

EQUUS RISING

Adapted for the Screen and Written by

BILL FROEHLICH

Based on "*Yes, We Treat Aardvarks*"
And the life and work of Dr. Robert M. Miller, D.V.M.

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We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.

Immanuel Kant

EQUUS RISING

FADE IN:

1 **ON BLACK**

1

Then... a BURST of creativity as a STROKE of WHITE SLASHES the darkness -- then more strokes form an IMAGE of a simple CARTOON SKETCH drawn by an unseen artist's hand.

The sketch REVEALS an OPEN DOOR through which a VETERINARIAN is YANKED off his feet by the stethoscope STUCK in his ears pulled by an unseen force.(CREDITS OVER)

As the cartoon completes, we SEE the unseen force is a COCKER SPANIEL, the front diaphragm chest piece of the stethoscope in his mouth, as he gleefully races to greet his woman owner.

The last strokes are the artist's signature: *RMM*.

The SCREEN BRUSHES clean and a NEW cartoon is quickly drawn. We SEE a GIRAFFE, a stern warning look in his eyes, glaring down at a VETERINARIAN perched on a step stool with a look of clear consternation on his face as he pulls on a long-sleeved examination glove. *RMM* is the final touch.

Several SWIPES clear the screen -- then a new flourish of lines REVEAL a bathroom mirror above a sink -- REFLECTED in the mirror is a HORSE'S HEAD.

Our TITLE, as a caption, APPEARS: ***EQUUS RISING***.

When the cartoon COMPLETES, we SEE the VETERINARIAN looks in the bathroom mirror above the sink and sees the horse's head looking back at him instead of his own. Again... *RMM*.

The horse in the mirror GALLOPS OFF, DRAGGING the white lines of the cartoon behind it. The final trailing line SNAPS like a WHIP and flicks off the WORDS: ***Based on a true life story.***

Then with a gust of wind... ALL IS BLACK. (CREDITS END)

2 **EXT. PORCH AND WESTERN LANDSCAPE - DAY**

2

In the CENTER of the BLACKNESS, a DOOR OPENS REVEALING a wooden porch facing a western landscape pasture. The FIGURE of a MAN steps OUT of the blackness onto the porch.

In the DISTANCE, a HORSE fast approaches...

BOB (V.O.)

In the wild, when it moves, a horse is making a life or death decision.

The horse draws close and stops...

BOB (V.O.)

They have a look that says: "What about you?"

The horse angles his head -- his EYE staring right at us.

BOB (V.O.)

"What moves you?"

The door CLOSES from BEHIND the man and again ALL IS BLACK.

The BLACKNESS RIPPLES, then in the landscape of dreams where the images become increasingly agitated and odd, we SEE:

3 **EXT. SUBDIVISION RANCH & ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 3

Dusk. Leaning against a pasture fence, gleeful CHILDREN point at us -- a FLASH BULB POPS but SOUNDS like the CRASH of lightning... then all goes BLACK and we HEAR:

ATTORNEY (V.O.)

Yeah, I know Doc Miller.

4 **INT. HOME LIBRARY - DAY** 4

A storm rages outside as an imposing ATTORNEY sits in a plush leather chair -- a fawn GREAT DANE beside him.

ATTORNEY

He was Samson's doc. I warned him some people dig their own grave and call it construction. Helluva shame what happened to him.

5 **EXT. COLLEGE RODEO ARENA - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 5

Close on YOUNG DEBBY in a cowgirl hat next to her horse.

YOUNG DEBBY

Promise me I'll never have to give up my horses.

6 **INT. CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY** 6

Under glaring fluorescent lights, DR. ROBERT E. KIND, 54, is joined by DR. JAMES PEDDIE and DR. LARRY DRESHER, both 48. They wear ENLARGED name tags and hold EXAGGERATED surgical tools as they stride down the corridor like Texas Rangers...

DOCTOR KIND

How could he do that to Debby?

DOCTOR PEDDIE
To leave his wife with no money.

DOCTOR DRESHER
After all she's done for him!

Closer and closer... in SLOW MOTION as we FLASH INTERCUT:

7 **INT. BARN - DAY** 7

A WOMAN RANCHER milks a cow with decisive strokes.

WOMAN RANCHER
Well he made the wrong decision!

A SQUIRT of milk strikes the bucket!

8 **EXT. SUBDIVISION RANCH & ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 8

By the fence rail, a HORRIFIED child suddenly points at us!

9 **INT. BARN - DAY** 9

WOMAN RANCHER
(SQUIRT)
That's for certain.
(SQUIRT)
And that's for sure.

Another SQUIRT strikes the bottom of the milk bucket, then we HEAR the SOUND of WET SLURPING as --

10 **INT. MILLER'S BEDROOM - DAY** 10

-- an Australian Shepherd, "TOAD," LICKS the face of DR. ROBERT M. MILLER and wakes him up from a restless sleep.

Late 50s, Bob is a robust, committed veterinarian, writer, equine behaviorist, and talented cartoonist wielding a lively sense of humor. A direct man, at times impatient, emotions quick to rise, who understands the struggle to have mastery over our natural instincts, for we are predators. And with a predator, how does kindness reign?

He's also torn between two loves -- on the verge of a risky, life-changing decision.

BOB
(to Toad)
Another party heard from.

DEBBY (O.S.)
He's trying to lick that frown off your face.

DEBBY MILLER, early 50s, is just as sharp, vibrant, and adroit in expressing her opinion. She's a talented horsewoman and devoted mother who has been with her husband stride for stride through an active and equal marriage partnership.

DEBBY (CONT'D)

You were dreaming.

After all the years, they still appreciate their moments...

BOB

Were you watching me?

DEBBY

I was.

BOB

How'd I look?

DEBBY

You looked... dashing.

BOB

That's my gal.

But Debby knows what's bothering him -- and he knows she knows it -- there's no running from this tension.

BOB (CONT'D)

(out of bed)

This is not a good time for this magazine interview, not with this decision hanging--

DEBBY

Which is not life or death.

10A **INT. MILLER'S BATHROOM - DAY**

10A

Some moments later. Bob works the razor through the shaving cream on his face... trying to put "it" behind him, but...

BOB

Not life or death? Really? With two kids in college and our financial future at stake?!

10B **INT. MILLER'S BEDROOM - DAY**

10B

BOB (O.S.)

This is the rest of our lives!

Debby doesn't respond. It does concern her.

She adjusts the framed photos on the dresser of their children, MARK(25, grad school) and LAUREL(18, college). It will affect them too.

DEBBY
(changing subject)
You going to be nice to her?

BOB (O.S.)
Who?

DEBBY
The journalist Gary's sent to
interview you -- Jennifer Harden.

11

INT. MILLER'S BATHROOM - DAY

11

Bob splashes water on his face to clear the shaving cream remnants, then lifts up as water drips down his face.

IN THE MIRROR -- Bob NOW SEES ONLY his younger self -- YOUNG BOB, 30 -- face dripping wet with an accusatory glare --

YOUNG BOB
You'd walk away after all my hard
work?! It could ruin you!

BACK DOWN IN THE SINK, Bob splashes his face with water...

DEBBY (O.S.)
Gary said this was important.

...and lifts up to SEE ONLY -- a HORSE'S HEAD IN THE MIRROR,
with water dripping down past a challenging eye.

DEBBY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Better get a move on in there.

BOB
She's got to interview you too.

12

INT. MILLER'S BEDROOM - DAY

12

DEBBY
She's staying here for a week, I'm
sure we'll have a chance to chat.

BOB (O.S.)
I'll be nice.

DEBBY
No practical jokes?

Bob sticks his head out of the bathroom door.

BOB

Not until she gets in the house.

With a look of anticipated fun, Bob closes the door...

DEBBY

All I'm saying, if Gary sent her,
she's probably nice.

13 **INT. RENTAL CAR - DRIVING - DAY**

13

JENNIFER HARDEN drives a tiny rental car. She's agitated and takes no notice of the beautiful scenery as she heads north along Pacific Coast Highway to Kanan Dume Road.

She's sharp, ambitious, but her self-worth has taken a blow that says *I am not enough* -- and her once good spirit, now bitter from gender injustice, is prickly and hiding behind a facade of forced toughness. Maybe too far gone.

She becomes increasingly pissed-off as she thinks back...

14 **EXT. EQUUS MAGAZINE OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

14

Next to a hot dog vendor stand, GARY DRUMMOND, a good editor, in boots and jeans with a steady cowboy attitude is under siege by Jennifer -- jamming a hot dog at him -- as he attempts to ply his dog with mustard and relish!

JENNIFER

Gary, you can't stick me with this!

GARY

I need you to go to Bob Miller's.

JENNIFER

This guy's only worked with a bunch of animals -- and he wrote a little book about it!

GARY

A good book.

JENNIFER

Who gives a damn?!

GARY

You might learn something.

JENNIFER

I already know all I'd ever want to about animals -- and I hate your shirt -- I could knock off your Miller story from here.

(MORE)

GARY

David's a Kentucky Colonel.

JENNIFER

Gary, I'm the only real journalist you got -- I can put your little rag on the map with this -- it's the Triple Crown!

GARY

Look, the Millers are nice people.

16A **INT. EQUUS MAGAZINE OFFICE - DAY**

16A

They come through the door as--

JENNIFER

You're shoving this Doc Miller guy on me 'cause I'm the girl!

GARY

Try not to be--

JENNIFER

I am not prickly!

GARY

Here's your plane ticket.
(re: cell phone)
And this is for emergency only. The calls are too damn expensive.

Jennifer grabs them both and spins on her heels to the door.

GARY (CONT'D)

What? No kiss?

JENNIFER

Yeah.
(points to her rear end)
Plant one here.

17 **EXT. MILLER'S ARENA PASTURE - DAY**

17

A horse trailer backs up to the open gate. The sides SHAKE as the horse inside kicks at the walls of the stall. ED BRODSKY, a tough middle-aged rancher gets out of the cab.

ED

Better stay clear.

The latch OPENS -- the ramp DROPS -- a very agitated horse, EMMA, DASHES down the ramp, JERKS the halter rope out of Ed's hand and BOLTS into the pasture. Bob watches Emma move...

BOB

Ed, Emma's a fine lookin' mare.

ED

That's about all that's good.

BOB

Emma seems sound, but I can examine her for you.

ED

Oh she's healthy, except in the head. She's crazy dangerous.

BOB

What are you looking for me to do?

ED

Honestly? Fix her or put her down.

BOB

Ed, I'd never put an animal down unless it's medically indicated.

ED

If it was up to me -- and it will be if you don't fix her -- I'd put her down straight away. The wife made me bring her here to you, give her one last chance. You have seven days. So, good luck with that.

Bob watches Emma move warily in the pasture. She spooks at the FLUTTER of a BLOWING PAPER. This is a troubled horse.

18 **INT. RENTAL CAR - DRIVING - DAY**

18

Still annoyed, Jennifer looks at the cell phone... a wicked grin slides across her face. She dials...

JENNIFER

Hey there, Gary.

19 **INT. EQUUS MAGAZINE OFFICE - DAY**

19

GARY

Are you at the Miller's already?

JENNIFER (V.O.)

No, I'm driving.

GARY

You're on the cell phone?!

20 **INT. RENTAL CAR - DRIVING - DAY**

20

JENNIFER

Yeah, Ka-ching, Ka-ching! You got me stayin' at the Miller's, not to know them better, you're just a cheap bastard who won't spring for a motel -- which is why my rental car's barely bigger than my purse!

GARY (V.O.)

Get off the phone!

JENNIFER

Couldn't Miller live in Santa Barbara or Laguna Beach -- even Malibu! I mean Thousand Oaks -- did some fool actually go out and count all the trees?!

GARY (V.O.)

Jennifer!!

JENNIFER

Hello, you're breaking up, can you hear me? Ka-ching, ka-ching. Hello?

The tiny rental car makes the climb along Kanan Road.

21 **EXT. TRAVELING SHOTS THOUSAND OAKS - DAY**

21

The stunning beauty of the varied landscape is revealed.
SUPER: *Thousand Oaks, California 1987*

22 **EXT. MILLER'S BARN PASTURE - DAY**

22

A bridle is slipped over a MULE'S head...

A saddle is lifted onto the mule's back...

A cinch is gently pulled taut...

Hands grab the reins...

Robert Miller's FACE comes into view over the horn of the saddle as he rises up on the mule. Bob suddenly SEES --

JENNIFER'S TINY RENTAL CAR -- as it ROARS by the driveway, KICKING up DUST and DIRT... flying right by the entrance!

BOB'S EYES FOLLOW the disappearing car as he remembers...

TOM (O.S.)

Right from the start I wondered...

Behind Bob, TOM DORRANCE, on a HORSE, moves to the fence. Tom is a hale and hearty 77, a wise and experienced cowboy, the gentle, grizzled dean of the Natural Horsemanship revolution.

TOM (CONT'D)

When they move, what's the decision?

Bob does NOT look because he's listening to *his thoughts -- a memory -- in what will become a visual, emotional leitmotif.*

TOM (CONT'D)

The exact moment. What's in that moment? It's so pure.

SWIRLING DUST BRUSHES AWAY the IMAGE of Tom and DRIFTS OFF.

More DUST is KICKED up as Jennifer ROARS by the DRIVEWAY in the OTHER DIRECTION -- passing the entrance again! Bob grins.

23 **EXT. MILLER'S DRIVEWAY - DAY** 23

Jennifer's tiny rental car turns into the base of the long driveway that leads up to the house and stops abruptly.

24 **INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY** 24

Jennifer unfolds a map, BLOCKING THE VIEW OUT the windshield. When she COLLAPSES the map, she SEES Bob in jeans, boots and cowboy hat ride down on a MULE. This is so uncool to her.

JENNIFER

Oh...my...God...

Bob pulls up next to the driver's window and leans down.

BOB

Hello there. You must be Jennifer.

JENNIFER

I am. Jennifer Harden.
(hoping he's not Dr.
Miller.)
And you're...

BOB

Local Yokel.

Bob holds her deflated gaze with a smile. She stares at the mule -- the mule stares back at her... and so it begins.

BOB (V.O.)

I came home from overseas and was discharged from the army in 1946.

25 **OMITTED** 25

26 **INT. MILLER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY** 26

Now Jennifer stares at MINNIE, MOLLY and TOAD, THREE AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERDS, who stare right back at her -- as if she's a sheep to be herded. It's disconcerting...

BOB (O.S.)

I had no idea what I was going to do with my life except that I had three goals.

On a coffee table, a mini-cassette recorder's SPINDLES TURN.

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

One was to work with animals and own horses.

Bob watches the staring contest knowing Jennifer's not listening to him. Her NOTEPAD sits idle next to the recorder.

BOB (CONT'D)

The second was to own a small farm. I saw that farmers ate well when food was scarce in war-torn Europe.

JENNIFER

(annoyed re: dogs)
Do they always stare like that?

BOB

Only when they haven't eaten.

Jennifer's not sure how to take that. She resumes staring.

BOB (CONT'D)

The third was to live in a mountainous area where I could ski.

With Jennifer not looking, Bob takes her notepad, turns past a few pages, then with quick strokes, SKETCHES a cartoon.

BOB (CONT'D)

I wrangled horses that summer for the Irvine Ranch in California and that fall I started at the University of Arizona College of Agriculture, under the G. I. Bill, majoring in Animal Husbandry.

Bob REPLACES her notepad, SNAPS his fingers at the dogs, who only move two feet as Debby brings Bob two sandwich halves.

Hating the spotlight, Debby lets Bob "run with the ball." But she's his down-field blocker -- always one step ahead.

DEBBY

(to Jennifer)

Would you like a sandwich?

(Jennifer shakes head)

Bob never ate lunch.

(to Bob)

Did you?

BOB

Holly threw a shoe and I --

DEBBY

Okay...

Debby hands him the plate -- sees the dogs "staring." She snaps her fingers and points -- now the dogs obey and leave.

JENNIFER

(relieved, grabs notepad)

So that was Vet school, then you--

BOB

No, that was later.

Jennifer can't believe it as Bob proceeds to pull the two sandwich halves apart and reconstruct one larger half.

BOB (CONT'D)

You need a college degree *before* you can get into veterinary school. Same as an M.D. One of my professors at UA was a vet. That's where I got the idea. Thought it'd let me meet my three goals.

Jennifer impatiently TAPS her pen on her notepad.

BOB (CONT'D)

That next summer I worked for a small ranch in the San Rafael Valley of southern Arizona.

(more rapid pen TAPPING)

They hired a bronc buster to start their colts and I watched him.

Jennifer's pen DESCENDS in SLOW MOTION...

BOB (CONT'D)

It was traditional and forceful.

...and STRIKES the notepad with a resounding THUD.

Bob picks up his *new* half sandwich -- but only gestures with it -- since his point is more important than food.

BOB (CONT'D)
The colt was roped.

Jennifer's descending pen is a DRUMBEAT punctuating Bob's words and sandwich gestures with a SHARP, RESONATE SOUND. We INTERCUT VISUAL ACTION FLASHES of each description.

BOB (CONT'D)
Choked down.
(TAP)
Eared down.
(TAP)
Blindfolded.
(TAP)
A hind leg tied up.
(TAP)
Sacked out.
(TAP)
Saddled.
(TAP)
Mounted.
(TAP)
Turned loose to buck until it quit.

We SEE a RUSH of absolute terror in the COLT'S EYES!

With the loudest DRUMBEAT STRIKE, Bob's EYE catches Jennifer making a cryptic NOTE on her legal pad: *boring*. Bob puts the sandwich down, never having taken a bite.

BOB (CONT'D)
I saw the terror in the colt's eyes. I knew there had to be a better way.

JENNIFER
Did you ever go to Vet school?!

BOB
Four years later at Colorado A&M, now Colorado State. One of the best Vet schools in the country.

JENNIFER
So you graduated and got started.

Bob looks to where Debby prepares tea and cookies on a tray.

BOB
No, something more important happened before graduation.

JENNIFER
 (flippant)
 You mean Debby.

BOB
 Something in how she said things...

Bob looks at his wife, but instead NOW SEES YOUNG DEBBY, early 20s, in jeans, cowgirl boots and hat. She WHISPERS:

YOUNG DEBBY
 Get ready. Easy.

BOB
 ...and in the way she moved.

Young Debby pulls her hat down tight over her forehead and...

27

EXT. COLLEGE RODEO ARENA - DAY (FLASHBACK)

27

...her head leans forward and Young Debby WHISPERS AGAIN...

YOUNG DEBBY
 Go.

Then she ROCKETS PAST as her HORSE CATAPULTS her down the line toward a BARREL in competition! We SEE FLASHES of THUNDEROUS momentum -- this is aggressive riding!

The SOUNDS of the ROARING CROWD -- THRASHING HOOVES -- RIPPED-APART EARTH -- FLESH STRAINING against LEATHER -- forcefully EXPELLED BREATH all RISE in blended crescendo -- but in the saddle, Young Debby is calm, focused and in a WHISPER...

YOUNG DEBBY (CONT'D)
 Easy, easy.

We RUSH MADLY at the barrel, then a slight slowing and...

YOUNG DEBBY (CONT'D)
 (another WHISPER)
 Turn, turn.

Horse and rider WHIP AROUND the barrel almost horizontal to the ground, every muscle straining for angled power, wildly turning on the ragged edge of stability, only inches from pile-driving into the earth at breakneck speed!

Young Debby uses only a HISSING SOUND to exhort her steed onward -- its hind end contracting and exploding them past the barrel in a perfect synchronization of power and grace.

32

INT. MILLER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

32

The look of love in Bob's eyes has only grown deeper.

BOB

Suffice it to say, I was smitten.

Debby holds his gaze with mutual appreciation.

JENNIFER

Was he really what you wanted?

Debby reacts to the condescension as she circles around her.

ON JENNIFER

Pen poised above notepad as her eyes follow Debby with a challenging stare. Suddenly a LASSO DROPS over her head, JERKS TIGHT around her shoulders, pins her arms to her side!

Debby RUSHES INTO FRAME -- FLIPS Jennifer OFF the chair ONTO THE FLOOR! Hog-ties her hands and feet together and YANKS the ROPE tight!! She stands over a stunned Jennifer triumphantly!

BACK ON DEBBY

With a knowing smile as Jennifer, still seated in her chair, holds the same challenging stare...

DEBBY

Well... he wasn't exactly Rapid Robert on the dating front.

BOB

Didn't want to seem too forward and scare her off.

DEBBY

He finally asked me out just before I was going to give up on him and go out with someone else.

BOB

It worked out okay.

DEBBY

That's because I told him he had to promise to never make me give up my horses. And he never has.

This touches a raw nerve for Bob since the decision he wrestles with threatens this promise.

JENNIFER
You still compete?

DEBBY
I stopped when I had children, when
Mark was born and then Laurel.

BOB
She made the National Championship
team and went pro in California,
riding a thirteen year old mare,
never out of the money and never
knocked down a barrel.

JENNIFER
I should be writing about you.

DEBBY
I've always loved animals so I
could put up with his irregular
hours, late dinners, holidays with
him on call and--

BOB
I put up with interrupted car
rides.

33 **EXT. ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 33

BOB (V.O.)
A lot of interrupted car rides.

A 1957 Chevy station wagon rolls down a country road.

34 **INT. 1957 STATION WAGON - TRAVELING - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 34

Young Bob drives as Young Debby in the passenger seat --
suddenly agitated -- twists around to look behind them.

YOUNG DEBBY
Did you see that?! Stop the car!

YOUNG BOB
What?

YOUNG DEBBY
There's a black dog lying there!

YOUNG BOB
Was it alive?

YOUNG DEBBY
Stop the car! You have to save it!

35 **EXT. ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

35

The station wagon STOPS! They both scramble out...

YOUNG DEBBY

It looked like a black Lab.

They approach a gully. Young Bob looks down, shakes his head.

YOUNG BOB

I don't think I can save it.

YOUNG DEBBY

(heart-broken)

What?!

She rushes up behind him and peers into the gully. Lying in the dirt, "*the black Lab*" is a discarded black tire retread.

36 **INT. MILLER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)**

36

BOB

Over the years, I've turned back to provide aid to dozens of tires.

DEBBY

Not dozens, no.

Debby hands him his still uneaten *new* half sandwich.

BOB

Well however many, sadly, none were revived. One Collie turned out to be a stoned-out hippie.

DEBBY

Well, he looked like Lassie.

(re: uneaten sandwich)

Are you really not gonna eat that?

Bob quickly takes his **FIRST** bite of the sandwich.

Jennifer **URNS** her **PAGE** and **SEES** Bob's **CARTOON** of an apprehensive Veterinarian, holding a syringe, about to inject a wary and *prickly* porcupine on an examination table.

Jennifer looks up to **SEE** Bob with a sly smile on his face as he finishes off the **LAST** bite of sandwich.

37 **OMITTED**

37

38 **OMITTED**

38

39 ON BLACK

39

MARY (V.O.)
Conejo Valley Veterinary Clinic,
this is Mary, may I help you?

A FLURRY of WHITE LINES form another CARTOON as we HEAR:

CHP OFFICER (V.O.)
This is the Highway Patrol. We've
got a van parked on the freeway and
it can't be moved...

The white lines form a van parked in a freeway lane with a
Highway Patrol Officer peering into the van...

CHP OFFICER (V.O.)
...because there is a lion in it
that gets mad when the engine is
started. Can the Doc come meet us?

A big male AFRICAN LION sits behind the driver's seat.

The cartoon collapses into a title: *The Decision*

40 INT. GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

40

An arrogant Jennifer's on the big cell phone to Gary.

JENNIFER
I'll have this wrapped up by
tomorrow. It's a small story.

41 INT. EQUUS MAGAZINE OFFICE - DAY

41

Her prickly attitude forces Gary to drop what he's doing.

GARY
You just got there. You're not
ready to come back!

JENNIFER (V.O.)
There's not much here.

GARY
Dr. Miller's a good man and--

42 INT. GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

42

JENNIFER
Gary, I know you like him, but
we're not talkin' world-shaker.
He's just a Veterinarian.

GARY (V.O.)

Your signal's breaking up. You're not on the cell phone are you?!

JENNIFER

Why would I be on the cell phone running your bill sky high when I could use the Miller's phone?

GARY (V.O.)

Maybe because you're being--

JENNIFER

Prickly???

(looks out window)

Oh wait a minute, wait, wait...

43 **EXT. MILLER'S BARN PASTURE - DAY**

43

JENNIFER (O.S.)

I'm lookin' out the window.

In the near Barn pasture, Emma wanders as a mule, JEANIE, approaches the fence as Bob walks toward it spreading the contents of A SMALL PAPER BAG around the perimeter fencing.

44 **INT. GUEST BEDROOM - DAY**

44

JENNIFER

(at the window)

Somethin' big's a brewin', it looks like... Yeah -- feeding time! I better haul my ass over there and write down every precious word.

She abruptly hangs up.

45 **EXT. MILLER'S BARN PASTURE - DAY**

45

Bob empties the last of the paper bag onto the ground as--

JENNIFER

Shouldn't you be spreading that in a feed trough or something?

BOB

These are fly predators. Little insects that kill the fly larva. Totally safe except to the fly. The animals are more relaxed when not pestered all day long by flies.

JENNIFER
(SEES Emma who's agitated)
So what's buggin' that one?

BOB
Her owner wants me to fix her.

JENNIFER
What's wrong?

BOB
I suspect she's had people problems
and just won't take anymore.

JENNIFER
Can you help her?

BOB
I don't know. If I can't, in seven
days her owner's gonna shoot her.

JENNIFER
Whoa.

Jennifer looks at Emma -- but it's not her problem -- and she
turns back as Bob extends a cut-up apple to Jeanie, the mule.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
This one's a funny lookin' horse.

BOB
Rather pretty mule though.

JENNIFER
So, ahh... you like mules?

BOB
I love horses, always loved horses.
I respect mules. Jeanie's great.

JENNIFER
Breeding, right? You get two good
mules together and --

BOB
Mules are infertile.

JENNIFER
So...

BOB
A good horse and a good donkey.

JENNIFER

That's romantic.

BOB

Jeanie's the first mule ever imprint-trained as a foal. You know imprinting?

(she shakes her head "no")

Well you should know you've just met an Olympian. Jordass Jean.

JENNIFER

Her?

BOB

The only mule ever invited to do exhibition jumping at an Olympic event -- Los Angeles in eighty four. Gary said you like the big stories. Grab your notepad.

JENNIFER

Where we goin'?

BOB

A Santa Gertrudis has a pregnancy complication.

JENNIFER

Santa's a woman?

BOB

Santa's a cow.

46

INT. 1987 STATION WAGON - TRAVELING - DAY

46

They drive past the Westlake Landing and lake...

BOB

We'll pick up the mobile unit and head on out to Hidden Valley. I was supposed to have the week off for you but everyone's jammed so--

JENNIFER

I should be at The Belmont Stakes, maybe Libya, interviewing Qaddafi.

Her disappointment drips off her words...

BOB

Weather's better here.

47 **EXT. CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY**

47

The station wagon pulls up front. Bob and Jennifer get out.
It's a sizable building for a community Vet clinic.

BOB

We've become the largest general
practice Vet group in the nation.
It's a good time for us.

Jennifer's not really impressed as they ENTER...

48 **INT. CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY**

48

...and pass by MARY TUTTLE, the receptionist.

BOB

Mary, do you have--
(she extends TRUCK KEYS)
Thank you.

MARY

They said the cow'll be in the
chute.

BOB

Okeydokey.

49 **INT. INNER CLINIC HALLWAY - DAY**

49

A long hallway of exam rooms. Bob keeps right on moving as a
ROTTWEILER, tail wagging, strains at his leash and jumps up
against him. The client, MRS. RAMSEY, is embarrassed.

MRS. RAMSEY

Thor -- get down!

BOB

Hello Captain Crunch. Mrs. Ramsey.
(To Jennifer)
Thor was given a new name when he
mangled a stethoscope last month.

Jennifer cuts a wide path around "Captain Crunch" as a
concerned Dr. Peddie and Dr. Dresher approach.

DOCTOR PEDDIE

Don't decide until we talk.

BOB

Okay, Jim.

DOCTOR DRESHER
Don't rush this.

BOB
No, Larry, I... thanks.

Jennifer picks up on the uneasiness.

50 **INT. SURGERY & RECOVERY AREA - DAY**

50

Dr. Kind washes his hands as HOMER, a PYGMY GOAT, ambles over to Bob. Jennifer sidesteps out of the way.

BOB
Homer are you back again?

DOCTOR KIND
He dined on some fence wire.
Punctured the stomach.

BOB
Jennifer... Doctor Robert Kind.

DOCTOR KIND
Be sure and come back without him
and I'll tell you what he's really
like. You'll sell more magazines.

JENNIFER
Can't wait.

BOB
Mobile unit's out the back door.

Jennifer pauses at the back door and HEARS:

DOCTOR KIND
Have you decided?

BOB
This is the wrong time to do it,
but, this feeling won't go away.

DOCTOR KIND
You're going to be a target, you
know that. Really think it through.

A troubled Bob follows Jennifer OUT the door.

51 **EXT. REAR LOT - CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY**

51

The MOBILE UNIT is a large pick-up with a custom, state of the art fiberglass unit mounted on the truck bed.

JENNIFER

You told Gary I'd have total access. This "decision," is it--

BOB

You know, I bought the first mobile vet unit west of the Mississippi. But when I started out, I did exams and surgeries right off the tailgate of my station wagon.

Bob OPENS the back door of the mobile unit --

52 **EXT. RANCH - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 52

-- and The TAILGATE of the 1957 Chevy station wagon OPENS. A LAMB is lifted onto it by Young Bob, in coveralls, as Young Debby, uncomfortable in a make-shift white nurse's uniform, holds his doctor bag. An OLD RANCHER watches warily.

These IMAGES are *impressionistic brush strokes* of memory.

53 **EXT. REAR LOT - CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY (PRESENT)** 53

Bob checks the equipment drawers in the rear of the unit. It's fully equipped with running water, work table, etc.

BOB

Debby accompanied me most of the time. We thought she should wear this little nurse's uniform.

54 **EXT. RANCH STABLES - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 54

A VERY PREGNANT Young Debby holds a sedated horse while Young Bob examines the underside of the horse's belly.

BOB (V.O.)

I don't think she ever liked it.

55 **EXT. ROUGH ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 55

The 1957 station wagon bounces over a rough dirt road.

56 **INT. 1957 STATION WAGON - TRAVELING - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 56

Young Bob and a VERY PREGNANT Young Debby bounce up and down.

YOUNG BOB

Maybe we can shake that baby loose.

YOUNG DEBBY

I'm sure ready to see my feet again.

57 **EXT. REAR LOT - CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY (PRESENT)** 57

BOB

She was always willing to take on
just about anything. And at home...

58 **INT. MILLER'S FIRST HOME LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 58

BOB (V.O.)

We just used an ironing board.

Young Debby holds a BEAGLE on top of the ironing board as
Young Bob examines the dog.

59 **EXT. REAR LOT - CONEJO VALLEY VET CLINIC - DAY (PRESENT)** 59

BOB

Worked out well for the most part.
(closes mobile unit door)
Kind of state of the art then. I
think Debby still has it.

JENNIFER

You still use it?!

BOB

(gets in driver's side)
Well... for ironing.

Shaking her head, Jennifer climbs in the passenger side...

60 **INT. MOBILE UNIT - TRAVELING - DAY** 60

Rolling along Thousand Oaks Boulevard past nice shops and
restaurants as Jennifer keeps pressing.

JENNIFER

Why's Doctor Kind so concerned?

BOB

Because he's very aptly named.

JENNIFER

So this is no routine "decision."

BOB

You think it's that important?

JENNIFER

I can read a face.

BOB

Debby can take forever mulling over
a decision.

(MORE)

COWBOYS ride horses to the street. A barn with a SIGN: *Louis Goebel -- Importer and Exporter of Wild Animals*. Elephants staked in an open field. ANOTHER SIGN: *World Jungle Compound*. LIONS and TIGERS chained to oak trees by the street as if they were the neighbor's dogs.

BOB (V.O.)

Thousand Oaks has over 100,000 people now, but in 1957 there were only twelve hundred and fifty. Thousands of cattle, dozens of ranches, kennels, and trainers and importers for exotic animals and birds from all over the world.

63 **OMITTED** 63

64 **INT. MOBILE UNIT - TRAVELING - DAY (PRESENT)** 64

BOB

Lions were in an open field that's now a rib joint across from Kinkos.

Bob notices that Jennifer is bored and NOT paying attention.

64A **EXT. THOUSAND OAKS - PHOTO MONTAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK)** 64A

CIRCUS WAGONS parked in empty lots. *JUNGLELAND* entrance with BANNER: *See Wild Animal Movie Stars*.

BOB (V.O.)

T.O. was home for the John Strong Family Circus and groups that serviced the movie and television studios. Roy Rogers and Joel McCrea became my clients years later.

65 **OMITTED** 65

66 **INT. MOBILE UNIT - TRAVELING - DAY (PRESENT)** 66

BOB

All this was outside of LA county, a lot of unregulated open spaces.

Jennifer's NOT taking any notes. Bob checks his REARVIEW MIRROR -- no one behind him. Then, like a tug on a halter rope to correct a horse, Bob steps on the brakes! Jennifer's notepad sails off her lap -- snapping her back to attention.

BOB (CONT'D)

You dropped your notes. Need me to repeat anything?

YOUNG BOB
A little Lawrence Welk?

ESTHER
You betcha.

71 **INT. ESTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)** 71

The OVEN DOOR OPENS. Esther reaches in with an oven mitt and pulls out her TV dinner. She places it on her folding tray stand and peels back the aluminum foil as *The Lawrence Welk Show* plays on the TV. There's a SOFT KNOCK at her door.

She OPENS the front door -- her eyes go wide with fright! Standing in front of her is a 400-pound pot-bellied demon covered with long red hair -- a LARGE MALE ORANGUTAN!

Esther sucks in her breath to scream and faints... The orangutan steps past her, closing the door behind him.

72 **INT. HOUSE ON WILLOW LANE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)** 72

Young Debby prepares dinner as Young Bob answers the phone.

YOUNG BOB
Esther... what??? Watching Lawrence Welk??? Just... Just be calm. Don't -- don't move. I'll be right there.

Young Bob hangs up and hurries to the front door...

YOUNG DEBBY
What's wrong?

YOUNG BOB
Esther says she has a big red ape watching Lawrence Welk?

YOUNG DEBBY
What?

YOUNG BOB
Better call Jungleland and tell them they might have an escapee.

YOUNG DEBBY
Dinner's ready in fifteen minutes.

73 **INT. ESTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)** 73

Esther huddles by the front door. At the KNOCK, she quickly lets Young Bob inside. He looks back into her living room... The orangutan on the couch picks through Esther's TV dinner with his fingers while he watches Lawrence Welk on the TV.

ESTHER

(a strangled whisper)
He's a monster! I was afraid to
move! You think he'll kill us both?

YOUNG BOB

Well... you first.
(off her offended look)
He's probably from Jungleland. Just
got out, that's all.

ESTHER

Like for a stroll?!

YOUNG BOB

Maybe.
(gently to orangutan)
Hey...
(extends his hand)
Let's go home.

The orangutan walks toward them. Esther slinks back into the corner. The orangutan thrusts his long arm out... takes Young Bob's hand and looks directly into his face. Young Bob smiles and leads the docile giant OUTSIDE...

74 **EXT. ESTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

74

Outside, a Jungleland truck, driven by a TRAINER, pulls up as Young Bob and the orangutan cross the front yard.

Young Bob lets go of the orangutan's hand... and the gentle, red giant walks to the truck, opens the passenger door, and climbs inside with his trainer. As they drive off, the orangutan looks back with a wistful expression.

Young Bob can't help himself and involuntarily waves back...

75 **INT. MOBILE UNIT - TRAVELING - DAY (PRESENT)**

75

Bob and Jennifer drive past Lake Sherwood into Hidden Valley.

BOB

Funny the things that stick with
you -- the little look on his face
when he turned around.

Even after all these years, Bob is still moved by the memory.

JENNIFER

You act like this type of thing
happened everyday. I mean really,
come on, this was rare, right?

The linoleum floor is slippery... Keno accelerates -- paws spinning madly -- but only advancing slowly!

Young Bob and Keno reach the door at the same time! Outraged BARKING, forcefully pawing the door, Keno wants at them! Bob braces his foot next to the door and OPENS it a CRACK...

Keno ABRUPTLY stops barking, lowers his head, tail between his legs and retreats! Bob slowly opens the door wider...

A young man, RALPH, holds a leash... at the end of which is a full grown, 450 pound MALE AFRICAN LION with a thick mane.

RALPH

I got a sick lion, Doc.

The lion opens his mouth and emits a deep-throated WHIMPER.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Can you take a look?

YOUNG BOB

Sure can, Ralph.

It's then that Young Bob notices the lion is CROSS-EYED.

79

EXT. COW ENCLOSURE - DAY (PRESENT)

79

Bob takes his vet bag but let's her carry the arm-length rubber glove. He walks toward the cow in the chute...

BOB

That sick fellow was Clarence and his trainer was Ralph Helfer who was quite a pro. Clarence became a pretty big star. Ever see the movie *Clarence, the Cross-Eyed Lion*? Or the television series *Daktari*?

JENNIFER

Yeah, I did...I saw those as a kid.

BOB

Well that was Clarence. Every night for about ten years we'd hear all his lion buddies. About forty of 'em lived in Jungleland, a few blocks from our house. You haven't been truly serenaded to sleep until you've heard the lion symphony. Everyday a different animal. Once treated a hummingbird and a whale. Same day.

(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)

But we're so busy now, I only handle horses. Even this cow's a rare exception.

JENNIFER

Lucky me.

BOB

Yeah... you get to be my assistant.

JENNIFER

Me?!

BOB

Give you a first-hand feel for it.

The Santa Gertrudis cow, held immobile in the chute, is very big. Jennifer's reluctant -- and Bob catches that.

BOB (CONT'D)

She has an internally retained placenta and she's straining severely. I've got to inject an anesthetic at the base of her tail so I can retrieve it.

Bob places a cinder block OUTSIDE the chute at the rear of the cow. Bob prepares a syringe then steps up on the block...

BOB (CONT'D)

You need to lift the tail while I palpate the injection site.

Jennifer hesitantly extends her arm way out toward the tail.

BOB (CONT'D)

You can see she's in a steel chute.

Jennifer nods... not getting his point.

BOB (CONT'D)

You can stand closer.

Jennifer carefully steps in toward the chute and gingerly takes hold of the cow's tail a full TWO FEET from the base.

BOB (CONT'D)

Grab the tail closer to her body.

Jennifer reluctantly advances her fingers two inches.

BOB (CONT'D)

Closer.

Jennifer SEES the base of the cow's tail COATED WITH MANURE.

BOB (CONT'D)
Hold it real close to her body.

JENNIFER
It's got all this...

BOB
Manure. It's only manure so just--

JENNIFER
(fingers frozen in place)
I don't...

BOB
If you can deal with Qaddafi you
can handle manure. Grab her tail
right next to her body and lift it.

She slides her finger and thumb down into the manure and grabs the messy tail at the base. Bob palpates a spot then injects the syringe. He takes the tail and ties it forward.

Disgusted, Jennifer holds her manure-covered fingers away from her -- looks for something to wipe them on -- *pissed off that this is what her career's come to*. She spies a clump of grass, rushes over and rubs off the manure over and over!

Amused, Bob stares at her involved cleaning process, then he extends his arm into the OB sleeve and steps BEHIND the cow.

BOB (CONT'D)
This won't take too long.

Jennifer pulls her NOTEPAD out and DROPS it.

THE NOTEPAD

HITS the ground as we HEAR SOUNDS of EXPLOSIVE DEFECATION SLAPPING against clothing. A SMALL DROP of BROWN LIQUID STRIKES the CORNER of the notepad.

BOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Almost done. There we go.

Jennifer reaches INTO FRAME, gingerly picks up the notepad and stands up. She SEES Bob -- then GASPS -- backing away...

BOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She's gonna feel a lot better.
(his voice never waivers,
always professional)
Yes, it looks bad, it smells bad...

Bob STEPS INTO FRAME -- his clothes dripping in manure!

BOB (CONT'D)
But you can *handle it!*

He calmly walks back toward the mobile unit...

BOB (CONT'D)
You wanna grab the bag?

Appalled, Jennifer grabs the bag and follows...at a distance.

80

EXT. MILLER'S BARN PASTURE - DAY

80

The 1987 station wagon arrives with Jennifer facing the open window, a handkerchief over her mouth. Debby carries FEED BUCKETS and SEES that Bob is still marked by manure.

BOB
I hosed off at the ranch...
(heads into house)
...but I'm gonna take a shower.

DEBBY
I should hope so.
(to Jennifer)
Had some good talk time, did you?

JENNIFER
When I could breathe.

DEBBY
He'd come home all smelly and used
to try to kiss me, my romantic
rogue. Just takes things in stride.

JENNIFER
Well now he's knotted up about some
decision at work.

DEBBY
Oh, that.

JENNIFER
Yeah, what is that?

DEBBY
He's thinking of leaving his vet
practice.

JENNIFER
Seriously? To do what?

DEBBY

Write some books, lecture.

JENNIFER

Write books?

(laughs)

Are you kidding?

(realizes)

But this is the time when his practice is finally earning good money. He's not gonna make any money writing books or lecturing. Do you have enough saved to retire?

DEBBY

Not with two kids in college and all the animals to take care of -- no, we could lose it all.

JENNIFER

Is he crazy enough to do that?

(no response, realizes)

My God... You gotta stop him from throwing his life away, yours too.

DEBBY

Gary called. Wants you to call him.

Debby smiles and moves on with the feed, hiding her concern.

81	OMITTED	81
82	OMITTED	82
83	ON BLACK	83

MARY (V.O.)

Conejo Valley Veterinary Clinic.
This is Mary, may we help you?

RANCHER (V.O.)

Yeah, tell the Doc that a hot-air balloon landed in my pasture and...

A CARTOON forms of a hot-air balloon settling into a pasture.

RANCHER (V.O.)

...my horse ran through the fence.

The CARTOON completes to show a horse crashing through a wooden pasture fence. Then the air leaks out of the balloon and it collapses into another TITLE: **Leadership & Movement.**