

PROSPECT

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EXT. WESTERN PRAIRIE - DAY (DAY 1)

The camera pans across a DESOLATE PLAIN. It is sparse but beautiful. A lone STAGECOACH HOBBLES along a dusty path.

WOMAN (O.S.)
...this is actually my first time
out west.

INT. STAGECOACH - CONTINUOUS

We see the person speaking is a WELL-DRESSED WOMAN, Abigail Lansing (late 20's, proper, smart, a little awkward and chatty, but always positive and hopeful). She's crammed in with the OTHER PASSENGERS who look ROAD-WEARY and BORED.

ABIGAIL
(upbeat)
...my first time anywhere really.
I've never left Boston before. I
can scarcely believe I did it
myself! But I want to make a
difference in this world...well
that's a silly thing to say. I'm
sure you all want to make a
difference.

The GRIZZLED men beside her stare at her BLANKLY.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
(proudly)
I've been hired to be the new
school teacher for the town of
Prospect. And when you educate
children, they can do anything.
Take me for example,
(excited)
I'm heading out west. All by
myself! Absolutely no one thought
it was a good idea. Especially my
fiancé. Well, former fiancé. He
made that abundantly clear when he
tore up the only photograph I'd
ever taken, the day I left.
(then)
Such a brilliant man, but he just
couldn't understand that my life
back home was too rigid and
structured and...old fashioned. Out
here the possibilities feel
endless!

The man beside her SNEEZES LOUDLY.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (looking in her bag)
 Oh dear, I think I have a
 handkerchief in my--

He wipes his nose on HIS SLEEVE.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 That works too.
 (prattling on)
 It's such an amazing time to be a
 woman. So many changes! It's 1882,
 for goodness sake. We aren't just
 expected to clean and birth
 children anymore.

Abigail looks at all the PASSENGERS, sure they will all NOD
 in agreement. NO ONE seems remotely interested. EXCEPT for
 ONE person, the only OTHER WOMAN on the stagecoach. She
 STARES at Abigail INTENTLY, with a SLIGHT SMILE on her face.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (smiling at woman)
 We have a future, same as any man.
 (then)
 Well, I must apologize. I feel like
 I've been dominating much of the
 conversation. I'm sure someone else
 would like to tell their tale.
 (gesturing to older man)
 You sir. Why don't you tell us why
 you're heading to Prospect.

OLD MAN
 Whelp. First thing I'm gonna do is
 bury my wife.

ABIGAIL
 Oh, I'm so sorry. When did she
 pass?

He gestures to the WOMAN that Abigail thought was so RAPT
 with her NEW IDEAS.

OLD MAN
 I'm guessin' bout' an hour ago.

Abigail is HORRIFIED as she LOOKS AT the smiling CADAVER.

STAGECOACH DRIVER (O.S.)
 Prospect!

The stagecoach comes to an ABRUPT HALT, throwing the DEAD
 WOMAN into Abigail's lap.

TITLE CARD: **PROSPECT**

EXT. STAGECOACH - CONTINUOUS

A man OPENS the stagecoach door. Abigail gently pushes the cadaver off of her and gets out of the STAGECOACH. She stands for a beat as she takes in the town of Prospect. It consists of ONE DUSTY STREET, with crude WOODEN SIDEWALKS and RUDIMENTARY STOREFRONTS. In the near distance construction is going on. The street bustles with ANIMALS and MULTI-CULTURAL PEOPLE (mostly MEN), who also look DUSTY and WORN. Behind her we see TWO UNDERTAKERS set down a WOODEN CASKET beside the stagecoach.

ABIGAIL
 (to passing man)
 Pardon me. Can you tell me where I
 might find Mayor Ambrose?

MAN
 Saloon.

ABIGAIL
 Oh. But I've never been in a saloon
 before.

The man SHRUGS and walks away. Abigail hears a sound BEHIND HER and turns to see the undertakers UNCEREMONIOUSLY FLING the dead woman's BODY into the casket. She GRABS her bag and QUICKLY walks away.

EXT. PROSPECT MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Abigail walks down the MAIN STREET.

ABIGAIL
 (brightly, to passing
 people)
 Hello. Good afternoon.
 (then, proudly)
 I'm headed to the saloon.

She STOPS in front of the saloon, UNSURE of whether to enter or not. A MAN passes by her and EXITS through the SWINGING DOORS. The SALOON DOORS swing SHUT. Abigail stands for a moment, then gets a BIG SMILE on her face.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 This is my adventure!

She DRAMATICALLY FLINGS the saloon doors OPEN.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Abigail stands TRIUMPHANTLY in the entrance as the doors BANG LOUDLY against the wall. The entire saloon FULL OF MEN turn to look at who has entered.

ABIGAIL
 (through a forced smile)
 Oh...shoot.

Abigail TURNS to a BEDRAGGLED MAN standing near-by.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (small)
 The mayor, please?

The MAN points to the BACK of the SALOON to MAYOR AMBROSE (50's, any ethnicity, bigger than life, a bit of a scoundrel but super charming) who is BENT OVER another man who SITS in a chair. Abigail holds her HEAD HIGH, and WALKS STIFFLY as the PATRONS stare at her. Abigail TAPS Ambrose on the SHOULDER.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 Excuse me, Mayor Ambrose?

AMBROSE
 Be right with you.

We see that THE MAYOR is about to PULL the seated MAN'S TOOTH out with a pair of PLIERS.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
 Okay, Bill. You ready?

BILL
 (terrified)
 No, sir. I'm not ready at--

Ambrose PULLS the tooth, drops it and the pliers in a NEARBY BUCKET.

AMBROSE
 There! That shouldn't bother you anymore. Roy, mop up this blood and bring Bill here a whiskey.

ROY (mid 20's, Asian, overly-cheery, an energetic people-pleaser) RUNS OVER holding a MOP and a bottle of WHISKEY.

ROY
 Two steps ahead of you sir!

AMBROSE
 In fact, whiskey shots for everyone!

The saloon PATRONS CHEER and YELL Ambrose's name.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
 (to Abigail)
 You must be Abigail! Welcome to Prospect!
 (MORE)

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry I couldn't meet you,
but as you can see I had some
pending business. How was your
journey?

ABIGAIL
Well, it was very exciting. Until
someone...died on the coach.

AMBROSE
Only one? That's a good trip!

Ambrose takes her by the arm and leads her to the BAR.

ABIGAIL
So you're the mayor and a dentist?

AMBROSE
No, just the mayor. But I'll do
'til the real dentist gets
here...sometime in the future. How
'bout a drink?
(calling off)
Delfina!

A barmaid, DELFINA (late 20's, hispanic, street-smart, a
tough beauty) SAUNTERS over.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
Abigail Lansing, Delfina Reyes.

ABIGAIL
Oh, it's so inspiring to meet
another woman who's making her way
in the west.
(looking around)
I had no idea there'd be so few of
us.
(then)
I'm the new school teacher here.
Perhaps we could meet up at some
point and you could share your tips
on how to negotiate this wide-open
landscape. From a working female's
perspective.

DELFINA
(curt)
You're quite a talker. What do you
want to drink?

ABIGAIL
Oh.
(boldly)
I would like to have a beer,
please. Same as everyone else.

Delfina puts a beer in front of her. Abigail takes a sip.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (choking it down)
 Delicious. I can see what all the
 fuss is about.

DELFINA
 (calling off)
 Frank, you're up!

Delfina STARTS up the stairs, as FRANK, a ranch hand, FOLLOWS her. Abigail sees Frank grab DELFINA'S BEHIND as they continue up.

ABIGAIL
 Mayor Ambrose is that woman a--

AMBROSE
 Would you like to go see where
 you're teaching?

ABIGAIL
 Oh, yes. But is Delfina a--

AMBROSE
 Let's get you to that school!

As Ambrose USHERS Abigail out, she narrowly MISSES someone spitting TOBACCO into a SPITTOON.

EXT. MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Ambrose and Abigail WALK through town. Ambrose GREETs the people like a CELEBRITY.

ABIGAIL
 My, you really are beloved here. I
 don't even know the name of the
 mayor of my town. I suppose I might
 have learned it, but since I wasn't
 allowed to vote, I couldn't quite
 see the point.

AMBROSE
 I'm more of a hands on kind of
 mayor. Got to get in there! Guide
 the people. Help them move into the
 future. That's why I named this
 town Prospect. I want them to have
 hope! Expectations! A belief that
 anything is possible! Because
 anything is possible!
 (then re: sidewalk)
 Roy! This plank is busted!

Roy runs up HOLDING A PIECE of wood.

ROY
On it, sir!

ABIGAIL
(re: Roy, confused)
Wait...did he run around the back
or--

They get to the EDGE OF TOWN and turn the CORNER.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE- CONTINUOUS

AMBROSE
And here we are.

Ambrose GESTURES GRANDLY with his ARM. Abigail looks and SEES nestled in a GREEN MEADOW sloped gently before them, the LITTLE SCHOOLHOUSE. CHILDREN RUN and PLAY in the yard.

ABIGAIL
(getting emotional)
I'm sorry, it's just...I worked so hard to get here. And it's perfect. Exactly how I pictured it.

AMBROSE
That's how the men reacted when I showed them the saloon.

ABIGAIL
(moving towards children)
Would it be alright if I went down and met my students? I know it's silly but I brought them some peppermints in my bag. Peppermints make everyone happy.

AMBROSE
Sure. But...
(pointing at children)
those aren't your students. Those are.

He POINTS to a GROUP of UNRULY MEN who are mending a fence and SCUFFLING over a FLASK.

ABIGAIL
What? There must be some mistake.

AMBROSE
(re: men)
Nope, those are your students, alright. Let's get you over there, you said you wanted to meet 'em.
(MORE)

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
 (leading her to men)
 Boys! Say hello to your new
 teacher!

They are BIG ED (mid 20's, small, quick-witted, quick to
 fury), GUS (early 30's, a ruggedly sexy cowboy, charming, a
 definite "player"), ETU (Native American, 16 or so, bright,
 so cheery you'd think he never had a hardship, and you'd be
 wrong), JASPER (50's, rode hard put away wet, drunk).

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
 Abigail Lansing, these are your
 students: Big Ed, Gus, Etu and
 Jasper.

BIG ED/GUS/ETU/JASPER
 (mumbling)
 Howdy. Ma'am. Mornin' Bweh.

ABIGAIL
 (nodding to each man)
 Hello. Pleasure. Good Afternoon.
 (re: Jasper's filthy
 extended hand)
 I am politely going to decline
 that, thank you.
 (pulling Ambrose aside)
 I'm sorry, but this situation is
 completely untenable!

AMBROSE
 Untenable! Wonderful word! You're
 going to make a fine teacher!

ABIGAIL
 These are grown men! I came here to
 teach children. Shape their minds,
 broaden their horizons! We were
 going to draw turkey hands on the
 first day, for God's sake. Are
 those men going to want to draw
 turkey hands?

AMBROSE
 Everyone wants to draw turkey
 hands!

ABIGAIL
 (reaching into her bag)
 But you sent me a telegraph.
 (reading note)
 "Dear Miss Lansing, I would like to
 hire you as the new school teacher
 for Prospect."
 (then)
 Why didn't you add that I wouldn't
 be teaching children?!

AMBROSE

I'm truly sorry about that, but the telegraph office charges by the letter, and it would have cost me a fortune. I guess I could have forgone the small pox vaccinations so your letter was more clear.

ABIGAIL

Well...no, if it was between that and vaccines...now I feel terrible.
(then, sadly)
I'm going to eat this whole bag of peppermints.

AMBROSE

Now, I'm sure you're wanting to get yourself settled. I've got a wagon coming to take you to a nice family you'll be staying with while you're here.

Abigail looks over at the PLAYING CHILDREN, then back at the MEN who are SPITTING TOBACCO and SHOVING each other.

ABIGAIL

(thrown)
Men. Grown men.

AMBROSE

You're like a dog with a bone with that, aren't ya? Look I know this might not be what you expected, but I'm of the belief that every man deserves an education. No matter their age, creed or color!

ABIGAIL

And what about the women?

AMBROSE

There you go! You got your sense of humor back.
(chuckling)
Women.

A WAGON PULLS UP. It is driven by ROY.

ABIGAIL

(re: Roy)
My goodness, you again?

AMBROSE

Abigail, meet Roy Chen, the best damn right-hand-man a mayor could ask for. He does a little bit of everything in this town.

ROY

Mainly the stuff no one else wants to do. But I truly enjoy it! Plus, I find the more useful I am around here, the less I get attacked!

Ambrose HELPS Abigail up to the SEAT.

ABIGAIL

But how is this going to work? What is their level of education? Are they going to wash their hands?

AMBROSE

I imagine some people would find all your questions annoying, but I love your inquisitive nature!

Ambrose SIGNALS Roy. The HORSE moves out.

ABIGAIL

Mayor Ambrose! Mayor Ambrose!
(moving farther away)
Are you even listening?

AMBROSE

(yelling to her)
So many questions! Not annoying at all!

Off Abigail's BEWILDERED FACE, we...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

EXT. TWILL FARM - LATER

Roy and Abigail PULL UP to a QUAIN T COUNTRY FARM HOUSE. CHILDREN PLAY in the yard, as a handsome man, PETER TWILL (mid 30's, folksy, care-free, country wise) sits on a TREE STUMP, STRUMMING his GUITAR. He APPROACHES them.

ROY
Miss Abigail, this is Peter Twill.
This will be your host family until
you find a place of your own.

Peter helps Abigail DOWN from the WAGON and GRABS her bags.

PETER
(warmly)
It ain't much, I'm just a simple
farmer. But we're happy here, hope
you will be too.

ABIGAIL
I'm grateful for your hospitality.
What exactly do you grow here?

PETER
Well, had a bit of a tough run with
our crops. Right now, seems like
all we're growing is children. Roy
can attest to that. He helped Mayor
Ambrose deliver our youngest.

ROY
(big smile)
I sure did. And it was tra-matic.

Roy TAKES off.

PETER
I bet you're a might tired from
your travels. Why don't you head
inside for a rest. I'll bring your
bag in shortly. The goats tend to
give sweeter milk when I serenade
them.

Abigail SMILES at his COUNTRY charm and heads to the house,
as Peter sings and PLAYS his GUITAR.

INT. TWILL HOUSE- CONTINUOUS

Abigail enters. It is one main room but has sections: a
fireplace, a dining table, a kitchen area. There is a
SWEETNESS to it, but it's very basic.

ABIGAIL
 (looking around)
 Okay. Not bad. A little dirty, but
 I can live with it.

She hears a sound in the corner. She JUMPS and sees a WOMAN hunched over a wash-board, FURIOUSLY washing clothes. She appears to be in her SIXTIES.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 Oh, hello! I didn't see
 you...crouched in the corner there.

The woman doesn't looks up.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 I'm Abigail Lansing. Thank you so
 much for opening your home to me. I
 didn't mean to barge in, but your
 son said it was alright.

WOMAN
 My son?

ABIGAIL
 Yes, the gentleman out there
 playing the guitar. Peter.

WOMAN
 That's not my son, that's my
 husband.

Abigail is mortified by what she has just said.

ABIGAIL
 (back pedaling)
 Yes, your husband! Not your son. Of
 course it's your husband! What did
 I say?

The woman Abigail is talking to is WINNIE MAE (early 30's but looks much older, work-horse, salt-of-the-earth pioneer woman, think Frances McDormand).

WINNIE MAE
 You said my house was dirty and
 that you thought I was my husband's
 mother.

ABIGAIL
 No, no no. I've had such a busy day
 and I'm very tired. I'm mixing up
 my words.
 (changing subject)
 What a lovely fireplace, is it
 stone?

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (touching it)
 Oh no, mud. Rustic! Beautiful!

WINNIE MAE
 Well, I'm sorry I'm not a fancy lady like you. With all your lotions and your sun hats and your...soap.

ABIGAIL
 Oh no, I'm not a fancy lady. I mean I use soap, of course.
 (small)
 And I have several sun hats and an assortment of lotions. But I am not a fancy lady.

WINNIE MAE
 Really? Do you scrub laundry for six hours a day? Do you rush to clean up one meal, just so you can start fixin' another? Do you chop wood, kill chickens, pull a plow through a dry field, and pop out a baby once a year while your husband sits on a stump and plays some stupid ditty on his guitar?

ABIGAIL
 Well...no. I was going to say I got my teaching degree.
 (selling)
 And sometimes I stayed up til nine studying and...
 (relenting)
 Oh, God. I guess I am a fancy lady.

INT. TWILL HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

ABIGAIL SITS at the TABLE with Peter eating SUPPER. Winnie Mae SCRUBS pots in the KITCHEN AREA.

PETER
 (to Abigail)
 You know, I suspect you and Winnie Mae are going to become great friends. Being the same age and all. She's thirty-two, I'm guessing you're around there.

ABIGAIL
 (dropping her spoon in shock)
 Oh! That's--thirty two? Really?!
 (sympathetic to Winnie Mae)
 Wouldn't you like to sit down and join us?

PETER

She always eats later. I don't know why.

Winnie-Mae gives Peter a DISDAINFUL look and LOUDLY drops and armful of DIRTY POTS in the sink.

PETER (CONT'D)

(to Abigail)

How are you finding everything so far?

ABIGAIL

Well, I can't help but be a little disappointed. I thought I was going to be shaping the minds of children. Those men's minds have already been shaped. By whiskey and...

(disgusted)

chaw.

PETER

I think I might have something that can help you.

ABIGAIL

Oh, that would be wonderful.

WINNIE MAE

(to Abigail, dead-pan)

Wait for it.

Peter has PICKED UP his GUITAR and starts to play.

PETER

(singing a peppy tune)

*Oh, the cat he came a prowlin' one
night/looking for something fierce
to fight/So he sat on a fence
underneath the moon/until he saw a
big ol' raccoon*

(then, to Abigail)

You get what I'm trying to say?

ABIGAIL

(unclear)

Uh...is the raccoon supposed to be me?

Winnie Mae's passive-aggressive pot banging becomes LOUDER as Peter CONTINUES his song.

PETER

*And a rat and a hog/And a little
bitty frog/sat down on a log/and
along came a dog/And--*

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 (stopping singing)
 Dang it, Winnie Mae! Can't hear myself sing. I'm going out on the porch!

He EXITS, leaving an UNCOMFORTABLE Abigail.

ABIGAIL
 Well, I guess I'll toddle off to bed.
 (gently)
 And I've left you a little bit of cream here...not to be fancy, just for, you know, the dry area around your eyes. And...elsewhere.

WINNIE MAE
 You're a teacher, ain't ya?

ABIGAIL
 Yes, of course.

Winnie Mae SITS DOWN next to her.

WINNIE MAE
 Then teach! What are you belly-aching about?

ABIGAIL
 Well, I'm sorry but I don't think you quite understand my situation. I gave up a lot to come here. My home, my family, my beloved... albeit slightly long-winded fiancé--

WINNIE MAE
 Good gravy, what a whiner! You got yourself educated. You know how rare that is for a woman? When I asked to go to school, my daddy threw me out a window!

ABIGAIL
 (sympathetic)
 I would really like to hug you, but I don't see that going well.

WINNIE MAE
 Who cares that you're teaching grown men? Doesn't matter what age they are. Don't everyone deserve a chance to learn?!

Abigail takes THIS IN.

ABIGAIL
 (shoulders back)
 You're absolutely right. Thank you.

Winnie Mae SMILES at her warmly, then gets a FAR-OFF look in her eye, like the woman on the stage coach.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (panicked)
 Winnie Mae!

WINNIE MAE
 (startled)
 What?!

ABIGAIL
 (relieved)
 Never mind.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE -NEXT DAY, LATE AFTERNOON

Abigail ENTERS. A beautiful young woman, ELIZABETH (20's, confident, entitled, seems nice until you figure her out) APPROACHES from the BACK of the room.

ELIZABETH
 (friendly)
 Hello. You must be Abigail. The mayor told me you'd be coming.
 (re: her stuff)
 Let me help you with that.

ABIGAIL
 Thank you so much. Wow. You smell like clean candy.

ELIZABETH
 I'm Elizabeth Hastings. I'm just getting things ready for my class tomorrow. I'm the real teacher. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say "real teacher". That sounds insulting. What I mean is, I teach the normal students.
 (then)
 Oh my, that's not much better, is it?

ABIGAIL
 Do you need any extra art supplies?
 (wistfully)
 I brought colored paper and fun decorative buttons...that my students won't give a hoot about.

ELIZABETH

Ooh, I don't do that. Too much work.

ABIGAIL

Work? Arts and crafts is one of the great joys of teaching. Plus it helps with creativity and--

ELIZABETH

(plowing through)

What brings you to Prospect? Are you looking for a husband? Of course you are. Why else would you teach?

ABIGAIL

(getting annoyed)

Well, I thought I was here to help the children. Broaden their minds. Show them there's a future.

(then)

And of course make turkey hands because that's just good fun.

ELIZABETH

Daddy got me this job because it's the best position to find a quality man. It shows you're good with kids, that you're resourceful. And that you can be pleasant even though you hate what you're doing.

ABIGAIL

I don't hate what I'm doing.

ELIZABETH

(winking)

Neither do I.

(then)

Well, I really must go. And as one single woman to another,

(tone change)

I was here before you so I get first pick. After I'm married, help yourself.

ABIGAIL

(with judgement)

You're what Winnie Mae would call a real fancy lady.

ELIZABETH

Thank you!

(then)

Have a wonderful evening!

Elizabeth glides out.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATER

Abigail is finishing SETTING UP her classroom as the MAYOR ENTERS.

ABIGAIL

Oh, Mayor Ambrose. I appreciate you checking on me, but I'm fine.

(then)

And I owe you an apology for how I acted when I first met my students. You'll be happy to know that I've embraced it, and I'm excited to take on the challenge of this new endeavor.

AMBROSE

Endeavor! Another good one. But I didn't come to check on you. I want to introduce you to someone.

(calling off)

Barnes!

A LARGE, out of shape man, BARNES (early 40's, slovenly, full of bravado and swagger) ENTERS.

ABIGAIL

Is this another student?

BARNES

(snorting)

Hardly.

AMBROSE

This is Sheriff Barnes. I thought it was important that he was here.

BARNES

(patting his gun)

For protection.

ABIGAIL

Protection?

(to Ambrose)

Protection from what?

AMBROSE

Well, I'll leave you to it!
I've got an "endeavor" of my own:
card game and a shot of whiskey.

He EXITS.

ABIGAIL

(calling after him)

Mayor Ambrose! Mayor Ambrose!

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

(then)
Darn it!

She TURNS and sees Barnes leaning "DIG ME" against the WALL.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

So where would you like to sit? Up front with me or--

BARNES

Hold on, girlie. Before you get too excited, I'm taken. By a woman I love...who has a very large bosom.

ABIGAIL

(dry)
She's a lucky lady.

BARNES

(blow-hardy)
So what are we starting with today? Letters? Numbers? Genography? I got some thoughts.

ABIGAIL

Genography?

BARNES

("duh")
Yeah. Study of earth and stuff. What, did Mayor Ambrose get you on sale?

ABIGAIL

(politely)
Maybe it would be best if you just stood near the door.

The room explodes with the STOMPING of BOOTS and LOUD VOICES as Etu, Big Ed, Jasper and Gus ENTER.

BARNES

Come on, boys. Show some respect! Take your damn hats off!

The men comply, but Abigail only LOOKS at GUS. He appears to be moving in SLOW MOTION as he removes his HAT and SHAKES his DARK CURLS loose.

GUS

(Brad Pitt smile)
Sorry about that.

ABIGAIL

No, fine. You're fine. Let's get started.

Gus, Big Ed, Jasper and Etu take a SEAT, as Abigail MOVES to the HEAD of the class.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

(brightly)

Hello, everyone. In order to get to know each other better, I thought we could go around and say a little bit about ourselves. I'll go first. My name is Abigail Lansing. I'm from Boston. I have two younger sisters, and I like oranges!

(pointing to Etu)

How about you?

ETU

(upbeat)

Okay. I'm Etu, don't have a last name. I think I'm about sixteen, but no one knows for sure. They don't even know how I came to town, but I'm awful glad to be here. I'm awful glad you're here too!

ABIGAIL

Oh. Thank you, Etu. That's nice of you to say.

ETU

I'm Chumash Indian...but you're a woman. So with you here, I won't get picked on so much!

ABIGAIL

(half-hearted)

Yay.

Jasper STANDS up.

JASPER

(unintelligibly drunk)

Mar nah esh Jashpuh. Bursh dorp compinshun marsht-

ABIGAIL

Oops, that reminds me. Quick little rule: no drinking before class. But you didn't know so...just sit down.

GUS

(standing up)

Guess I'll go next. I'm Gus Harney.

(then)

So what should I call you? Teacher? Ma'am?

(forward)

Abby?

ABIGAIL

(thrown by his magnetism)
You may actually call me, Miss
Lansing.

GUS

Miss? Well, that's good to know.

(then)

Don't really know what to say about
myself. I'm just a cowboy. Work up
a sweat during the day...

(grinning)

sometimes at night too, if you know
what I mean.

ABIGAIL

(flustered)

I assure you, I do not.

(then)

I need some water. Does anyone else
need water?

GUS

(leaning in)

I should probably let you in on a
little secret. I just fell pretty
hard for someone, but she don't
know it.

ABIGAIL

(intrigued, despite
herself)

Doesn't.

GUS

(winking at her)

She doesn't know it.

ABIGAIL

(coy)

Well, these things can happen very
fast.

GUS

I'll say. First time I saw
Elizabeth, struck me like a bolt.
Do you know her, Elizabeth
Hastings?

ABIGAIL

That's who you're interested in?
Then why were you just talking to
me like that?

GUS

I don't know. That's how I talk to all women.

Big Ed STANDS up.

BIG ED

Is it my turn, or what?

ABIGAIL

Oh, sorry. Of course. Ed, right?

BIG ED

Big Ed.

The other men SNICKER again.

BIG ED (CONT'D)

(defensive)

Yeah, I gave myself that name, so what?! There's not a man in this town that I haven't fought.

BARNES

I don't know why you're bragging about that. You haven't won one yet.

BIG ED

(to Abigail)

Is he even allowed to speak? He isn't even a student!

BARNES

Yeah, because I ain't a dumbass!

BIG ED

Neither am I! I just ain't had much schoolin' 'cuz I had to take care of my momma.

ABIGAIL

Aw, that's very sweet.

GUS

No it ain't. His momma's not sick, he just don't want to be away from her.

BIG ED

That's because she's my best friend and there's nothing wrong with that!

(standing threateningly)

You wanna take it outside, you possum-faced turd?!

GUS
 (standing, towering over
 him)
 I get a little tired of whoopin'
 your ass, but alright. Let's go
 momma's boy.

BARNES
 Both of you idiots shut up! If you
 have a problem with each other,
 take it out on Etu.

ETU
 (re: Abigail)
 Or her. She's here now too.

ABIGAIL
 Oops! Rule number two: no fighting.
 That should actually be rule number
 one. But again, you didn't know
 so...
 (desperately trying)
 We're off to a fine start!

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATER

The STUDENTS sit in VARIOUS STAGES of disinterest: GUS LOOKS
 out the window, BIG ED FIDDLES with his fingernails, ETU is
 trying to catch a FLY. JASPER is just flat out ASLEEP.

ABIGAIL
 (singing as if to children)
 A,B,C,D,E,F,G.--
 (then)
 Come on, join in!
 (then)
 If you participate, you get to
 reach into the surprise bag!
 (holding up bag)
 You never know what you're going to
 get! Toys, knick-knacks...
 (selling)
 peppermints! I bet I'll get some
 singers now!
 (singing)
 H,I,J,K--

GUS
 Miss Lansing?

ABIGAIL
 Yes, Gus?

GUS
 (flirty)
 You have a real purty voice.

ABIGAIL

Could you please stop that? It's not about how I sound, it's about what I'm saying.

BIG ED

When is this stupid class over? 'Cuz my mama-- someone is waitin' for me to do a puzzle at home.

ABIGAIL

Over? This...stupid class has only been going for thirty minutes. Now, if I could have your attention--

ETU

I'm gonna have to drag Jasper out to the porch. He's snoring awful loud over here.

ABIGAIL

No, please. Just leave him be. I need those of you that are conscious, to focus.

BARNES

(pompous, to class)

What she's sayin' is she wants you to pay attention.

ABIGAIL

Right. Thank you.

(to class)

And I know this probably seems very simple but you have to know your ABC's. Then before you know it, you'll be reading!

BARNES

What Miss Lansing's trying to say is you need to learn your letters so you can do words and stuff.

ABIGAIL

(covering annoyance)

Thank you...again. For clarifying what I just clearly said.

BARNES

Happy to help. I think they're more likely to listen when a man is speakin'.

ABIGAIL

(big smile)

Well, maybe if a man would stop speaking, they would have a chance to listen to what a woman said.

BARNES

You hear that, boys. She needs you
to pipe down while she's yappin'.
(to Abigail)
Go ahead, little lady.

ABIGAIL

(standing up to him, but
shaky)

My name is Miss Lansing. Not
"little lady", not "girlie", not
"darlin'". I know you haven't used
that last one yet, but I sense it's
in your repertoire.

(then, strong)

Now, I am going to write the
alphabet on the board. You will all
take out pencil and paper and copy
it down.

She TURNS her back, and writes on the CHALKBOARD.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to be so stern, but I am
the teacher and I am in charge. And
I know it's difficult, but an
education will open up
opportunities that you never
thought possible.

BEHIND HER we see Big Ed DROP his PENCIL on the floor. Rather
than PICK IT UP, he reaches over and GRABS Gus' pencil from
his HAND. Gus stands up and shoves Big Ed.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

(back still turned)

In fact, if I hadn't gotten an
education, I doubt that I'd be
teaching you here today!

Big Ed PLOWS into Gus. Etu and Jasper JUMP IN. Barnes tries
to break it up. Abigail TURNS AROUND and sees the MELEE.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Oh, oh my. Stop this right now!

Barnes SHOOTS his PISTOL in the AIR to end the fight. Abigail
SCREAMS, drops to the ground, COVERS her HEAD, then looks up.

BARNES

Go ahead, Darlin'. I got 'em
listening now.

Off Abigail's SHOCKED face, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SCHOOLGROUNDS - A BIT LATER

The men stand HUDDLED outside a CRUDE outhouse.

GUS

Well, I don't know how to get her out of there! Big Ed, what do you do when your mama's locked in the john?

BIG ED

You goat-ass! I'm going to tear you apart!

Big Ed LUNGES at Gus. Gus BARELY pushes his shoulders, and Big Ed FALLS to the GROUND.

BARNES

Let me take care of this. I know how to handle women.
(knocking on outhouse door)
Are you having some kind of lady time? If so, we'll let you be with that.

ETU

Miss Lansing? I been locked up in an outhouse myself...not voluntarily. It ain't pleasant. Are you okay?

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

(shakily)
I'm fine! Thank you!

GUS

Are you sure? There's been some...noises. Like maybe you've been crying.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

(giant sob)
I don't know what you're talking about. Could you please leave?

BARNES

But I'm supposed to take care of you and there's critters out here.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

Thank you Barnes, but I am a grown woman and I can take care of myself!

(then, teacherly)

Now go back to class, put your hand on a piece of paper and trace around it. You'll be surprised what it looks like!

The men look at each other, SHRUG, then walk away.

INT. OUTHOUSE - A BIT LATER

Abigail SITS there holding a CANDLE.

ABIGAIL

Abigail Lansing you did not come out west to sit in this outhouse. You get back in that classroom and teach.

SUDDENLY there is the sound of CRUNCHING LEAVES and TWIGS outside. Abigail sits taller.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Hello? Barnes? Is that you?

She hears the SNIFFING and GRUNTS of an ANIMAL.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

(terrified looking around)

Oh, dear God. Critter!

With her PANICKED BREATHING, she BLOWS the candle out. The screen goes BLACK.

EXT. OUTHOUSE

We see a time-lapse of NIGHT to DAY.

EXT. OUTHOUSE

Winnie Mae is SHEPHERDING her FOUR CHILDREN (three boys, one girl, ages 5, 6, 7, 8, adorable, rowdy, messy) to the schoolhouse. They STOP at the outhouse.

WINNIE MAE

(to kids)

Alright, them that needs to go, do it now. Or hold it all day.

(MORE)

WINNIE MAE (CONT'D)
 Just don't soil your britches, you
 got to pass 'em down to the next
 'un.

The outhouse door FLINGS open revealing a DISHEVELED Abigail.

ABIGAIL
 Winnie Mae! Thank God!

WINNIE MAE
 My Lord, is this where you were all
 night? I was hoping you were lying
 in sin somewhere.

ABIGAIL
 I just came in here for refuge and
 then was held captive by wild
 animals! I was trapped!

WINNIE MAE
 Don't be so dramatic, you're
 scaring my kids. We're all trapped.

Winnie Mae and the kids WALK OFF as Abigail looks on
 EXASPERATED.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER

Abigail TROMPS down the sidewalk.

INT. SALOON - MOMENTS LATER

Abigail has once again, SWUNG the doors open so HARD that
 they CLANG against the wall. Delfina is behind the bar.

ABIGAIL
 Where's Ambrose?!

DELFINA
 Fishing, I suspect. And you really
 need to learn how to enter a
 saloon.

Abigail sits at the BAR.

ABIGAIL
 Give me a whiskey. Or whatever
 people have after surviving a
 classroom brawl and spending the
 night being terrorized by wild
 animals.

DELFINA

(pouring her shot)

Welcome to the West. It ain't for
the faint of heart.

ABIGAIL

What was I thinking coming here?!
I had a perfectly fine life in
Boston! I could be married right
now to a very nice man, Walter. But
I said, "no".

DELFINA

Why, bad in the sack?

ABIGAIL

(appalled)

How would I know, we weren't
married!

DELFINA

Hoo-boy. Just go on.

ABIGAIL

The night Walter came to ask my
father for my hand, I was hiding in
the parlor, listening. No easy
task, because Walter is a droning
bore. They were talking about what
a wonderful life he was going to
provide for me. Then they finished
their scotch and shook hands, and
my path was set. I would have his
children, clean his house, make his
meals. I would have been like
Winnie Mae.

DELFINA

Except much younger.

ABIGAIL

She's thirty-two.

DELFINA

(gut punched)

Dang. That poor thing looks like a
dried up apple doll.

ABIGAIL

My life in Boston wasn't enough for
me. But this is too much.

(then)

How do you do it?

DELFINA

Well, I didn't really have a
choice.

(MORE)

DELFINA (CONT'D)

My family came here from Mexico. They were going to start fresh in the West. I was so excited, I thought it was going to be an adventure.

ABIGAIL

That's what I thought too!!
(re: whiskey)
I'm sorry, this is making me loud.

DELFINA

(nonchalant)

But on the trip here, my parents got cholera and died. I huddled near them until the warmth stopped. Then I had to set out on foot with a pack of coyotes trailing me...until I got so skinny they lost interest. I was pretty near a goner when I saw this town in the distance.

(with pride)

Crawled here on my hands and knees, and worked my way up to town whore.

ABIGAIL

(embarrassed)

Maybe you should have told your story first.

Delfina POURS herself a shot.

DELFINA

(toasting)

To the ladies of Prospect. Few but mighty.

ABIGAIL

(clinking her glass)

I love that.

(then)

I just wish I knew how to reach these men.

DELFINA

Well, I hope you figure it out because it would do us all a heap of good. You have an opportunity here, you're in the room with them. You can help make them better men. I mean I'm in the room with them too, but in my business we don't do much talking.

ABIGAIL

Isn't there any other job you can do?

DELFINA

No, I don't have smarts like you.

Abigail CLOCKS this.

DELFINA (CONT'D)

And don't worry, what I do isn't so bad.

A very HAIRY, over-weight OAF enters.

DELFINA (CONT'D)

(re: oaf)

Oh, damn. It's Cody.

(calling to him)

Go on up, Handsome. I'll be there shortly!

Delfina SMILES at Abigail and STARTS to go upstairs.

DELFINA (CONT'D)

You know, you're alright. I'm not so sorry Ambrose tricked you into coming here anymore.

Abigail takes THIS IN, pours herself a SHOT and DOWNS it.

EXT. POND - LATER

Ambrose is FISHING. Abigail STORMS up.

ABIGAIL

You tricked me into coming here!

AMBROSE

Absolutely, how else would I have gotten a quality teacher to come to Prospect?

ABIGAIL

Well the trick's on you, because I'm not going to teach. I'll just do something else in the town.

AMBROSE

Great, we're in need of a dentist. But in the meantime, could you bait this hook for me? Worms are in that bucket right there.

ABIGAIL

Oh, you think I'm going to get squeamish about putting my hand in a bucket of worms?

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Well, you're mistaken. My
grandfather was an adept angler.
(sticking her hand in
bucket, disgusted)
Eww so slimy, I'm fine with it.

She takes a worm and TRIES to put it on a HOOK.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Gaah!
(dropping worm)
I'm not doing this! And I'm not
teaching. I came here to make a
difference and I can't with these
men, they don't even want to learn!

AMBROSE

But they need to. These boys need a
future, and you can give it to
them. You want Big Ed to waste his
life sitting at his mama's feet?
And imagine his potential, if we
can just figure out what's making
that boy so angry!

ABIGAIL

Well, I have a guess. I had an
Uncle Lloyd back home who was mad
all the time like that too. Until
he found something he loved.

AMBROSE

What was that?

ABIGAIL

Our neighbor, Mr. Calhoun.
(then)
Never mind.

AMBROSE

And what about Gus? Do you think
that highfalutin Elizabeth Hastings
is going to give him the time of
day, when he can't even read her a
simple love poem?

ABIGAIL

Well, she's awful so...

AMBROSE

Then there's Etu. I don't know what
kind of tales you heard in Boston,
but we did not do right by his
people.

(MORE)

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

So, I'll tell you what I tell everyone else. If you have a problem with him being here, you can take your sorry-ass to the next damn town.

ABIGAIL

I have no problem with Etu, he's lovely. Now Barnes, on the other hand, is a complete jack--

AMBROSE

He's illiterate.

ABIGAIL

What?

AMBROSE

Yeah, I didn't know it either until two weeks after I'd hired him, and he kept putting up "Wanted" posters upside down. I can't have a sheriff that can't read or write. And he's too proud to admit it so...

ABIGAIL

So you tricked him into going to school.

AMBROSE

Yep. I'd do anything to make this town work. The last place I was mayor of....turned into a ghost town.

ABIGAIL

(laughing)

That's funny.

(off his look)

Oh. I thought you were kidding. I didn't even know ghost towns were real.

AMBROSE

I did everything I could for the people of that town, except educate them. And without that, they had no purpose. They couldn't work in stores, banks, the post office. They'd just run after every gold rush rumor that came along. God knows what happened to them.

ABIGAIL

People have such sad stories here.
I wish I had my peppermints.

AMBROSE

Look, I came out west, same as most, for the adventure. But I stayed for the people. And I'm hoping you will too. These men need you.

ABIGAIL

These men.

AMBROSE

Yes. If you educate them, you give them a future.

(then)

So what do you say?

Abigail takes a BEAT.

ABIGAIL

I wanted to make a difference. Not just for myself...but for others. So yes, I will continue teaching the class.

(then)

But I have a caveat.

She turns and starts to WALK OFF.

AMBROSE

Caveat! Another fine word!
What exactly do you mean by that?
(calling after her)
Miss Lansing? Abigail?! What's your caveat?

ABIGAIL

(not turning around)

So many questions! Not annoying at all!

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NEXT DAY

We see a TABLE covered with guns, knives, whiskey bottles, etc. The men are at their seats. Barnes STANDS nearby. Abigail NOTICES something at the FRONT DOOR.

ABIGAIL

Boys, I want to introduce you to your new classmates.

They all turn and see DELFINA and WINNIE MAE in the DOORWAY.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (huge smile)
 Hello Ladies. Let's start our
 adventure.

The men GRUMBLE in DISAPPROVAL.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 (to men)
 Any more of that, and I take away
 the surprise bag.
 (gesturing to Winnie Mae)
 Now, why don't we take a minute to
 let our new students tell us a
 little about themselves.

WINNIE MAE
 Well, I'm Winnie Mae Twill. I'm
 thirty-two years old.

The men GASP and WHISPER.

WINNIE MAE (CONT'D)
 I got four kids...that lived
 anyway.
 (then cheery)
 And I make a real mean apple pie!

ABIGAIL
 God love you, Winnie Mae.

Abigail motions to Delfina.

DELFINA
 I'm Delfina. You boys all know me.
 Inside and out.

The men HOOT and CHEER.

DELFINA (CONT'D)
 Except you, Big Ed. And that
 happens to every man, don't worry
 about it.
 (to Abigail)
 Should I keep going?

ABIGAIL
 No, no. That's good.
 (big smile)
 Now class, let's learn our ABC's!

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAYS LATER

The students, now including WINNIE MAE and DELFINA, sit at their desks as Abigail LEADS them through the ABC SONG.

ETU

A,B-

Abigail POINTS to Big Ed.

BIG ED

C,D-

She points to Delfina.

DELFINA

E,F,G-

She points to Jasper.

JASPER

H,I-

She points to Winnie Mae.

WINNIE MAE

J,K-

She points to Gus.

GUS

Oh...shoot, shoot!

BARNES

L-mineno-P!

ABIGAIL

Yes! That's right...almost. Nicely done Sheriff!

BARNES

Well, I already knew it. Maybe I'll just sit down for awhile. Just to rest my legs.

ABIGAIL

Well done, students. And tomorrow...turkey hands!

Abigail LOOKS UP and smiles as she SEES AMBROSE in the doorway looking PROUDLY at her class.

END OF SHOW