

# **HAPPY ENDINGS**

**by Ronald V. Micci**

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FADE IN:

EXT. CORNWEEVIL RANCH - MIDWEST -- DAY

To Establish.

INT. LIVING ROOM

ELEANOR CORNWEEVIL, 70s, the lady of the house, is standing in front of an easel with a large cue card mounted on it. The card depicts economic trends in the form of a graph, with rising and falling lines. Her husband BERTRAND is seated nearby. She cocks her ear.

ELEANOR

Oh gracious, what is that I hear, Bertrand? Could it be, could it possibly be -- birds twittering happily in the trees. Oh, life is rich and fat with promise this day, Bertrand, so very rich and fat with promise. Our dear little farm in the Midwest is such a blessed happy little home. Rich and fat, and yet I long for the days, oh how I long for the days. . .

(raps with her stick)

Attention, please. Charts, Bertrand, they're wonderful teaching aids. Now observe -- this is our projected rate of growth for the current year, and this is our rate of growth through the year 2050...With negative growth expected in the near term, and taxes on the rise, let me zero it out for you -- we're broke.

BERTRAND

Broke?

ELEANOR

Yes, am I not making myself clear?

BERTRAND

But I thought -- well, you know --

ELEANOR

That your flimsy little railroad pension and the microscopic trickle of Social Security that we get each month would be enough to see us through? Wrong. . . Again, observe -- here we are, Bertrand, you and I, two tiny people arrayed against a giant mountain of taxes. This, is us -- and this, is the Matterhorn. And how do we surmount such a formidable obstacle, how you might very well ask indeed. Well, the answer is simple -- we don't. You see, the government has built that mountain so high that nobody gets over it, not, at least, if they do so honestly. And so, what do we do?

BERTRAND

Cheat?

ELEANOR

Oh no, Bertrand -- no, no, no. We're honest citizens, we don't cheat. Have you ever heard of something called the Laffer Curve, Bertrand? I do believe you have. Well, we're somewhere along that curve but I can assure you we are not laughing. No, I'm not laughing, Bertrand, are you? No, to be perfectly honest, we find ourselves in a tight spot, a very tight spot indeed.

(MORE)

ELEANOR (cont'd)

And yet, dear husband, I have always been a believer in happy endings. And by that I mean, what if a stranger should come to the door this very minute? What if he should pound his fist this very minute on the door?

BERTRAND

I don't know.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! at the door

ELEANOR

Aha -- there it is, as lately prophesied -- the proverbial knock at the door. Yes, what if a stranger should knock at the door, Bertrand? And indeed, it has come to pass. Should we allow our stranger to persist, allow him in, or shoo him away?

BERTRAND

I think we should answer it.

ELEANOR

Are you sure, Bertrand, are you absolutely sure?

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

BERTRAND

There it is again. Let's answer it.

ELEANOR

My, but our stranger is persistent, isn't he. Who is this stranger of ours? Do we dare let him in? Yes, to answer my own question, we most certainly do.

She moves to the door, opens it. MR. LODESTONE is standing there.

ELEANOR

Good afternoon to you, sir.  
What may I ask is your business?

LODESTONE

What may I ask is your pleasure?

ELEANOR

Already I see that you are a man with a certain distinct style and appeal. Come in, come in.

LODESTONE enters.

LODESTONE

Good afternoon, sir.

He shakes hands with BERTRAND.

LODESTONE

And now, madam, you strike me as someone in the mood for a happy ending. So mightn't we cut directly to the chase?

ELEANOR

We mightn't and we shall.

LODESTONE

Your pastures here in the glorious Midwest, madam, are resting squarely on oil. And now, if you'll just sign this contract.

He waves a contract in her face.

ELEANOR

What did I tell you, Bertrand -- a happy ending.

She takes the contract from him.

ELEANOR

But why be so quick to accept?  
Won't you sit down, Mr. -- ?

LODESTONE

Lodestone.

ELEANOR

Mr. Lodestone. Please, sit  
down. I think we could all do  
with a nice cup of coffee.  
You'll entertain Mr. Lodestone,  
won't you, Bertrand, while I  
get the coffee? But don't let  
him trick you into signing  
anything, not until we've had a  
nice little talk. . . Take a  
load off, (Mr.) Lodestone.

She goes out; LODESTONE sits next to BERTRAND.

LODESTONE

You could still own the land,  
Mr. Cornweevil. Of course you  
understand that. We would only  
be concerned with the drilling  
rights.

ELEANOR returns with coffee on a tray.

ELEANOR

Now, how did I do that so  
quickly? Ah, you underestimate  
me, Mr. Lodestone.

(beat)

Now, let me just set this down  
and you can have yourself a  
nice fresh cup of coffee.

She sets down tray.

ELEANOR

Please -- help yourself.

They sip coffee.

ELEANOR

Was Bertrand telling you about the old days, Mr. Lodestone, when he worked for the railroad? Tell him about the narrow gauge up in Butte, Bertrand, about how you came screaming down off the mountain in a blizzard, you and that old coal burner of yours. Yes, you and all that excitement. While I sat up with the gals talking around the fire, knitting quilts. Tell him about the way things used to be.

BERTRAND

Well --

ELEANOR

That's enough. What's past is past. What Mr. Lodestone has an eye to is the future, isn't that right, Mr. Lodestone? And what I'd like to know is, just how profitable might that future be?

LODESTONE

De-licious coffee, Mrs. Cornweevil, de-licious. If you'll just sign here on the dotted line, you'll find out that future can be most profitable indeed.

ELEANOR

In dollars and cents, Mr. Lodestone -- just exactly what are we talking?

LODESTONE

We know there's oil here, Mrs. Cornweevil. We get to drill, and you get the thrill.

ELEANOR

How much of a thrill might that be?

LODESTONE

You get to keep fifty percent of the profits from what comes up out of the ground. Sound like a happy ending?

ELEANOR

Very. But what would you say to 75/25, the lion's share going to little old us?

LODESTONE

I'd say you're being a little greedy, Mrs. Cornweevil, a little greedy. Not moments ago you were ready to go belly-up, admitting, if I'm not mistaken, that you were flat broke. It seems to me that in this instance, beggars can't be choosers.

ELEANOR

I wouldn't be so sure, Mr. Lodestone, I wouldn't be so sure. When push comes to shove, haven't we the inalienable right to the happy ending of our choosing?

LODESTONE

You chose the knock at the door, Mrs. Cornweevil, and with that knock comes this contract. Those are the terms. If you prefer, the knock can vanish from the door.

ELEANOR

(abruptly)

Well, there it is, Bertrand.

(MORE)



ELEANOR (cont'd)

No deal. Oh, I was so hoping for a happy ending, and indeed I had all but promised you one. And yet, I'm going to have to decline your offer, Mr. Lodestone. I hope you won't find me too greedy. I must decline your offer and bid you good day.

BERTRAND

Wait.

LODESTONE

Better think twice, Mrs. Cornweevil. The deal you do, is better than the deal you don't.

ELEANOR

Devilishly true, Mr. Lodestone, devilishly true. But I'm afraid I've made up my mind.

BERTRAND

But -- ?

LODESTONE

It's your decision, of course, Mrs. Cornweevil, I know better than to try to force your hand, albeit an offer this lucrative does not come along every day. And an advance of, say, \$50,000 in cold cash and a blank checkbook with a one million dollar line of credit might help sway your decision.

He removes wad of cash from pants pocket and hands it to her.

ELEANOR

Surely there must be a catch.

LODESTONE

No catch, Mrs. Cornweevil.  
Just sign this contract on the  
dotted line.

ELEANOR scrutinizes contract.

ELEANOR

I see the name of your outfit  
is Hades Drilling and Excavation,  
Mr. Lodestone. The word Hades  
has a nasty taint to it.

LODESTONE

Doesn't it just.

ELEANOR

Likewise, your motto on the  
letterhead -- "We drill for  
your soul."

LODESTONE

As I like to say, we drill from  
the bottom up.

ELEANOR

I am also curious about this  
small print.

LODESTONE

Mere legalese, Mrs. Cornweevil,  
the usual technical scratchings,  
and nothing to concern yourself  
about. Merely sign over the  
rights to your soul -- I mean,  
your land -- and we shall  
conclude our deal. Why delay  
your happy ending?

ELEANOR

Bertrand?

He nods emphatically

ELEANOR

No, Mr. Lodestone, I believe this is just not for us. I'm not convinced it is merely oil you're drilling for here. And so, not to seem abrupt, but I must bid you good day.

BERTRAND

Wait!

ELEANOR

Bertrand, say a sweet goodbye. Trust me in this. Good day, Mr. Lodestone.

LODESTONE

I hate for you to pass up such a lucrative deal, Mrs. Cornweevil, but I must defer to your judgment. Good day to you, and to you, Mr. Cornweevil. Should you have a change of heart, that's where to reach me.

He gives her his business card. He bows, goes out.

BERTRAND

There goes our happy ending. We blew it.

ELEANOR

You don't seriously believe what that stranger was peddling was an oil contract? He wanted something more, Bertrand. Think, Bertrand, think.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! at the door

ELEANOR

Don't, Bertrand, don't.

BERTRAND

But?

ELEANOR

Don't worry, Bertrand, we'll  
come up with the money somehow.  
We always have before.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! BERTRAND throws her a look of  
desperation

ELEANOR

Oh, all right. If it will make  
you happy, go ahead and answer  
it. I'm going back to my  
knitting.

BERTRAND goes to the door. ELEANOR can't resist  
sneaking up behind him, peeking over his shoulder

BERTRAND

Good afternoon, sir. What's  
that you say, you come to offer  
us the promise of eternal  
salvation?

(gestures)

Those two horns on the top of  
your head?

(a pause)

I must tell you, that offer  
sounds *almost* too good to be  
true.

He winks.

FADE OUT.

THE END