel leads out the corral.

Mrs. B stops her outside the corral, looks the class over.

MRS. B
You're settling in, Melissa. You
have a way with horses and children.

MEL
Thank you, Ma'am.

MRS. B
And the soft Southern accent, so
pleasant to hear. I don't think any
child north of the Mason-Dixon would
call me "Ma'am".

MEL
Yes -- Ma'am.

MRS. B
I guess Sharon getting the measles
was a blessing in disguise.

MEL
Thank you -- Mrs B. I'm -- glad to
be here.

MRS. B
I won't keep you. You know the route?
Watch the crossing by the boathouse.

MEL
I will.

MRS. B
 (mimicking a cowboy)
 "Move 'em out!"

Mel leads the horses toward the trail in the woods.

Mrs. B meets MRS. MAC walking.

Mrs. Mac is the Camp Administrator. Any race, age.

MRS. MAC
 New girl going to stick?

MRS. B
 I hope so.

MRS. MAC
 Maybe we'll see a summer romance and
 get some vicarious thrills.

MRS. B
 Maybe not. I think our Southern
 belle is as homesick any first-week
 camper...

EXT. TRAIL IN THE WOODS - MORNING

The trail winds through scruffy Maine woods.

SHOT: Glimpses of Lake Molunkus. Summer homes and cottages
 are studded around the lake. Not overcrowded.

Mel rides comfortably, watching the girls and path.

Girls and horses settle down. Only little April is leery.

MEL
 Let her drop her head, Theona! She's
 got to see the trail too. Caroline,
 trust your mount. She's won't
 stumble.
 (to April)
 How you doing, Buckaroo?

APRIL
 O-K...

MEL
 Relax. It's supposed be fun. And
 she's Buttercup. Say hello.

APRIL
 Hello, Buttercup. Please don't eat
 me.

EXT. FIRE ROAD - MORNING

The trail stops at a dirt fire road. Mel looks around.

HAILEY

This is the fire road. It circles
the mountain.

MEL

"Mountain." Where I come from this
is a mole hill.

HAILEY

We go right.

MEL

Thank you, Encyclopedia Brown.

Girls giggle.

They ride. The fire road descends. Hooves kick up dust.

MEL (CONT'D)

When's the last time it rained?

HAILEY

There's a drought.

APRIL

The Smoky the Bear wheel at the Fire
Station is all red.

THEONA

The camp wanted to cancel riding
lessons in case we got cut off by a
fire. But we protested so they're
still on. That's why you're here.

MEL

Thank you for that. I was looking
at a summer at Burger King getting
fried and salted.

APRIL

Do you have horses at home?

MEL

I can't afford one. I ride working
at different stables around town.
But I got pushed out by the college
kids for the summer.

The fire road bends.

SHOT: They see Brick Hill, the small town. The lake sparkles.

Mel pulls aside to let riders pass. THEONA struggles with her horse.

Theona is 13 and "mature".

MEL (CONT'D)

Don't fight her, Theona. Loosen up.
You're doing the horse a favor, you
know.

THEONA

I am?

MEL

Horses like to get out and ride too.
Same as a dog likes a walk. Relax
and you'll both enjoy it.

EXT. BOATHOUSE - MORNING

Along the fire road is the boathouse. Two stories, old,
boarded up.

Before it is a clearing. Mel leads the troop in. Dismounts.

MEL

Dismount if you want, but hang onto
the reins. What's that?

Mel goes down the line checking cinches and bits.

Hailey and a Girl dismount to peek in the boathouse through
the boards. Can't see anything.

HAILEY

The old boathouse. The camp doesn't
use it since they got canoes.

Mel stumbles over a rut.

SHOT: The ground is churned up from traffic.

MEL

So what's all the traffic?

HAILEY

The high school kids come here to
park.

Girls giggle.

APRIL

Are you in high school, Mel?

MEL

I am. We drive out to the old mines
to make out.

Girls gasp and giggle.

APRIL

Do you have a boyfriend?

MEL

Not anymore. This one guy I liked
graduated and went off to the Army.
Mount up.

Mel goes to mount, but spots a white rag on a bush. Picks
it up.

MEL (CONT'D)

Slobs. Huh?

It's not litter, but a fancy piece of lace. Mel holds it
up. It's square.

MEL (CONT'D)

It's a -- doily?

APRIL

Doilies are round. That's an
antimacassar.

(Huh?)

Anti-macca-sur. They go on the back
of old-fashioned chairs. Men wore
macassar -- grease -- in their hair,
and antimacassars protected the
fabric.

(blushes from attention)

My mom sells antiques.

MEL

OK. But what's it doing out here in
the woods?

HAILEY

Can we go?

Mel folds the antimacassar into her waistband (so it shows).
She mounts.

MEL

Move 'em out.

They ride down the road.

EXT. BRIDAL PATH CROSSING - MORNING

The fire road ends at the town road. Across is a bridal path with a sign "Bridal Path". Right at hand is a big yellow "Horse Crossing" sign.

HAILEY

This is the crossing. You have to be careful.

MEL

Figured that out all my by lonesome, honey child.

Girls giggle.

Mel listens in both directions. Kneels her horse into the middle of the road. Waves the Girls to cross.

MEL (CONT'D)

All right, little bunny-rabbits. Hip hop.

Girls ride past. Two girls are clumsy and their horses dither, but cross.

April held back to be with Mel. She's last.

MEL (CONT'D)

Get a move on, child. Wait!

A CRUNCH and RUSH tells of a car coming -- fast.

A SILVER VAN rushes down the dirt road, much too fast.

The DRIVER (ASSOP) spots Mel and April and stomps the brakes --
-- But the van SKIDS.

In the middle of the road, April freezes, SCREAMS.

APRIL

(screams)

Mel WHACKS April's horse so it jumps down the bridal path. Then she BOOTS her own horse to jump after.

MEL

Hy-aah!

The van SKIDS past so close it flicks Mel's horse's tail.

The van slides to a stop. The Driver (Assop) hops out.

Assop is a 40 YO insurance salesman.

On the bridal path, Mel dismounts. She quiets her horse, snags the reins on bushes.

She checks the girls are OK. April is shook up but nods bravely.

Mister Assop comes down the path.

ASSOP
Everyone OK?

MEL
No thanks to you. You practicing
for NASCAR?

Mel's accent gets thicker when she's mad. Assop grins.

Mel raises a fist and Assop steps back.

ASSOP
Look, I'm sorry I spooked your horses.
But you're not supposed to ride on
the road, are you?

Mel hooks a thumb at the "Horse Crossing" sign.

MEL
And the speed limit's 30. How fast
were you going?

Assop blinks.

ASSOP
Maybe I was lead-footing a little.
It's been a crazy morning. I'm sorry --
Hey, where did you get that?

Assop spotted the antimacassar in Mel's waistband.

MEL
None of your business and don't change
the subject. I could --

Assop snatches it from her waistband, examines it. Mel is ready to pop him.

HAILEY
(calls)
We'll be late for lunch!

MEL
(to Assop)
Keep it. But I'm watching you.

Mel mounts and leads the Girls away.

APRIL
Were you really going to punch him?

MEL
Darn right. I got three older
brothers. I could pound that clown
into mush.

APRIL
Cool!

They ride along the path by the lake.

EXT. BRIDAL PATH CROSSING - MORNING

The troop crosses the lake road for the fire road. April's
horse, Buttercup, limps.

APRIL
Mel, my horse's gone lame!

MEL
Too bad. You'll have to shoot her.

APRIL
What? No!

MEL
Kidding.

Mel dismounts, pulls April down. Examines Buttercup's hoof.
It's jammed by a rock.

Pulling a hoof tool, Mel digs out the rock. But the shoe
dangles and she can't get it off.

MEL (CONT'D)
I'll have to walk her. Ride my horse.

APRIL
Godzilla?

HAILEY
Lunch?

Mel slings April up on the huge Jolly Roger.

MEL
Yeah, I hear your tummies growling.
Hailey, lead the class to camp.
Leave the horses in the corral and
close the gate. I'll be along.

Hailey beams. Leader!

THEONA

Ben's house is just down that road.
He could fix the shoe. And it's his
lunch break.

MEL

Oh? You stick a GPS in Ben's ear?

Theona blushes. Girls giggle.

MEL (CONT'D)

It's a good idea. Off you go.

Girls ride on.

Mel walks Buttercup down the road.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - NOON

Ben's house is a small cottage, neat and tidy.

Behind a jam-packed garage spills junk onto tarps. The yard
is lumpy and overgrown.

A car sits in the dirt driveway.

Beyond the land drops away to a huge swamp with dead trees,
yellow grass, hummocks, scrub.

A vulture leaves a tree and flaps away.

MEL

(looking at swamp)

Bleech.

A side door is ajar. A shovel leans by the door.

Mel leads Buttercup across the driveway.

A slimy "rock" sits by the stoop. Mel steps past it.

The "rock" shoots out a craggy head like a dinosaur's and
SNAPS at her!

It's a huge SNAPPING TURTLE covered with slime!

MEL (CONT'D)

Yikes!

She jumps. The horse spooks and jerks its head. She stumbles
to one knee.

The turtle charges her. Mel scoots backwards on her butt.

MEL (CONT'D)

Help!

Ben, mouth full of lunch, bounds out the door, grabs the shovel, and blocks the turtle. It BITES the shovel blade.

BEN

(swallows lunch)

Ajax, you don't want to eat her.
She's too skinny.

MEL

What the hell is that thing?

BEN

Alligator snapping turtle.
Macrochelys temminckii. Practically
a living dinosaur.

Mel gets up, dusts off.

MEL

It can die off any time, suits me.

Ben picks the turtle up by the tail. It HISSSES and claws the air, terrifying.

BEN

See? Not so tough. You can carry
him like until your arm gets tired.
Then he'll bite your kneecap off.

Straining with the weight, Ben carries the turtle down to the swamp. Fascinated and repulsed, Mel follows.

BEN (CONT'D)

Snappers can weigh 300 pounds. They
can go anywhere and eat anything.

MEL

Yeah, I imagine that goomer can take
care of itself.

Ben goes to release Ajax, but pauses. He pulls a multi-tool and rips some gray lump from a back leg.

Then he lets go. The turtle slips into the water.

MEL (CONT'D)

And what's that, Crocodile Dundee?

Ben shows a gray writhing LEECH. Chucks it.

BEN

Leech. He can't pull them off
himself.

MEL

This is how you spend your spare
time? Picking leeches?

BEN

And dead birds. Remember the
raccoon's dinner? I fed it to Ajax.
That's why he hangs around the
kitchen. Hey, you hungry?

Mel is grossed out, but suddenly hungry.

MEL

I could use an RC.
(Huh?)
Royal Crown Cola? It's what we drink
at home? Never mind...

Ben's mother JULIA stands by the door.

Julia Cabot is 40. She wears a white blouse and business
skirt with an apron tied on.

JULIA

I'm sorry, dear. I've told Ben not
to feed that monster. Julia Cabot.

Julia offers her hand, but Mel's hands are dirty.

MEL

Melissa Purkey. Mel.

BEN

From the Bluegrass state of Kentucky.

JULIA

Would you care for some lunch?

MEL

I need to see to my horse, Ma'am.

Buttercup is cropping grass on the lawn and seems fine.

BEN

After lunch. C'mon. No dead birds
or leeches. Promise.

Both females sigh.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - NOON

The house is small but airy. Classical music plays quietly.

Cleaned up, Mel sits at table. Julia pushes lunch her way.
She makes a sandwich.

MEL
Your house is lovely. It's not
anything like mine, but...

JULIA
But it makes you homesick anyway?

Mel is surprised and suddenly teary.

JULIA (CONT'D)
We drove through Kentucky once when
Ben was small. Those blue mountains
were enchanting, like a glimpse of
Heaven.

Mel eats to hide her embarrassment. Ben pushes pickles.

BEN
Bread-and-butters. Mom puts them
up.

MEL
So, why do you keep that big dangerous
turtle for a pet?

BEN
He's not a pet. He's a neighbor.

MEL
An attack turtle.

BEN
(grins)
Takes all kinds to make a world.

JULIA
The mail carrier won't get out of
her Jeep. We have to pick up packages
at the Post Office.

BEN
Snapping turtles were here first.
They're part of the ecology. Not
like horses. They're just a -- source
of pollution.

MEL
Shows what you know. Horses evolved
in North American, walked over to
Siberia, then died out here. They
were reintroduced by the Spanish.
So my horses go back further than
your slimy turtle.

BEN
Snapping turtles are as old as sharks.
Evolved to perfection.

MEL

Sharks make great pets too. You like any animals that don't eat people?

BEN

That's why I like Ajax. He's ornery. Bite your toes right through your boots.

JULIA

Ben...

BEN

They can kill Canadian Geese. They walk on the bottom of the lake, grab their feet, pull 'em down to drown --

JULIA

Ben!

BEN

(points at Mel's shirt)
"Camp Moluska" is named after the lake. "Moluska" is the Abenaki word for "Snapping Turtle".

MEL

Really?

JULIA

Ben, behave, or I'll make you eat on the porch. Melissa's a guest. Now where are you from, dear? You sound like Scarlet O'Hara with that lovely accent. We "Main-uhs" talk like typewriters.

BEN

She's a rich Southern belle, Honey-Chile Mayhew-Fairweather, rides after foxes and sips mint juleps under the magnolias.

Mel almost belts him. Angry, her accent thickens.

MEL

I'll have you know my father works the line at Honda in Lexington, so he's gone all week. My mama works at a steaming-hot bakery starting at four in the morning. And the only riding I get is after cleaning out stables and I still can't afford my own horse. So -- there!

She snuffles. Ben is shamed.

JULIA

Good girl. You shut Ben up for a whole minute. Ben, you can wash the dishes and clean the bathroom when you get home.

(rises)

If you'll excuse me, I have a showing. A pleasure to meet you, Melissa. Stop by anytime you want to talk.

Mom dons a jacket and exits.

BEN

(calls)

Don't drive over Ajax.

(to Mel)

You know, I'm sorry -- Ow!

Mel PUNCHES him in the arm.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Mel cleans Buttercup's hoof. Ben dithers with tools. Mel takes away a hammer and nails the shoe back in place.

MEL

That'll hold until the farrier comes.

Mel looks around the place. Ben puts tools away in the overstuffed garage.

MEL (CONT'D)

What does your dad do?

BEN

He builds oil wells. He's in Karachi. Pakistan. Him and Mom don't get along, so... I Skype him once a week.

Mel nods at the blue tarps before the garage. They're littered with dirt bike frames and parts.

MEL

Oh... What's going on there?

BEN

Dirt bikes. I ride enduro, but I'm short on parts.

MEL

Dirt bikes are a source of pollution. Tearing up trails in the woods makes the rain run off --

BEN

Well, uh, responsible riders... Ow!

Mel tosses the hammer on his toes. Mounts her horse and rides off.

MEL

Grease monkey!

BEN

(calls)

You're welcome!

EXT. STABLES - AFTERNOON

Mel rides into the stables. The horses eat hay. Half are still saddled. She huffs and unsaddles the others.

Her Girls come running.

GIRLS

Mel, Mel! Mrs. B's been arrested!

MEL

What?

Mel strides toward the Camp Office. Girls swirl and chatter.

GIRLS

The police chief is here! Asking Mrs. B questions! About stealing! And there's another man asking questions! And they want to talk to you! Yeah, you!

MEL

Me? I don't know anything!

EXT. CAMP OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The Camp Office is a big log cabin. A Brick Hill Police Car is parked. And the silver van (Assop's).

Mel recognizes the van.

Dozens of girls are clustered chattering. Other COUNSELORS, all girls, try to hush them with no luck.

Mrs. Mac waves Mel inside.

MRS. MAC

Melissa? The police chief would like a word.

Gulping, Mel goes. Her Girls are stunned.

INT. CAMP OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The Camp Office is very woodsy to impress parents: slab pine, greens, pictures of the lake and moose.

Mrs. B sits behind her desk, stiff-necked but calm. Mister Assop is there.

ASSOP
We meet again.

And CHIEF CRATHERN.

Police Chief Crathern is a secret alcoholic, and looks it. His face is pasty and baggy-eyed. He keeps rubbing his head or stomach as if they hurt.

Mel is shocked to see, laid out square on Mrs. B's desk, the lace antimacassar.

Despite her innocence, Mel is nervous.

CHIEF CRATHERN
You're Melissa, the horse counselor?

MEL
Equestrian Counselor, yes, sir.

CHIEF CRATHERN
(points to antimacassar)
Can you tell us where you found this?

MEL
I found it in front of the old
boathouse at the bottom of the hill --
mountain.

CHIEF CRATHERN
Where, exactly?

MEL
Just -- in the bushes. I thought it
was litter. That's why I picked it
up.

CHIEF CRATHERN
See anything else down there?

MEL
Like what, sir?

ASSOP

Clues? Cigarette butts, candy
wrappers, helpful things.

MEL

No. There were tire tracks churned
up, like someone turned around.

ASSOP

We saw those. Horses obliterated
all traces.

MEL

I'm sorry. I didn't know they were
clues. Clues to what, anyway? What
was stolen? Is Mrs. B under arrest
because of that stupid anti-massacre?

MRS. B

Oh, dear, no, I'm not under arrest.
Is that what the girls are saying?

MEL

Every one of them, all at once.

CHIEF CRATHERN

Did you see anyone? Jogging?
Working? Any cars or trucks?

MEL

No, sir.

ASSOP

Not very observant when you're riding,
are you?

Mel's temper flickers. Her accent thickens.

MEL

I saw a silver van going way too
fast. Doing fifty or better. Enough
to plow into a horse and rider.

(beat)

And why, if I may, are you asking
questions? You with the police?

ASSOP

I'm an insurance adjuster.

Huh?

The Chief puts the antimacassar into an Evidence bag.

CHIEF CRATHERN

That's all for now, Melissa. But
notify us if you see anything
suspicious, OK?

MEL
 (like what?)
 Uh, yes, sir, I will.

Mel exits.

MRS. B
 And don't say anything to the girls!

EXT. CAMP OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Mel comes out. Girls mob her.

GIRLS
 (chatter questions)

MEL
 Girls, I can't tell you -- I don't
 know --

Mrs. B comes out. Girls hush.

MRS. B
 Girls, Staff, let me assure you
 nothing is wrong. The police had
 some questions about the old
 boathouse. Someone's been poking
 around that shouldn't be. And that
 is all. I'm not arrested, though I
 suppose the idea is irresistible.
 (laughter)
 Now everyone get back to activities.
 Shoo!

Counselors shoo girls off. Mel leads her Girls away. But
 she glances back.

Mrs. B stands before the Office looking brave but worried.

EXT. REC HALL - AFTERNOON

The Rec Hall is a big open-sided pavilion with huge
 fireplaces, picnic tables, activities like ping-pong, etc.

Mel leads her Girls past. They're still bubbling.

APRIL
 But what if Mrs. B is arrested?
 What happens to the camp?

MEL
 What if a meteor crashes into camp?
 (MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

Or a Martian invasion? What's important, Punkin-head, is to keep calm and not spread wild rumors. You can get people into huge trouble with idle gossip.

BEN (O.S.)

Look who's talking.

THEONA

It's Ben!

GIRLS

Hi, Ben!

Ben walks up with a weed whacker, goggles, ear phones, gloves, grass stains.

MEL

Don't you start. I got hammered with a bunch of questions and I didn't get any answers at all.

BEN

Oh. You don't know about the thefts.

GIRLS

Oooh...

MEL

What thefts? Tell me before I bust.

BEN

There's a gang stealing antiques around here. This town and others. They hit the big summer houses and clean 'em out. Mrs. Partridge lost everything. They even took a four-poster bed and a breakfront.

APRIL

A whole breakfront? Wow!

Mel will not admit she doesn't know what a "breakfront" is.

MEL

So... Why can't the police catch them?

BEN

Dunno. Chief Crathern's not happy because it makes him look bad. The thieves bypass the burglar alarms and the security cams. Thousands of dollars' worth of stuff just disappears.

MEL

So... Why did I get the third degree?

BEN

The old boathouse was full of stolen antiques. They must've dropped the doily moving a stolen chair.

APRIL

Antimacassar.

BEN

See, they used to pin antimacassars --

MEL

Right, greasy hair, ducktails, Elvis, got it. But why is Mrs. B in trouble?

HAILEY

You said she wasn't in trouble.

MEL

She's not in trouble.

BEN

The boathouse is camp property, she's the director, she's responsible.

MEL

That's bonky. They think Mrs. B robs houses and hauls antiques in the middle of the night?

(thought)

You ask me, that snotty Mister Assop's the crook. He drives a big silver van. If he sells insurance, he'd know the contents of everyone's house.

Ben fiddles with the weed whacker.

BEN

OK, sure, Veronica Mars. Look, about earlier, I wanted to apologize for teasing you.

Girls perk up with romance in the air.

GIRLS

Oooh...

MEL

Oh, that's... OK. Everyone teases the new guy.

BEN

And horses are OK, too. Good for -- making baseballs.

MEL
Yeah, like snapping turtles are good
for making soup.

BEN
Man, everyone hates them. But they're
an essential part of the ecology.
Just like the swamps.

MEL
(holds her nose)

BEN
I'll bet you've never even set foot
in a swamp.

MEL
No, but I'll bet you've never sat on
a horse.

BEN
No, but -- I will. If you'll spend
an afternoon in a swamp, I'll sit on
a horse. Dare you.

MEL
Dare me?

BEN
Double dare.

MEL
Double dog dare. OK, when?

BEN
Oh, uh...

MEL
Chicken!

Mel and Girls make CHICKEN NOISES.

MEL (CONT'D)
Look me up when you get the guts to
climb on a quarter horse. C'mon,
girls.

BEN
OK - girl! I will.

Mel and Girls move off giggling.

BEN (CONT'D)
And if you learn anything about the
missing antiques, tell me. There's
a reward.

Mel stops short.

MEL

How much?

BEN

\$12,000 and rising on a GoFundMe page. Mrs. Partridge started it. The Lake Owners Association and insurance company kicked in.

MEL

\$12,000. I could buy my own horse. I could buy six horses.

BEN

\$6,000. We split 50/50.

MEL

Still, three horses.

Ben starts the weed whacker. WHIRR!!!!

BEN

(yells)

Big deal. I get snapping turtles for free.

Ben works. Girls move off.

APRIL

Are you going to marry Ben, Mel?

MEL

That snarky Yankee? I'll let Hailey and Theona fight over him.

HAILEY

My family's Orthodox.

THEONA

Then I shall wear white satin with an empire waist and a long-long train.

APRIL

Flower girl!

EXT. BOATHOUSE - EVENING

Mel rides down the hill on Jolly Roger. Frowns at the boathouse.

Looks both ways and turns onto the road around the lake. Checks her phone for the time.

MEL
Ok, Rog. One hour. Let's see
what'cha got. Hah!

EXT. ROAD AROUND LAKE - EVENING

The road around the lake is dirt and winds around inlets and creeks.

Some houses are jammed together, others are half-hidden among trees and bushes.

Cars pass occasionally, crunching gravel.

Mel starts slow, posting, then a canter, then reaches a straight spot -- and lets the horse RUN!

The horse likes to run, and so does Mel. Together they seem to fly.

KIDS point at the horse and CHEER. Barbecuing DADS look at the girl.

Cars HONK. People wave.

Mel rides hard when it's safe, slows on curves, always watches out. But she has fun and so does the horse.

She shakes her head, LAUGHS, glad to get free of troubles and homesickness for a while.

MEL
(laughs)
Whoo-hoo!

SOON

The horse slows, and Mel lets it walk. Stops at a stream so the horse can drink. Dismounts, takes off her helmet, fans herself.

She mounts and they walk.

EXT. MINI-MANSION - EVENING

One big house is set far back from a perfect green lawn. The house is dark, unused.

In the driveway is a big lawn spray truck with the big silver tank. The logo is a green genie and "ChemMagic". (Clue: The license plate number is "CHEM-3".)

Mel leads Jolly Roger past.

MEL

(to horse)

Imagine. Some people keep a whole
second house like it's a birdhouse.

Little yellow pesticide-warning flags flutter along the road's
edge.

Jolly Roger would crop the grass, but Mel pulls his head
back.

MEL (CONT'D)

Not for you, sport. That grass is
beautiful because they spray it with
poison.

But the horse is strong, whips his head around. Mel is almost
yanked over.

MEL (CONT'D)

I said no, knothed.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)

Hey, you! Get away from there!

Big John Tate is the lawn sprayer. Big and surly. He wears
overalls marked "ChemMagic".

He drags a dripping hose back to the truck.

BIG JOHN (CONT'D)

You deaf? Those chemicals will poison
your horse, you dumb bimbo.

MEL

"Bimbo?" I saw the warning flags.
Any rider knows them. So just worry
about yourself, huh?

BIG JOHN

Just get out of here. You'll be
safer that way.

Mel blinks. Is that a threat? She mounts.

MEL

(to horse)

C'mon, Rog. There's poison in the
air, too.

Mel boots the horse and rides off.

She looks back. Big John is calling someone on a cell phone.

A LITTLE FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD

Mel looks around, reins in, checks the time.

MEL

(to horse)

Shoot. That bully got me turned around, Rog. We gotta turn back for bed check.

Mel turns around, boots the horse to ride.

EXT. MINI-MANSION - EVENING

The mini-mansion shows down the road but...

MRS. PARTRIDGE intercepts her.

Mrs. Partridge is a scatter-brained old woman (or so it seems). She wears a bird-watching outfit, binoculars, notebook. She shouts (ostensibly) because she's hard of hearing. She wears (what look like) hearing aids.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

(loud)

Yoo-hoo, dear! Hold up, will you?
I say, did you see the hawk?

Mrs. P actually blocks the horse's path. The horse almost ran the woman down. Mel is flustered.

MEL

Hawk? Ma'am -- What hawk?

Mrs. Partridge shoves the binoculars at Mel. Won't take no for an answer.

Mel takes the binoculars, scans the sky.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

There, look! Where's it gotten to?
Either a Sharpshin or a Broadtailed Hawk. There, riding the thermals! Probably hunting mice at dusk. A female, by the tail. See it?

Mel doesn't see anything.

MRS. PARTRIDGE (CONT'D)

I hike all over this mountain. Just an old tramp, my husband used to say.

(MORE)

MRS. PARTRIDGE (CONT'D)
 I've been tracking that broadtail
 for weeks. Snaps up meadowlarks for
 his brood, the nasty brute.

Mrs. Partridge shows off her messy bird book. Mel gives
 back the binoculars.

MEL
 Yes, Ma'am. Very nice. But I have
 to get back to camp.

Mel tries to steer around, but Mrs. Partridge grabs the reins.

MRS. PARTRIDGE
 Oh, that's a shame. Couldn't you
 linger a while? Maybe a cup of tea?
 It's not often I meet another birder.
 Most people think I'm loony. Get
 it? Like the bird?
 (gives loon cry)
Galoo-galoo-galoo-galoo-galoo!

Mrs. P WARBLER LIKE A LOON.

Mel dismounts to pry the reins from the old woman. Leads
 Roger away, but Mrs. P still blocks the way.

MRS. PARTRIDGE (CONT'D)
 You must visit sometime. I'm Mrs.
 Partridge. But someone stole all my
 lovely antiques. Looks as if locusts
 swept my house. I lost so many family
 heirlooms --

Mrs. P stops, jiggles her hearing aid, then lets Mel go.

MRS. PARTRIDGE (CONT'D)
 If must be, off you go. Don't want
 to be late. We'll catch up later.

MEL
 Yes, Ma'am.

Leading the horse clear, Mel mounts and rides.

SHOT: Passing the mini-mansion, she sees the CheMagic truck
 is gone.

She rides quicker.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (to horse)
 Why are all Yankees dead-unfriendly
 or else smother you, Rog? Or are
 they all just crazy?

The horse SNORTS.

MEL (CONT'D)

Yep.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE IN KENTUCKY - NIGHT

A typical middle-class house, well loved.

MEL'S MOTHER stands at the screen door, looking at the night, talking to Mel on a cell phone.

Mel's Mother is 50ish, lean and tired from working her whole life, but cheerful to talk to her only daughter.

MEL'S MOTHER

(on phone)

... And Chad's got a new girlfriend, Linette. She's polite and gets good grades. Your father's been in class for two days because someone had an accident at the plant, lost a hand in the machinery, I think. Brett tried out as tight end and they might keep him there. And... that's it. How's Maine? Do you like the job?

EXT. GIRL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Mel paces outside the cabin, swatting mosquitoes. Keeps her voice low because the girls are asleep. Her accent get thicker calling home.

CUT BETWEEN THE TWO

MEL

(on phone)

I like it fine, Mom. The director and staff were thrilled to see me. I can't believe my old car made it this far. The girls are nice, not snooty -- well, mostly not. The food's not your home cooking. I don't, uh...

MEL'S MOTHER

What's wrong, hon? Are you crying?

MEL

(sniffling)

No. I just miss y'all. It's... weird being so far from home, not knowing anyone. Scary.

A RATTLE and CLUNK sound by the Rec Hall. Swatting mosquitoes, Mel walks that way.

RACCOONS dig through a dumpster. Mel BANGS the dumpster and they run off.

MEL'S MOTHER

I know, sweetheart. Same when I went off to technical school. But you gotta take heart. You've got a good job and are gaining experience. And Lord knows there's no work here. They're turning folks away from Burger King. You're doing the right thing.

MEL

I know, but.. They make fun of my accent. Oh, I'm just a big baby.

MEL'S MOTHER

Well, you are my baby girl. Don't let those Yankees tease you. Punch 'em in the snoot. You come from a proud line of Kentucky purebreds. Don't take any crap.

MEL

(sniffs, laughs)

I will, or won't. I gotta go. The mosquitoes here are bigger'n crows.

MEL'S MOTHER

I believe it. And I believe in you, daughter. And I'm proud of you, working so far from home. I've never been north of Pennsylvania.

Mel looks around at utter blackness in the woods.

MEL

I think I passed the Arctic Circle. This is Stephen King country, and looks it. I love you, Mom.

MEL'S MOTHER

Love you too, Princess.

They hang up.

Mel SIGHS, wipes her tears. Turns toward the girl's cabin.

INT. GIRL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Mel creeps into the cabin. All is silent. Eight little girls sleeping.

Her room is at the back. Gingerly she closes the door and creeps for the rear.

LIGHTS FLASH ON. Mel is blinded.

APRIL
PILLOW FIGHT!

Mel is mobbed, pummeled, hammered by eight Girls in pajamas wielding pillows.

GIRLS
Get her get her get her!

Laughing, pounded, Mel tries to grab someone, upsets, CRASHES to the floor.

Girls jump on her, pounding away. Mel is helpless with laughter.

EXT. SWAMP ROAD - DAY

A fire road runs along a swamp, rutted and dusty.

The country is scabby pines and "puckerbrush" and big rocks. A dismal swamp runs for miles.

Ben drives his mother's car, bouncing over holes and humps. Gear is piled in the back.

Mel rides in the passenger seat, jouncing. Brush whips through the window against her sleeve. She's annoyed.

They both wear long-sleeve flannel shirts and jeans.

BEN
Some country, huh?

MEL
Nothing a forest fire wouldn't fix.

BEN
Maine's a transition area. The temperate zone and sub-arctic zone meet here. So you get deer and caribou, crows and ravens --

MEL
Did you know you can tell the sex of a broadtail hawk by its tail?

BEN
Huh? No you can't.

MEL

Yes you can.

BEN

No, really. The females are smaller,
is all. Who told you that?

MEL

I just know.

BEN

Here we go.

EXT. SWAMP EDGE - DAY

A bulldozed area off the fire road, even more rutty and ratty.
It wends down to the swamp's edge.

They get out. Melissa's feet SQUELCH in mud.

MEL

What do you mean, "here we go"?
There's nothing here.

Ben pulls gear out of the car.

BEN

It's a swamp. What did you expect,
a mall?

Midges swarm on Mel. Ben hands her a bottle.

BEN (CONT'D)

Dab that on your fingers and your
cheeks. Don't get it in your eyes.
It'll burn.

Mel dabs. Hisses as it burns her skin.

BEN (CONT'D)

And your ears, or the bugs will chew
them off.

Ben dons a floppy hat, gives her one. Douses the brims with
bug juice.

MEL

You didn't tell me there'd be bugs.
How did the Indians stand 'em? They
didn't have spray bottles of poison.

BEN

Indians were smarter.
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

They moved to the seaside for two months and ate shellfish. And bugs feed birds and bats. They're --

MEL

Part of the local ecology? You can keep it.

Ben hands Mel chest-high waders with suspenders. She struggles them on.

Ben loops a whistle on a lanyard around her neck.

BEN

My mom makes me wear one. To blow if you get lost.

MEL

You could blow your brains out. There's nobody around for miles.

BEN

My mom would hear.

Ben takes a machete and cuts and trims two saplings into ten-foot poles.

MEL

I'm tired of being ignorant, but what --

BEN

This.

Ben WHACKS her pole with his, like Robin Hood fighting Little John. She fumes.

BEN (CONT'D)

OK, protection.

MEL

Against vampires?

BEN

Sinking.

MEL

Quicksand? Are you crazy?

Ben tucks his pole under one armpit.

BEN

Not quicksand. Bog. It's safe. Just keep it pinned under your arm in case you step in a hole. Come on.

Ben stomps toward the swamp. Mel stalls, worried.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's perfectly safe. I've walked miles through these swamps, never got lost, never sank. Well, once. Twice. Anyway, you double-dog dared me. You stomp a swamp, I sit a horse.

MEL

You'll do more than sit a horse, buddy.

BEN

You're not chicken, are you? Ow!

Mel BOPS him with her pole.

MEL

Hmm. Pole works. Lead the way, Tarzan.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The water is murky and dotted with slime.

They wade thigh-deep. Ben plods, having practiced. Mel slogs and stumbles. Both still have the safety pole under one arm.

MEL

I didn't know they had swamps in Maine.

BEN

A swamp is just a soggy forest. Canada's got swamps big as the Everglades. 'Course, you don't hear about 'em because no goes in 'em.

MEL

(looking down)

What are we walking on?

BEN

Drowned trees, mostly. Rocks and roots. Mud.

MEL

That why the water is so dark? And creepy?

BEN

Oak leaves leak tannic acid. Tannic acid is used for tanning hides.

Ben picks some white fluff off a plant.

BEN (CONT'D)
Quiz time. Name the plant.

MEL
The White Fluffy Plant of the Swamp.

BEN
You know what this is.
(Mel fumes)
Hint: You roast them over campfires.

MEL
Marshmallows? Really?

She takes the fluff and sniffs it.

BEN
Marsh mallow. The original plant.
Now they're made from whipped corn
syrup. Oh!

Ben jabs his hand in the water, pulls up a SMALL SNAPPING
TURTLE.

Ben tries to hand it to her, holding it by the tail. The
turtle snaps and writhes.

BEN (CONT'D)
Want one for yourself?

MEL
I ain't touching no slimy turtle.

BEN
You shovel horseshit and you're
squeamish about a turtle?

MEL
Gimme a nice warm handful of horseshit
any day. Are we done?

Ben lets the turtle go.

BEN
What? Don't you love this?

MEL
It's as much fun as a graveyard.
Worse. You won't trip and drown in
a graveyard.

BEN
What about the teaberries? Deer
yard? A grouse nest? Vultures?

MEL

(sighs)

Lead us to the Promised Land, Moses.

LATER

Mel is exhausted. Ben is tired but having fun.

MEL (CONT'D)

Call it quits? It's been fun, but
I'm bushed.

Ben consults a compass.

BEN

OK. Long as you enjoyed it. Come --
this way.

Ben wades into the deepest water yet, chest-high. Mel
follows. And GASPS.

MEL

(gasps)

Hey, these waders leak!

BEN

Yeah, they're mine. They're old and
cracked.

MEL

So why did I get 'em?

BEN

You can't wear these. They're my
dad's. They're too big.

Mel slogs but water drags down the waders. The safety pole
hampers her. She carries it in one hand instead of her
armpit.

MEL

I'm gonna get you for this, Cabot!
I'm gonna pick up the meanest,
cussedest --

It goes silent. Ben slogs along.

BEN

Meanest, cussedest what? Pony?
Mel? MEL!

Ben whirls. Mel is GONE, disappeared underwater.

Ben slogs, half-dives, fishes around --

-- And YANKS Mel out of the water.

Soaking wet and bedraggled, Mel SOBS for air! She clutches Ben tight.

MEL
God, I could have drowned!

Ben looks at the pole in her hand.

BEN
I told you -- Never mind. You OK?
You look, uh, you look --
(starts laughing)
You look like a drowned muskrat!

Ben can't help it. He LAUGHS and LAUGHS.

MEL
Oh, I do, do I?

Mel winds up and PUNCHES Ben in the gut. He SOBS for air, paralyzed.

Mel PUSHES him over with a great SPLASH. He comes up GASPING.

MEL (CONT'D)
You just wait, brother. Once you're
in the saddle, you're gonna be so
sorry...

EXT. STABLES - MORNING

Mel helps her GIRLS mount horses.

Ben arrives, leans on the fence.

BEN
Hey, Daisy Duke. Can I get a ride
at lunchtime?

MEL
Not today. Horses need rest before
afternoon classes.

BEN
No, in your car.

GIRLS watch the exchange, taking notes.

MEL
You want a ride? After you almost
drowned me?

BEN
(Mister Innocent)
I got wet, too. Just a little ride.

MEL

Pay attention, girls. Boys are all alike. Sweet when they want something, snotty when they don't.

(to Ben)

Why should I do you a favor? All I get is criticism.

BEN

No. Teasing. Harmless joshing. Don't you get ragged at home?

MEL

Yeah, by three brothers. All older and thick as you. Why do you think I bugged halfway across the country?

BEN

Then you should thank me. I'm making you feel at home.

Mel gets a pang at the word "home".

Ben makes puppy-dog eyes.

GIRLS

Aw, give him a ride, Mel... Yeah, he's so sweet and innocent... Maybe you can drive over his foot.

MEL

Fine. Meet in the parking lot at 12:15. But if you're one minute late --

BEN

I'll be there! Thanks!

Ben runs off.

MEL

Now why did I agree to that?

THEONA

Are you dating Ben?

MEL

No. This is not a date. I don't even like him.

APRIL

Lucky.

HAILEY

He's a hunk and a half.

MEL
He's homely and repulsive.

GIRLS
(giggle and laugh)

MEL
Y'all are so silly.

Mel mounts her own horse and they ride.

EXT. CAMP PARKING LOT - NOON

Mel leads Ben to her car: old and crappy.

BEN
You drove this wreck all the way
from Kentucky?

MEL
It was free. You want a ride or
not?

Ben gets in.

INT. MEL'S CAR

The interior is still crammed with road-travel crap: maps,
junk food wrappers, a sleeping bag, dirty clothes.

Mel pushes junk off the passenger seat. Ben sits.

Mel starts the car. It WHEEZES and SMOKES.

He tries to fasten the seat belt, but it won't catch. Mel
is not wearing her seat belt.

Ben looks out the window at smoke.

BEN
You need a ring job, bad.

MEL
Not for \$1900, I don't. Where are
we going?

Ben points. Mel drives. The car RATTLES and JOLTS.

Ben's seat belt won't stay clicked.

He reaches across Mel and fastens her belt.

MEL (CONT'D)
Hey, Grabby Hands.

BEN
State law. \$50 fine. Didn't you
see the signs?

Ben holds his seat belt across his chest.

MEL
I'm from 'Tucky. I can't read,
remember?

BEN
I could do a ring job if I rig an
engine hoist. Hundred bucks for
parts, tops.

MEL
Seriously? Why would you be nice to
me?

BEN
(surprised)
Why not?

They drive. Ben points the way.

PASS THROUGH TOWN

They wend through Brick Hill, a typical Maine town, and out
the other side.

And pass Maine countryside, beautiful and scruffy.

SOON

They pass a tall fence "TATE'S SALVAGE YARD".

BEN (CONT'D)
Here.

EXT. JUNKYARD PARKING LOT

The junkyard is screened like a fortress by a tall fence and
big chain-link gate.

The only entrance to the yard itself is a doorway through
the office. The door stands open.

Mel parks. It's quiet, nobody around.

They get out.

Ben heads for the office door. Mel follows. It's spooky.

INT. JUNKYARD OFFICE

The office is a grimy desk with a dirty computer and tables heaped with parts. Nobody around.

A back door stands open that leads to the yard.

BEN

Come on. We gotta get permission to hunt parts.

They step out the back door --

EXT. JUNKYARD - CONTINUOUS

A HUGE DOG LUNGES and BARKS -- and BARKS.

Ben JUMPS back and almost BOWLS Mel over.

The dog JERKS to a halt at the end of a chain, barking.

MEL

Jeez, what a monster!

BEN

Criminy! Bruno, shut up!

The dog BARKS and BARKS, half-crazy. The chain JINKS as it lunges.

Ben edges around Bruno's limit. Mel clings tight to his back.

CRISPY shambles up.

"Crispy Kyle" is 30-odd, scruffy, filthy, burned out.

CRISPY

Bruno! Shut up! Shut up!

Crispy picks up a part and lobs it at the dog. It stops barking but watches Ben and Mel suspiciously.

BEN

Bike parts, Crisp. Hondas. OK if I dig around?

CRISPY

Yeah, OK, man. Just don't rip us off...

Crispy wanders off. Ben and Mel move off.

FARTHER ALONG THE JUNKYARD

The junkyard is millions of smashed cars and trucks in rows.
Seems to stretch forever.

MEL

What's his problem?

BEN

Crispy? He was the tester for drug dealers. They'd get a new batch of something, not know what it did, feed it to Crispy. He's burned out.

MEL

You got drug problems in Maine?

BEN

Heck, yeah. We're sophisticated. We've got meth labs and drive-by shootings and smuggled cigarettes and illegal aliens just like the big cities.

MEL

I never knew there were this many smashed cars in the whole world.

BEN

It's depressing after a while. See those round holes?

SHOT: Several cars have round holes in the windshields -- holes the size of human heads.

BEN (CONT'D)

That's where people not wearing seat belts smashed their skulls.

MEL

Point taken, Mister Rogers.

BEN

Here we go.

EXT. JUNKYARD REAR

The junkyard ends at a chain-link fence topped by razor wire.
On the other side runs an overgrown railway line.

Here are dumped junked motorcycles.

MEL

Does a train run past here?

BEN

Not since the brick factory moved to Mexico. It'll make a great dirt bike trail if they ever rip up the tracks.

Ben hunts parts, turning over wrecked bikes.

MEL

Will this take long? I've got afternoon activities.

BEN

Done in a jiff.

MEL

How come you need more parts? You had a whole tarp-full back home.

BEN

Murphy's Law. If you have three junked bikes, all three have the same parts broken.

Ben searches. Mel wanders off.

EXT. JUNKYARD SHED

There's only wrecked cars, very depressing.

MEL

(to herself)

It's like the Twilight Zone.

Ahead is a big barn-like garage looking out of place.

Curious, Mel wanders over. The doors are closed with a padlock. She tries to peek between --

A PATTTERING makes her turn.

The fierce dog, Bruno, runs at her. Jaws open, slavering. She SCREAMS.

MEL (CONT'D)

(screams)

Ben!

Mel runs toward Ben.

SHOT: Too far away, Ben jumps up.

Mel runs. The dog veers to intercept her.

Mel considers dashing between rows of smashed cars.

She STUMBLES to one knee.

Looks back and sees the dog about to attack. She cowers --

BIG JOHN
Bruno! Halt!

-- The dog freezes like a robot. Three feet from cowering Mel. GROWLS.

Big John arrives as Ben trots up.

BEN
Hey, John. Your, uh, dog got loose.

Ben helps Mel up. She's shaking.

But she recognizes Big John as the CheMagic lawn sprayer.

BIG JOHN
(surly)
Sorry. I let him off the chain for exercise. Didn't know you were back here.
(to Mel)
You shouldn't wander around, sweetheart. It's dangerous.

MEL
(gulps, can't speak)

BEN
No harm done.

Ben helps Mel back to the motorcycle parts.

Mel recovers from fright, grows angry.

MEL
No harm done? That animal could'a killed me!

BEN
Hush up.
(looks back)
John knew we were here. He must've seen your car. And Crispy would tell him.

MEL
So -- what...

BEN
He let the dog loose to scare you.

MEL

What a peach. That bastard yelled at me the other night, too, to scare my horse away from a chemicaled lawn.

BEN

What were you doing?

MEL

Nothing. Just walking around -- that shed...

She and Ben stare at the shed.

Ben picks up some parts. Takes her hand to lead her off.

BEN

Time to go.

They both look down at holding hands. Break.

Walk off briskly, watching everywhere for wild dogs.

INT. MEL'S CAR - DAY

In the junkyard parking lot, they get in her car.

Mel SLAMS the door.

MEL

Big John's hiding something. He's gotta be a crook.

Ben hold his broken seat belt in place.

BEN

Buckle up. That windshield looks harder than your head -- some.

Mel buckles up.

They DRIVE.

MEL

Don't think you can tell me what to do.

BEN

Never. Big John might be a creep, but that doesn't make him a crook.

MEL

Siccing his killer dog on innocent people.

BEN

Guys do steal parts from junk yards.

MEL

Probably runs a chop shop.

BEN

Accused, never arrested.

MEL

So if he's got a job there, why spray lawns at night?

BEN

This is Maine. Everyone has seasonal jobs. Mow lawns in summer, cut wood in fall, plow snow all winter, clean yards in spring. I do 'em all.

MEL

Someone's making money stealing antiques. I'll bet it's Big John.

BEN

Don't say that to his face. He's meaner than his dog. He gets arrested for fighting in bars.

MEL

He needs someone to whip him into shape. Oh, speaking of which, your first riding lesson is tonight.

BEN

Tonight?

MEL

Afraid?

BEN

No... Just seems a lot for one day. Big slobbering dogs by day and ferocious foot-stomping beasts by night.

MEL

No risk of drowning.

BEN

Right. Maiming, bleeding, skull-spinal fracturing. But dry.

MEL

Baby.

EXT. STABLES - NIGHT

Mel leads two horses from the stables. Hitches them, fetches tack. Ben carries his motorcycle helmet and wears work boots.

A brown horse is Coconut. A different colored horse is Suzie.

MEL

First thing to remember is, be gentle
but firm.

BEN

Like handling girls?

MEL

You want me to whap you with a riding
crop?

BEN

I don't need beatings to work like a
slave.

MEL

You ride Coconut. Good-natured
quarter horse-thoroughbred cross.

Ben doesn't trust horses, especially big ones.

Mel lays on blankets.

BEN

Guys ride guy horses, girls ride
girl horses?

MEL

Coconut's a gelding.

BEN

Which is?..

MEL

A male that's had unnecessary parts
removed. He's an "it".

BEN

Ouch.

MEL

A recommended operation. Makes males
easier to handle.

Mel lays on English saddles.

BEN

Where's the rest of it?

MEL

English saddles for pleasure riding.
Western saddles for working cattle.
Are you being funny, or do you really
not know horses?

BEN

All I know is from Clint Eastwood
movies.

MEL

Too bad. Everything in Westerns is
wrong. Helmet.

Ben pulls on his motorcycle helmet.

MEL (CONT'D)

Let's mount up. Not that way!

Ben went to circle behind the horse. He freezes.

MEL (CONT'D)

Never approach from the rear. Horses
have a blind spot. If you pop up
suddenly they panic. Talk to him
gently.

Coconut SNORTS. Ben flinches. He's really nervous.

BEN

Why are horses so jumpy if people
take care of them?

MEL

Evolution. No teeth or claws, right?
So they moved onto the plains and
ran from anything scary: wolves,
cougars, bears. Not everything snaps
like your turtles. Talk to him.

BEN

OK, Coconut. Let's be friends. You
don't stomp me and I don't, uh...
Good horsey...

MEL

Mount from the left --

BEN

Same as a motorcycle. That much I
know.

MEL

One smooth motion.

Mel mounts easily. Ben tries to hook his foot in the stirrup --
but his work boot is too large to fit.

BEN
It won't... fit...

He lurches up, gets half in the saddle, kicks for the other stirrup --

-- And PITCHES OFF to CRASH on the ground. Coconut skips away.

Mel LAUGHS. Then sobers as he doesn't move.

MEL
(laughs)
That was smooth. Now try -- Hey,
you all right? Ben?

BEN
(lying on ground)
It's real peaceful here, you know?
Gazing at the stars... Is the lesson
over yet?

MEL
You're not getting off that easy,
you big faker. Take your boots off.

Shucking his boots, in floppy socks, Ben catches Coconut and finally gets into the saddle. Cringes there.

MEL (CONT'D)
Head up, face forward. Back straight.
Stick your tits out, as my mother
says. Elbows in, hands relaxed,
thumbs up for Victory... Not bad.

Ben sits stiffly, looks around.

BEN
We're really high.

MEL
Wait. You've never sat a horse
before?

BEN
Merry-go-round's count? How do we
get down? Stop alongside a ladder?

MEL
No, you grab a tree branch and swing
off like Zorro. Start your engine.
Press with your knees. There you
go.

Ben squeezes and Coconut walks. Slowly they walk out of the stable yard and into the woods.

EXT. TRAIL IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

They ride. Ben relaxes -- a little.

MEL

Don't yank the reins. You wouldn't
someone pulling you around by the
jaw.

BEN

You're leading me around by the nose.

MEL

Like being dragged through a swamp
in clown boots. Though I'll admit
you know a lot about swamps.

BEN

Won't do me much good. There aren't
a lot of careers in swamp-stomping
unless you have a PhD. Even then.

MEL

Same with horses. Unless you own a
stable or race horses, you just shovel
horse shit. Back straight.

BEN

Tough on the tail bone.

MEL

It's a balancing act. You're doing
OK for a first lesson. You respect
the horse, and that counts.

BEN

Everyone loves animals with big brown
eyes. It's a slimy snappy ones that
need help.

MEL

To each his own.

BEN

But this is fun. Thanks.

MEL

You mean it or are you being...

(he's serious)

Huh. Anyway, let's turn back. I
got bed check.

EXT. STABLES - NIGHT

Edge of the woods, stables in sight.

BEN
Race you to the barn!

MEL
Huh? No!

Ben digs in his heels.

BEN
Hyaah, mule!

Coconut startles, LURCHES a few paces -- and STOPS DEAD.

Ben SAILS over the horse's head and SLAMS the ground. His helmet takes the worst.

Mel hops off and kneels by him. His eyes are closed.

MEL
Ben! I should'a warned you. Coconut won't gallop. Hey, you there?

Ben opens his eyes, inches from hers.

BEN
You know, it's real peaceful lying here gazing at your eyes --

MEL
Oh, piffle!

She leaves him lying and walks the horses home.

EXT. LAKE NEAR SHORE - DAY

The lake not far from a wooded shore. There are inlets and fingers of land.

Several houses are visible but it's not crowded. Every dock is marked, "PRIVATE DOCK -- KEEP OFF".

Mel and eight campers struggle in four canoes. The girls wear safety helmets and float vests.

There's lots of splashing and little progress. Mel hates it.

MEL

Carrie, watch you don't bonk someone!
April, you're paddling backwards!
Rahima, look -- Oh, never mind.

THEONA

You're no good at this either, Mel?

MEL

I do horses, not crippled ducks.
Least nobody can drown -- I hope.
Let's -- put into shore for a break.
(calls)
Girls, follow me! Pump them skinny
little arms!

Splashing, Mel leads toward a tiny beach and rocks. Behind trees is a pink house with white trim.

MEL (CONT'D)

Make for the birthday-cake house!

The canoes make slow progress with much splashing.

A loud WHINNNNNNE off-screen gets louder. Mel looks.

MEL (CONT'D)

What's that noise?

THEONA

Jet ski? The boys always drive full
bore.

A POWERBOAT comes around a finger of land. Big, sleek, with twin engines --

-- Coming very fast! A big bow wave precedes it.

MEL

(to girls)
Back up! Get to shore!

The boat ZOOMS closer.

Mel tries to stand, almost pitches out, waves her paddle.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hey, idiot! We're here! Turn!

Too close, the powerboat VEERS and misses the canoes.

The wake sets the canoes bobbing, almost spilling.

The BOAT DRIVER wears white and a captain's hat and sunglasses. She peers around as if confused.

MEL (CONT'D)

I'll see you arrested, pal! You
shouldn't be allowed -- Mrs.
Partridge?

It's Mrs. Partridge in a silly boating outfit! She sees Mel
and waves gaily.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

I say, dearie, have you seen the
loons?

MEL

(thunderstruck)

THEONA

Birds. They dive.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

(bird call)

Galoo-galoo-galoo-galoo-galoo!
There's a whole gaggle, a mother
with four hens, in the grass around
the bend! It nice to see them make
a comeback, eh?
(Bird call again)

Mel doesn't know where to begin.

MEL

Ma'am...

Mrs. Partridge finally notes the trouble she's caused.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

Oh, dear, you're all out of sorts.
Can I give you a tow?

Mrs. Partridge finds a line, throws it toward Mel, but it
wasn't attached to the boat, so just flops and floats.

She reaches for it and almost pitches overside. Almost loses
her hat.

Girls GIGGLE. Mel turns away --

SHOT: And sees a CheMagic truck drive off behind trees away
from the pink house.

Truck ROARS off in dust.

MEL

Wait a minute...

Mel watches. Spots the license plate.

SHOT: The license is "CHEM-3".

MRS. PARTRIDGE
Are you all right, dearie? Not
getting too much sun?

MEL
(grinding her teeth)
Mrs. Partridge -- we're new to
paddling -- so could you please --
keep your distance with your big --
boat?

Mrs. Partridge touches her hearing aid.

MRS. PARTRIDGE
Yes, of course, my bad. My, aren't
you Southern belles polite. Well,
good luck!

Mrs. Partridge drives away slowly. Mel watches her go.

HAILEY
Mel, my sneakers are wet.

MEL
Well, take 'em off, puddin'-head.

INT. REC HALL - NOON

It's raining, but the camp declares an "Indoor Picnic".

Girls help the LUNCH LADIES bring in trays of hot dogs and
chips and soda.

Ben starts fires in the big stone fireplaces. Girls try to
help, but he SHOOS them away. A bucket of water stands by
each fireplace.

Mel and her Girls eat at one table. Starved, girls eat
without chattering. Mel is grateful.

Ben gets food and aims for their table, but --

CLANG! A damper fails in one fireplace. SMOKE billows out
into the hall. Some Girls SHRIEK.

Ben trots, grabs the water bucket and douses the fire. BOOSH!

Curious, he fishes around in the fireplace flue, getting
filthy. Nods.

He trots off and returns with wire. Mel goes to see, carrying
her plate. Girls follow.

MEL

What'd you break this time, Mister
Fix-It?

BEN

The damper. It's rusted. The heat
burned off the rust and it fell.

Ben fishes in the chimney. Steals some of Mel's chips with
black hands.

MEL

Help yourself. No trouble.

Girls GIGGLE.

BEN

Gee, you're awful sweet to me. Hey,
did you hear? Another robbery around
the lake. They cleaned out copper
and pewter plates, kettles and pots.

MEL

When was this?

BEN

Just this morning. There's a mini-
mansion all by itself on a spit.
It's this wild pink color --

MEL

Pink? Like a big birthday cake?
Wow! We were there! I saw --

Ben and Girls wait, mouths open. Mel stops. Points the
girls to their table. Pouting, they go.

Ben finishes wiring up the damper. Cleans out ashes,
rekindles the fire.

MEL (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I saw a CheMagic truck pull out. It
drove off fast. I'll bet Big John
Tate robbed those antiques. The
license plate was "CHEM-3".

BEN

I thought Mister Assop, the insurance
adjuster, was your chief suspect.
With his van.

MEL

That was before Big John sicced his
dog on me.

BEN

A chemical truck doesn't make sense.
It's a big sealed tank full of poison.
You need a panel truck to haul
antiques.

MEL

Maybe Big John's casing the place
and running interference -- or
something.

BEN

A lot of maybes. But you're a
witness. You need to tell the cops.

MEL

Oh...

BEN

Not that Chief Crathern would do
much about it.

MEL

I'll bet the stolen antiques are in
that big garage in the junkyard.

BEN

Could be...

MEL

We could sneak a peek at that barn.
Get some pictures. If we find those
antiques, we get the reward.

BEN

Yeah, what's the word for that? Oh,
"trespassing".

MEL

Someone trespassed against the camp
by hiding antiques in the boat house.

BEN

And they only found a couple pieces
of furniture. The rest has to be
somewhere.

MEL

You can buy a lot of bike parts with
your half of the reward money.

BEN

I could open a bike shop. But you're
forgetting Bruno, the smart bomb
that bites.

MEL

You wrassle snapping turtles. What's
a dog?

Ben thinks. Mel waits.

The fire POPS and hits them with sparks. One burns Ben's
shorts. He slaps it out. An omen?

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

The abandoned rail line that leads behind the junkyard.

Ben drives a trail bike. Mel rides behind, hanging on. The
bike WHINES and BLAST.

Mel pins a rope-wrapped bundle between them. And carries
Ben's homemade capture noose.

They THUMP-THUMP-THUMP along, jolting over railroad ties.

Mel is bumped around, almost thrown off, gets hair in her
face, spits.

Ben slows, stops. Shuts the bike off.

Ben signals: Junkyard, walk from here.

Ben gropes for the tarp.

MEL

Hands.

BEN

Sorry.

They creep.

EXT. JUNKYARD REAR - NIGHT

They approach the fence by the bike parts. There's a tall
light by the office.

Ben unties the crinkling tarp. Mel looks at the razor wire.

MEL

You really think that tarp will
protect us?

BEN

Shhh!

MEL

Don't fret. It's dead out here --
Eek!

A DOG BARKING almost in her face makes Mel SQUEAK.

She jumps back and stumbles, flops on her rear.

Bruno, the junkyard dog, crept up silently and now BARKS like mad through the fence. Chain links CHING as the dog hits them.

BEN

Distract him! The plan?

Mel creeps to the fence. Bruno BARKS.

MEL

Uh, good dog. Nice doggie. Quiet, please. C'mon, we're not so bad.

Ben fishes the capture noose through the fence.

BEN

(to Bruno)

Move, you big bastard. Little more...

(to Mel)

Poke him with a stick or something.

Mel takes a rock, raps the fence.

MEL

(to Bruno)

You're a mean cuss. I know a horse could stomp you to grits --

*

BEN

Hang on... Got him!

Ben snags the noose over Bruno's neck --

-- But the dog pulls back and Ben SLAMS the fence.

He hauls with all his might, drags Bruno to the fence.

BEN (CONT'D)

Tie it off! Quick!

Mel takes the noose's free end to the fence.

Lashed to the fence, Bruno fights, snaps -- then stops and chews at the rope.

MEL

He won't strangle, will he?

BEN
Not with those muscles. But he might
chew through it. Move.

Farther down, Ben flops the tarp over the fence's razor wire.
He CLIMBS and hops over. Mel follows.

Ben hands her a small flashlight.

BEN (CONT'D)
Your party. Lead the way.

EXT. JUNKYARD SHED - NIGHT

The big shed looms in the dark. The door is fastened with a
padlock.

Ben rattles the doors, opens them a crack.

Mel peeks with the flashlight.

BEN
What's in there?

MEL
Gimme a minute!

SHOT: The flashlight beam shows the interior. Mostly white
and chrome.

SHOT: The beam picks out a truck grill. "CheMagic". Then
the license plate "CHEM-3".

MEL (CONT'D)
It's the lawn spray truck. CHEM-3.

BEN
(disgusted)
Anything else?

Mel pulls her phone, snaps a PICTURE of the license plate
through the crack.

SHOT: Flashlight beam shows nothing else.

MEL
Nothing. Just the truck.

BEN
Awesome -- Uh, oh!

SHOT: By the office, HEADLIGHTS shine through the chain-link
gate.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)
Bruno! Where are you, boy? Brun-o!

SHOT: Headlights get brighter. Big John's opened the gate!

His pickup truck drives into the junkyard. Headlights flash all over --

-- And show Bruno lashed to the fence, jumping and growling.

MEL
What do we do?

BEN
Get under cover.

Grabbing hands, they scurry through the junkyard.

BEN (CONT'D)
We gotta get back over the fence.

MEL
There's razor wire.

They hunker.

AT THE FENCE IN REAR

Big John exits his truck. Tries to pull down the tarp, but it shreds. Uses a knife to cut Bruno loose.

BIG JOHN
Get 'em, boy! Tear 'em apart!

AMONG JUNK CARS

Ben points Mel at the gate.

BEN
Run out the gate. Go!

MEL
No. This was my idea.

They can hear Bruno PATTERNING, GROWLING, on his way.

MEL (CONT'D)
This way!

BEN
What are you doing?

Mel aims for a intact station wagon, still with glass windows and windshield.

She grabs the car door handle and it opens.

MEL

Hide!

(calls)

Bruno! Here, boy!

BEN

Are you crazy?

MEL

Hide! Like -- there!

She points. Ben hunkers behind junk cars. Mel creeps backward into the station wagon.

Bruno arrives, running, growling, snapping. He spots Mel. Charges.

INSIDE THE CAR

Mel crabs to the opposite door, eases it open.

She thumps the door locks on both doors, gets ready.

Bruno bounds into the car after her.

MEL (CONT'D)

Lord Jesus, help me now!

Bruno BITES Mel's sneaker.

Mel KICKS at Bruno, knocking him back temporarily, losing her sneaker.

She opens the car door and TUMBLES OUT.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

Mel hops up and SLAMS the door just as Bruno hits the inside.

MEL (CONT'D)

Ben!

Ben hops up and SLAMS the other door.

Bruno is trapped inside! His BARKING is muffled.

Ben grabs, lifts her.

BEN

Time to go!

MEL

I'm trying!

They stagger up and creep. Mel LIMPS on one sneaker.

BEN

Back to the fence and the bike.

They scurry for the fence and torn tarp.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)

Halt! Freeze!

A GUNSHOT rings out. The BULLET SLAMS a junked car across their path.

They VEER and hide again.

BEN

We should split up.

MEL

No, we work better together.

They glance at each other, surprised. It's true.

BEN

Out the gate, circle the yard to my bike.

They scuttle along.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)

Bruno! Where are you?

A MUFFLED BARKING announces Bruno.

BEN

He's gonna let Bruno out.

MEL

I locked the car doors.

BEN

But what if he --

A GUN BANGS. Glass SHATTERS. Bruno WHIMPERS.

MEL

Didn't think of that.

BEN

Bruno's probably in shock. Sensitive ears.

MEL

Why did we do this?

BEN

'Cause we're stupid and greedy.

EXT. JUNKYARD OFFICE - NIGHT

They reach the chain-link gate, which stands open.

But a motion detector LIGHT springs on like a SPOTLIGHT.

BEN

Quick like a bunny!

They dash through the open gate.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)

Get 'em, Bruno!

EXT. JUNKYARD PARKING LOT - MORNING

Ben veers right to circle the junkyard.

BEN

This way 'round!

MEL

Wait!

Mel runs back. Ben gasps and follows.

Mel swings the big gate shut. Locks the chain and padlock,
CLICK! Just as --

-- Bruno HITS the inside, snapping and snarling.

BEN

Not on the menu tonight.

MEL

Sorry, doggie. You were just doing
your job.

The two run off into the night.

SOON

TRAIN TRACKS

Ben and Mel ride the motorcycle, THUMP THUMP THUMP into the
night.

EXT. BRICK HILL POLICE STATION - DAY

A typical New England municipal building in town.

Mel and Ben look at the door.

MEL
This is a bad idea.

BEN
We've had nothing but bad ideas.

MEL
There's probably a warrant out for
our arrest.

BEN
Crooks don't call the cops.

MEL
No. They -- deal with trespassers
their own way.

BEN
Big John can't know who we are.

MEL
You left a tarp and that homemade
noose thingy. And he heard the
motorcycle.

BEN
Two kids in the dark ripping off
parts. Probably didn't even spot
you were a girl.

Stalling, Mel looks around.

MEL
This town kind'a reminds me of home.
The lake and small houses.

BEN
I thought Kentucky was all rolling
hills and bluegrass.

MEL
Well, yeah, and more space. But our
towns look the same.

BEN
Maine was a tough place to settle.
Pine trees and acidic soil and rocks.
Made for tough people.

MEL
Kentucky means "Dark and Bloody
Ground".

BEN
I know. I've seen "The Beverly
Hillbillies".

Mel pokes him.

MEL
We don't like that word.

BEN
(hillbilly accent)
"Why, Clem, them's fightin' words!
Let's us get our squirrel rifles --"

POW! Mel SLUGS him in the arm. It hurts.

BEN (CONT'D)
Man, you hit hard -- for a girl.

MEL
You want more?

BEN
Peace.

Ben opens and holds the door. They go in.

INT. BRICK HILL POLICE STATION - DAY

Quiet interior. Police Officer LOZITO sits at a desk and
computer.

Lozito is any age, race, gender.

OFFICER LOZITO
Help you?

BEN
Hey, Loz. Chief Crathern around?

Officer Lozito nods at the back. Mel and Ben go.

INT. CHIEF CRATHERN'S OFFICE

A small town cop's office, with faded awards on the walls.

Chief Crathern checks a computer against papers showing
various antiques. With no luck. He looks tired, as usual.

BEN
Chief, there's something suspicious
about Big John Tate's junkyard.

Chief nods to sit. They sit.

CHIEF CRATHERN
Melissa, right?
(she nods)
What's suspicious?

MEL
There's a big shed in the middle of
the junkyard --

BEN
I was scavenging bike parts.

MEL
There's a CheMagic truck parked in
the shed. The license plate is CHEM-
3.

CHIEF CRATHERN
Big John works for CheMagic. He
does welding too. Maybe just keeping
the truck out of the weather.

MEL
But I saw a CheMagic truck at two
houses that were robbed. One was
CHEM-3.

CHIEF CRATHERN
And... you think he loaded antiques
into the tank truck? Wasn't he
spraying the lawn?

MEL
Yes... But he seemed so damned --
darned -- sneaky...

CHIEF CRATHERN
Lot of that going around.

Mel and Ben feel like fools.

CHIEF CRATHERN (CONT'D)
Tell you what. I'll run the license
through the RMV. And talk to Kevin
Urban. He owns CheMagic. Make sure
Big John is authorized to work on
the truck. Would that settle your
minds?

MEL
Yes, sir...

EXT. BRICK HILL POLICE STATION - DAY

They come outside. Feeling like idiots.

BEN

No Hardy Boys - Nancy Drew Award.

MEL

He treated us like idiots.

BEN

Rocket scientists don't scale razor wire and trespass around rabid dogs to peek at a truck.

MEL

The chief won't do anything, will he?

BEN

It's Friday. Maybe he's starting the weekend early.
(Huh?)

They enter Mel's car. Drive back to camp.

INT. MEL'S CAR

Mel drives.

DRIVE BACK TO CAMP

MEL

What did you mean, "starting the weekend early?"

BEN

Never mind. Mom says the Chief is good in emergencies but lousy at day-to-day stuff.

(huffs)

Who cares? Let 'em strip all the houses around the lake. People shouldn't leave expensive stuff lying around.

MEL

Maybe it's not Big John. Maybe it is really Mister Assop, the insurance investigator. I suspected him from the get-go.

BEN

Boy, you won't rest until someone's rotting behind bars, will you?

MEL

No. If Simon Kent and Daniel Boone had stayed home in Virginia, there wouldn't be a Kentucky.

BEN

Someone else would have discovered it. The Dukes of Hazzard, maybe.

WHAP! Mel WHACKS his arm.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ow! That's the same place as before!

MEL

Practice makes perfect.

EXT. CAMP PARKING LOT - DAY

Mel and Ben exit the car.

Mel's Girls come running. They've been waiting for her.

Three girls wave small newspapers.

GIRLS

Mel, you gotta see! Rahima's gone! Her parents took her home. And Theona's mom called and said she's coming. There's a bunch more leaving!

MEL

Quiet. What? What's going on?

Ben snatches a paper and reads. Mel grabs another.

BEN

Uh, oh.

CLOSE ON: The newspaper is a weekly puff piece for tourists.

But there's a big headline: "Camp Boathouse Yields Stolen Antiques".

BEN (CONT'D)

(reads)

Mercedes Breckinridge, Director for Camp Moluska, was questioned Tuesday about the discovery of stolen antiques..."

MEL

(reads)

Mrs. B's name is Mercedes?

GIRLS

They're going to fire Mrs. B! And shut down the camp! We have to go home!

MEL

What? That's crazy. Do they think Mrs. B is robbing houses and hiding antiques?

BEN

Bad news always gets blown out of proportion. Most of the parents are from away, like New York and Boston --

APRIL

I'm from Philadelphia!

BEN

And if there's "crime" some parents just freak and haul their kids home.

MEL

That's bonkers. Ugh! If I hadn't found that stupid doily --

GIRLS

Antimacassar!

BEN

Somebody else would've found it.

APRIL

What do we do, Mel?

Mel looks at her phone for the time.

MEL

You're going to Crafts. Something normal.

HAILEY

It's time for Swimming.

MEL

Whatever. Go, move, hustle.

BEN

Enjoy it while you can.

EXT. TRAIL IN THE WOODS - AFTERNOON

With a precious hour off, Mel rides Jolly Roger to clear her head.

MEL

(to horse)

Gossip, Roger, nothing but gossip
and rumors. Be glad you're a horse
with horse sense.

EXT. BOATHOUSE - AFTERNOON

The boathouse is marked with "Crime Scene" yellow tape.

Chief Crathern and Mister Assop take measurements of the
ground, turning radius, etc.

Mel rides out of the woods.

She wants to avoid them and ride, but the men wave her over.

CHIEF CRATHERN

Melissa. I checked that license
plate with the Registry. CHEM-3 is
a legitimate number. In fact,
CheMagic has five trucks from CHEM-1
to CHEM-5. Or did have. CHEM-2 was
wrecked. And the owner says John
Tate is authorized to make repairs
on CHEM-3.

MEL

Yes, sir. What's going to happen to
Mrs. B, if I may ask?

CHIEF CRATHERN

Nothing. Why?

MEL

There's crazy rumors flying around
that could ruin her reputation and
the camp's.

CHIEF CRATHERN

Small town gossip.

Chief goes back to measuring. Assop steps up.

ASSOP

Melissa, the chief said you had some
theories on the antiques theft.

(MORE)

ASSOP (CONT'D)

Good for you. It'll take community action and awareness to solve these crimes.

MEL

Yes, sir. May I go?

Huh? Sure. Mel rides off.

EXT. ROAD AROUND LAKE - AFTERNOON

Mel rides Jolly Roger as fast as safe on curves. She lets him gallop on straightaways.

MEL

Let's ride, Roger! It might be the last time, so run hell for leather!

Mel passes FISHERMEN, KIDS, FAMILIES, JOGGERS. They smile and wave. She thunders on.

A SMALL HOUSE

Passing a small house, Mel sees a CheMagic truck. A WORKER in coveralls sprays the lawn.

SHOT: The license is CHEM-3.

Mel shakes her head and rides on. Don't care, not my problem.

They reach a straight stretch and Mel BOOTS Roger. She yells of joy.

MEL (CONT'D)

(yells for joy)

Wa-hoo!

FARTHER ALONG

Mel slows for a curve.

SHOT: Something silver glitters down a lane.

Mel stops and wheels Roger.

MEL (CONT'D)

(to horse)

Sorry, Rog, but... I'm seeing silver everywhere these days.

EXT. TREE-LINED LANE - AFTERNOON

A tree-shadowed lane. At the end is a big house.

Mel rides Roger partway down the lane.

The "silver" is a CheMagic truck.

Mel watches.

Crispy comes from around the house. Does something at the back of the truck. Leaves.

MEL

He's not spraying any lawn.

They creep closer.

SHOT: The truck's license plate is (also) CHEM-3!

Light dawns like a cartoon balloon.

MEL (CONT'D)

Well, for gosh's sake.

SHOT: Just then, Crispy comes back and sees her!

MEL (CONT'D)

Oh, crap. C'mon, Roger. We gotta tell the chief.

They ride, fast and hard.

EXT. BOATHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Mel and Roger reach the boathouse, but the Chief and Assop are gone.

Mel pulls out her phone to call. Stops.

MEL

Wait a minute. Ben.

She boots Roger and they trot.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Ben tinkers with a motorcycle. Mel rides up fast.

She leads Roger around Ajax, the snapping turtle. It HISSES.

MEL

Ben. I solved the mystery. There are two trucks. Both with CHEM-3 license plates.

BEN

Huh. That's -- clever.

MEL

The chief said the company had five trucks, but one was wrecked. It must've gone to Big John's junkyard. And he fixed it up, got a fake license plate --

BEN

And it's a -- phantom tank truck. Boy, that is smart. We gotta tell the cops.

MEL

Right, right.

Mel pulls out her phone, but Ben stops her. Huh?

BEN

Not over the phone. If we're gonna claim that reward money, we need a written police report, timed and dated, with our names on it.

MEL

Yeah. Good.

Ben straps on a helmet, mounts his motorcycle.

BEN

Race you to town.

MEL

I can't ride to town. Roger's too tired. And I have get back to camp.

Ben starts the motorcycle. It SNARLS and POPS.

BEN

Go. I'll make the report in both our names.

Ben roars off. Ajax the turtle HISSES.

MEL

(to turtle)

You stay here, double-ugly.

Mel follows on Roger, slower.

EXT. ROAD AROUND LAKE - AFTERNOON

Mel trots onto the road. Ben is zipping along, almost out of sight --

-- When he SWERVES to avoid a car. It blocks the road.

Mrs. Partridge hops out of the car. Ben is flummoxed.

Mrs. Partridge waves her notebook and binoculars at Ben.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

... A snow goose. Imagine. Right here at Lake Moluska. But it's white so I can barely see it against the clouds. Can you spot it?

BEN

Mrs. Partridge, I've told you, I'm a reptile guy --

Mel catches up.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

Melissa, dear! Can you help? You know how old my eyes are.

Mel is flummoxed too. Mrs. Partridge holds the horse reins.

Mrs. Partridge juggles her hearing aid (listening).

MEL

Mrs. P, I'm so sorry, but we're busy --

BEN

I'm going on ahead!

A ROAR (CheMagic truck) sounds down the road.

Ben REVS his bike and ZIPS around Mrs. Partridge's car --

-- Just as the CheMagic truck CHEM-3 ROARS up!

Big John drives, murder in his eyes. Crispy rides passenger.

Ben swerves to avoid --

-- Big John swerves to ram --

-- And CRASHES into Ben's bike!

Ben flips off the bike and skids into brush.

Big John hops out of the truck and rushes to kill Ben.

Mel snaps the reins from Mrs. Partridge's hand, lashes Jolly Roger, and charges around Mrs. P's car.

MEL

Hy-aah!

Big John KICKS Ben. Only Ben's helmet saves his head.

Crispy climbs from the cab, dazed and unsure what to do.

BIG JOHN

Messing with my business. Cutting
into my operation --

MRS. PARTRIDGE

John! Stop! You'll kill him! Stop!

Big John raises a foot to stomp him --

MEL

Oh, no, you don't!

Mel rides straight for Big John. So close he ducks aside.

BIG JOHN

(to Crispy)

Get that girl! Drag her off that
horse and into the truck!

Crispy makes a half-hearted attempt to grab Mel.

She LASHES Crispy with the reins and he FALLS down.

Big John grabs Ben by the belt, drags him toward the truck.

Ben, in pain, staggers to his feet and resists.

MEL

Have it your way, you big bastard!

Mel BOOTS Jolly Roger to REAR.

Hooves FLAIL at Big John and he lets go of Ben.

MEL (CONT'D)

(to horse)

Get him, Roger! Go, boy!

Spinning the horse, BUMPING Big John aside --

-- Mel grabs Ben's arm. He JUMPS atop Roger.

Mel and Ben ride off to (temporary) safety.

FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD

Mel slows the horse. Ben slips off, aching.

BEN
Jeez. Some day off.

MEL
Are you all right? I was worried
he'd kill you.

BEN
Worried about Yankee carpetbagging
scum?

MEL
Scum but useful scum. Now what?

BEN
Now we've got something to arrest
him for. If I hadn't had my helmet,
my brains'd be left on the road.

Jolly Roger is WHEEZING.

MEL
Let's get back to camp. Tell Mrs.
B, call the cops from there. We
gotta walk Roger, though, he's
whipped.

BEN
Uphill through the puckerbrush.
Right -- Uh, oh...

They both freeze and SNIFF.

Smoke carries to them.

MEL
Burning -- leaves?

BEN
Holy mackerel. Big John's set the
woods on fire.

Not far off, a PINE TREE IGNITES like a skyrocket.

MEL
A forest fire. With the woods so
dry, the camp'll burn.

Both pull their phones. Mel calls camp, Ben calls 911.

Simultaneous calls.

BEN
This is Ben Cabot. There's a forest
fire started on the lake road north
of the bridal path. Uh, huh.
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

It's arson, I'm pretty sure, but
we'll get to the later...

MEL

Mrs. B. It's Melissa. There's a
forest fire coming up the bridal
path for the camp. You can see it?
OK, I'm on my way...

End calls.

BEN

You head to camp. They'll evacuate.
There's a plan in place so nobody
panics.
(beat)
I'll get my bike, warn people along
the road, guide the fire trucks.
Go.

They look at each other. Almost kiss, shy off.

Mel mounts Jolly Roger and Ben trots downhill.

MEL

(to horse)
Roger, I'll give you a week's rest
and all the oats and corn you can
hold for one more try. Go!

Mel rides uphill.

EXT. CAMP OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Everyone is gathered before the camp office.

Girls, all CHATTERING, are with their counselors who call
the roll.

Smoke billows past, thin to start, but getting thicker.

Busses are lined up and running.

Mrs. B calmly directs operations.

Mel dismounts and runs a hose for Jolly Roger. Mrs. B hands
her a clipboard.

MRS. B

Gather your girls and check their
names. Do not let them wander off.
Do not let them go back to the cabins.
You haven't practiced the fire drill
but we have. Nothing to fear.

Counselors shepherd girls onto the first bus. Show Mrs. B the clipboards. Board with their groups. First bus pulls out.

Mel assembles her girls.

GIRLS

A forest fire! Are we going to burn?
It's unbelievable! Etc.

Mel raises a hand, has to shout.

MEL

Hey! Pipe down! First one speaks
gets a good hard smack, got it?

Girls nod, mute.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hailey. Rahima -- no, she went home.
Theona. April.

Girls raise hands rather than speak. April waves frantically.
Mel nods.

APRIL

What about the horses? We can't
leave them to burn!

Mel is stricken. Looks at the barn.

In the stables, HORSES sniff smoke and WHINNY in fright.

Mel shoos the girls toward the busses.

MEL

(stifling tears)

We can't -- It's people first. It's --
a rule.

Mrs. B, with her sixth sense, comes up.

MEL (CONT'D)

Ma'am, what's the plan for the horses?

MRS. B

We turn them loose to fend for
themselves. Even that's against
policy, because they might become a
public hazard...

MEL

And they could get caught by the
fire, trapped. Ma'am, please. The
fire's on the other side of the
mountain. The road down is clear,
just smoky...

Mrs. B is torn, decides.

MRS. B
Could you and the girls ride the
horses out to safety?

MEL
Oh, yes, Ma'am. We could!

GIRLS
We can do it! We can!

MRS. B
Listen, then. You must follow the
bus. Melissa rides at the rear. At
the first sign of trouble -- I honk
my horn -- you abandon the horses
and enter the busses, understood?

GIRLS
Yeah!

MEL
Bless you, Mrs. B.

Surprising herself, Mel kisses Mrs. B on the cheek.

Mel and the Girls run for the stables.

EXT. STABLES - AFTERNOON

The air is smoky.

Mel and Girls round up horses, saddle half. They'll lead
the others out.

APRIL
Do we need our safety helmets, Mel?

MEL
Now more'n ever, darling.

THEONA
We'll be heroes. Like -- Wonder
Woman, except on horseback!

HAILEY
What about Ben? We haven't seen
him.

MEL
Ben's -- It's a long story. He
went downhill to warn people and
guide in the fire trucks.

THEONA

Ben will be a hero too. Like Steve Trevor.

HAILEY

Shut up! Steve Trevor died!

MEL

Hush and mount, cowgirls.

Mel and Girls ride and lead the skittish horses out of the corral. Mel brings up the rear on Buttercup, leading Jolly Roger.

EXT. CAMP PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Mrs. B has her car. She'll be last to leave.

Mel and Girls line up horses behind the last bus.

Mrs. B nods.

The last bus pulls out. The horses follow. Last is Mrs. B in her car.

Mrs. B takes what may be her last look at the camp. Tears run down her face, but she bravely moves on.

EXT. ROAD TO CAMP - AFTERNOON

The winding road that leads up the "mountain" to camp. Smoke drifts. Far off the fire CRACKLES.

Mel watches the Girls and the forest.

Mrs. B rides slowly behind. Gives Mel a thumbs-up.

HAILEY

Are we going to make it?

MEL

We're fine. The fire's coming up the far slope. We just get some smoke. Hush now. Watch your mounts.

They pass a blackened section of forest: where the fire started.

MEL (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Another thing those creeps are gonna answer for.

EXT. ROAD AROUND LAKE - AFTERNOON

The road around the lake is jammed with cars evacuating and fire trucks coming in.

The camp busses merge and jam.

COPS and FIRE FIGHTERS direct traffic, SHOUT, wave, etc.

The busses creep. Mel watches everywhere -- and JOLTS.

SHOT: Lying by the road is Ben's motorcycle, run-over and crushed.

Mel pulls her phone, dials Ben. No answer.

From her car, Mrs. B calls.

MRS. B
Melissa, what's wrong?

MEL
That's Ben's bike. Run over. Can I --

MRS. B
We're safe. Ride on ahead and see
if anyone knows where he is.

MEL
Thank you, Ma'am.

Mel threads her horse through the jammed cars and people.

EXT. AMBULANCE - AFTERNOON

Two ambulances are parked at a wide spot in the road.

EMTs (any age, race) stand with radios, alert. One PATIENT sits with an oxygen mask.

Mel rides up.

MEL
Pardon. You got any word on Ben
Cabot getting hurt? He was on a
motorbike. It's smashed back there.

EMT
No reports of casualties so far.
Except some smoke inhalation.

MEL
Thanks.

But that's bad news. She casts about.

MEL (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Swamp Rat, where are you?

Deciding, she rides toward Ben's house.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Mel rides -- and STOPS cold. She leads the horse into shade.

At the juncture of the Swamp Road sits the CheMagic truck, CHEM-3.

Behind the truck, Big John and Crispy argue. Big John has a large wrench, raging. Crispy is terrified.

Crispy breaks and runs off. Big John yells after him.

Big John RAPS the tank three times, hard.

Big John gets in the truck and drives down the swamp road. Dust boils behind.

MEL
The Swamp Road. Oh, lord...

She looks back, but only evacuating cars are in sight. She pulls her phone, puts it away: no time.

MEL (CONT'D)
God, what have I got? Ah!
(to horse)
C'mon, Buttercup. We're going hunting.

Mel rides into Ben's yard. Searches, searches...

... And spots Ajax, the snapping turtle.

MEL (CONT'D)
Ajax, it's rescue time!

Mel dismounts. The turtle HISSES. She circles and grabs it by the tail, as Ben taught her.

The turtle kicks and claws, but is helpless. But he's slimy and hard to hold. Mel hangs on as she mounts her horse.

MEL (CONT'D)
Ajax, you're disgusting. And damnation, you weigh a ton!

She gets in the saddle. The turtle kicks. The horse shies.

MEL (CONT'D)

(to horse)

Not you too. Both'a you settle down.
Ben needs us. Hy-aah!

Clutching the turtle, Mel rides.

EXT. SWAMP ROAD - AFTERNOON

Mel rides through the dust of Big John's truck.

And there's the truck, roaring and rattling along.

Mel rides grimly, CHOKING on dust.

The truck enters a curve. There's room on the driver's side.

Mel rides into the slot --

-- Pulls up alongside the cab --

-- Big John goggles to see her --

-- And Mel CHUCKS the turtle into Big John's lap.

MEL

Catch!

Big John FREAKS at the turtle, drives wild --

-- And SMASHES into a tree.

The back of the tank, on a secret hinge, POPS open from the impact.

Ben TUMBLES into daylight. He's scratched and bruised, shirt and jeans torn, but alive.

Mel rides up.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hiding out when you should be working.
You all right?

Ben blinks.

BEN

Yeah, I'm fine. Where are we? Man,
it was dark in there.

BIG JOHN (O.S.)

(screams)

Ahh! Help! Get it off!

Big John tumbles from the truck cab. His face is bloody from hitting the steering wheel.

Ajax is clamped to his leg. Big John tries to kick him off. Scrambles up, limping.

Ben grabs a TREE BRANCH, winds up, and SMACKS Big John flat.

Mel pulls off her horse's bridle.

MEL
Tie him with this.

Ben roughly trusses Big John. He's furious now.

BEN
You stay down or I'll drown you in
the swamp! I'll let Ajax chew off
your ears --

Mel LAUGHS as she dials 911.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A barricade blocks the Lake Road.

Official cars come and go: ambulances, fire trucks, a fire marshal, volunteers.

Chief Crathern's car is parked. Big John is handcuffed in the back.

Chief Crathern talks to Mel and Ben.

Ben drinks from a water bottle. Pours some water on scratches. An EMT signals, but Ben waves him off.

Ben keeps a foot on Ajax, but the turtle squirms away.

Mel fits the bridle on Buttercup.

BEN
If Mel hadn't figured out where I
was, Big John would've drowned me in
the swamp.

CHIEF CRATHERN
I doubt he'd go that far.

BEN
He's crazy-mad. When I mounted my
bike, he tried to run me over again.
Almost did. I was so stunned he
stuffed me in that fake tank before
I could blink.

CHIEF CRATHERN

A fake truck. CHEM-2, resurrected.
And big enough to hide any piece of
furniture.

MEL

Even a breakfront.

CHIEF CRATHERN

There's even an auxiliary tank inside
to spray just a little lawn fertilizer
if anyone gets suspicious.

MEL

That much brains and talent, he
could'a made honest money.

BEN

That and bypassing the security alarms
and webcams.

MEL

But still... I spotted him just
riding around. And so many boaters
on the lake. How'd he pull off
robberies in broad daylight?

CHIEF CRATHERN

He targeted isolated houses, ones
screened by trees -- What the...

MEL

Oh, no.

Mrs. Partridge drives up in her car. She parks sloppily and
gets out. Carries a huge purse.

CHIEF CRATHERN

Mrs. Partridge, you can't park here.
We're cordoned off for emergency
vehicles --

MRS. PARTRIDGE

I know, Chief. But I've got a message
for you.

Mrs. Partridge fishes in her huge purse.

CHIEF CRATHERN

A message?

Mrs. Partridge pulls a big GUN! Aims at the Chief and kids.

MRS. PARTRIDGE

Don't do anything funny, dears. And
put your hands up, will you?

Everyone is flabbergasted while Mrs. P goes to the police car. She tries to open the door, but it's locked.

Inside, Big John is eager to get out.

MRS. PARTRIDGE (CONT'D)
Chief, I need you to unlock this
door and take the cuffs off John.
He's going with me.

CHIEF CRATHERN
Mrs. P, you're off your rocker if
you think --

She aims the gun as if to shoot.

Ben stoops, grabs Ajax --

BEN
Incoming!

-- SKIDS him across the top of the police car --

-- Mrs. P sees the turtle skidding toward her and SCREAMS.

MRS. PARTRIDGE
(screams)
Ahh!

She stumbles and FALLS. The gun goes off. BANG!

Ajax slides, tips, and lands on Mrs. P.

Chief grabs the gun, and her. Ajax scrambles under the police car.

CHIEF CRATHERN
Lord have mercy. Let's get these
two citizens to the station. I've
had enough excitement for one day.

Ben reaches under the car for Ajax.

BEN
Hang on. Never travel anywhere
without an attack turtle -- Ouch!
You bastard!

Ajax BITES Ben. Mel LAUGHS and LAUGHS.

INT. REC HALL - EVENING

The whole camp is gathered. They stuff food while Mel and Ben finish up their tale.

MEL

... I was never so scared in my life when I figured out Ben was locked in that tank truck.

BEN

She saved my life. No doubt about it. So give our own Daisy Mae from Kentucky a great big hand!

Staff and Girls CLAP, WHISTLE, and CHEER.

MEL

Don't forget my horses. And Ajax.

SHOT: Ajax is on the floor eating hot dogs.

Chief Crathern arrives. Waves Mel and Ben over to speak in private.

CHIEF CRATHERN

We're still sorting out details, but I thought you kids ought to know.

MEL

I want to know about the reward money. Is that still on?

CHIEF CRATHERN

\$23,000, last I checked. And more to come, I'd guess, once words get out you kids cracked the case.

BEN

What happens to Mrs. Partridge? I, mean, other than...

CHIEF CRATHERN

Jail? She masterminded the thefts, lock, stock, and barrel.

MEL

But her house was robbed -- Oh.

CHIEF CRATHERN

Hauled to New York and sold on the sly, then she collected the insurance money. Somehow she talked Big John into helping.

MEL

And all that silly bird watching?

CHIEF CRATHERN

Mostly real. But, yes, she was a lookout for Big John.

(MORE)

CHIEF CRATHERN (CONT'D)

Had a Bluetooth in her ear that resembled a hearing aid.

FLASHBACKS: Mrs. P interferes with Mel, joggles her "hearing aid", then suddenly lets her go.

MEL

Yeah! She'd hang on like a leech, then joggle her ear, then shoo me off. And that big boat of her, scaring us away from the birthday-cake house.

BEN

She did everything but tackle you.

MEL

A sweet old lady, crazy as a coon.

CHIEF CRATHERN

We've got her cold, besides the criminal threatening with a gun. Her cellar holds stolen antiques that wouldn't fit in the boathouse.

BEN

I said they had to be somewhere.

MEL

It was that stupid antimacassar started everything.

Chief Crathern is suddenly embarrassed.

CHIEF CRATHERN

(embarrassed)

On a personal note, I'll add that... I've got a problem I've been avoiding. You kids doing my job for me opened my eyes.

BEN

Hey, Chief, everyone goes through hard times...

MEL

And who'd listen to two dizzy teenagers?

CHIEF CRATHERN

Still. I plan to... make some changes in my lifestyle, as the TV gurus say.

(huffs)

But tomorrow's another day.

(MORE)

CHIEF CRATHERN (CONT'D)

Come down to the station and I'll
cut you each a check. You deserve
the reward and more.

BEN

We will.

MEL

Take care.

Chief Crathern leaves.

Mel and Ben look at each other, suddenly shy. Look at the
party in the Rec Hall, shrug.

BEN

I gotta -- look around. See what
needs cleaning up after the fire.

MEL

I gotta bed down the horses.

BEN

Oh, and Ajax. He must be pretty
dry.

Mel follows as Ben grabs Ajax by the tail and carries him to
a hose. Mel grabs the nozzle.

MEL

I'll do it.

Mel hoses Ajax clean.

BEN

He likes you.

MEL

I like him. He's part of the
countryside. And it's not such a
bad place.

BEN

Compared to the land of grits and
hominy?

MEL

It's all right. The people are nice.
Some of the boys, too.

BEN

Any boys in particular, Honey-Chile?

MEL

I warned you.

Mel BLASTS Ben with the hose. He YELLS and GRABS back.

They WRESTLE for the hose, getting soaked.

A RAINBOW halos as they KISS.

FADE OUT