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Two for One: The Story of “Ma and Pa” Ferguson

SCENE 1: Dr. Paulissen interviews Nola Wood

Text on Screen: Austin, 1977.

Setting: Sitting room of Nola Wood

Camera:

Dr. May Paulissen: *(Enters the room, and while sitting down, begins first line)* You're Nola Wood?

Nola: Just call me Woody, dear.

Dr. May Paulissen: I can't thank you enough for having me today. I've had quite an interest in the Ferguson story for a long time. But there really isn't much information on them except what their daughter, Ouida Nalle, wrote in her book. And to meet you—someone who knew them personally—is an opportunity I never would have imagined.

Nola: Don't get too excited, dear. You might not like what I have to say.

Dr. Paulissen: I just want the truth. Let's get started. Remind me again, what was your role in the Ferguson administration?

Nola: I was secretary and clerk.

Dr. Paulissen: What was that like?

Nola: *(doesn't respond at first. Her eyes and voice are far away and distant.)* It was so long ago.

Dr. Paulissen: Do you remember?:

Nola: I remember their daughter, Ouida, being insufferable. It was probably better for everyone that she died of alcoholism in 1952. But alcoholism is only the beginning. *(Pause as she prepares to purge her conscience)* Lord Forgive me, for what I was party to. I fear for my very soul!

Paulissen: What do you mean?

Nola: Bribes, selling justice, voter intimidation, fraud, theft, even...murder. How could God ever forgive me for this? *(tears in her eyes)*

Paulissen: You mean the Fergusons were caught up in all of these crimes?

Nola: *(crying)* I found myself in a web of deceit and corruption as I worked for the Fergusons. It began with various financial schemes, which were really just fancy forms of theft. Then we sold influence; then we sold votes; then we sold justi

Friend: I don't know, Miriam. It's something about his eyes; his eyes always seem to give me this hint like he's running from something. Integrity should have nothing to fear; it should have nothing to hide.

Miriam: [almost dissuaded from marrying him]

SCENE 3: Jim's Proposal

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

Jim: My darling, time with you is precious, and I'd like to make the most of it.

Miriam: J

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Hosea: *(Slightly uncomfortable)* Oh, well. I suppose Pendleton had some, uh, sore feelings? He only mentioned something about some issue with a Belton Trust and Loan Company back in February of 1905.

Jim: *(With false remorse)* Pendleton and I were business partners, and we were friends. He even preformed the service at my wedding. But he didn't have the vision of a successful businessman and turned against me. That's why, as Temple State Bank grows, I'm searching for a man with vision, someone who can help me uphold high standards I've set.

Hosea: If the need should arise, I do believe we share the same vision for this bank.

Jim: Poe, sounds to me like you're barking up the right tree.

SCENE 7: Jim's plans to run for governor

Text on Screen: Temple, Texas 1913

Setting:

Camera: One shot focused on Ma's face, encompasses the doorway as well, and thus Ouida upon her appearance; opposite shot from outside door, showing Pa's face, and catching Ma's head whip around to chastise Ouida. Dorrace sits sewing or reading.

Miriam: You stayed longer than I thought during your trip to Dallas. What? Did you introduce yourself to every banker in the city?

Jim: *(Smiling)* I suppose I did. How could I pass up a grand opportunity like that?

Miriam: Don't give me that Ferguson smirk. A penny for your thoughts, dear.

Jim: Miriam, you know I have been helping some of our friends in politics for some time. Now, I'm aiming to run for Governor!

Miriam: What?

Jim: Aren't you thrilled for me?

Miriam: Well I, I suppose. You know good and well that, as your wife, I will support you in anything you choose to do. But why run for Governor of Texas?

Jim: Why run? Darling, imagine the good we could do for this state.

Miriam: ...We?

Jim: Of course 'we'. Behind every strong man is a woman. It's time a governor of Texas stuck up for the voices and interests of the men whose backs Texas was built on. Tenant farmers.

Miriam: And what have we to do with the common farmer?

Jim: Well, thanks to our 2,000-acre Bell Bosque farm that your sainted mother gave us, we are farmers. Plus, [referring to himself] Farmer Jim's been listening and talking to farmers as a banker every Saturday now for the past fifteen years. I know what they want.

Miriam: After fifteen year

Ouida: *[sighs]*

Jim: Now let me read y'all some of my speech I've been working on and tell me what you think. "My opponent, Thomas Ball, is a member of the Houston Club. Now they say Ole Tom is an ardent prohibitionist, but Mr. Ball's Club, never fails to serve dram whiskey every Sabbath. Ole Tom may enjoy his cards over soda, but his friends figure over gin. His friends say that Tom is drier than tinder, but his own town, Tomball has five saloons!"

Miriam: Forgive me, dear, for interrupting. But Jim, that isn't for you to say. Let others criticize the man before you speak shamefully in public.

Jim: Miriam, you are always so sensitive and careful with you words; you're wonderful. And what you are saying would be true if my audience was targeted toward, how should I say, educated people? Like yourself! But the farmers I'm talking to enjoy a little harmless name-calling. They enjoy a catyumpus, cause deep-down they're feeling mighty angry.

SCENE 8: Governor Jim and Miriam: dinner with Hobby and Hogg

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

Hobby: A toast for our new governor, and his amazing victory. A man of destiny, the first to address the needs of poor tenant farmers in our midst!

Jim: Why thank you, Bill, and a toast to you as well. May your term as lieutenant governor be the most successful on record.

Miriam: Mr. Hobby, I would like to make some new rules known. I acceded to Jim's request to allow alcohol to be served at this meal, but in the future, the governor's mansion will gain a reputation as a place of virtue and temperance.

Ouida: Mother, please don't forget to add that coffee, teas, and sodas will also be added to the governor's menu, along with lemonade, and sarsaparilla.

Miriam: Ouida, please!

Jim: Miriam if we don't have root beer, instead of beer, and ginger ale instead of ale, you'll never persuade people to take the high road like you do. (Turns to Hobby laughing) Bill, we'll just have to find other stomping grounds if we want something stronger.

Dorrace: O Mr. Hobby and Mr. Hogg, we should tell you as well that Mama hyc -0u-2..ma

Miriam: From the time he first courted me, I have felt a growing admiration for his courage. Jim has boldly pursued goals with the legislature that has unnerved others even to contemplate.

Reporter A: Who do you think your husband is really trying to help?

Miriam: There are children in our fair state who don't even know the months of the year. And now my husband's education bill is going to provide better schooling for our state's future.

Reporter B: There are some that say that your husband is being unfair to landlords.

Miriam: Well, I have known families living by the river bottoms in tar-smearred cloth tents to pick cotton, and now my husband is working to lower their rents. The day is coming when young children and mothers of tenant farmers are going to be able to afford a roof over their heads. And I am his biggest admirer for this.

Reporter C: One final question. As the first lady of Texas, do you think a victory for women's suffrage would

Street mansion. My wife was enthralled. It seemed to be the chance of a lifetime; but it is turning out to be something more like a trap. Please don't laugh. I don't want sympathy; and I would prefer not to receive scorn. Gentlemen, previous events have attested to your wisdom, and I now I'm sorely in need of your advice and any help you can spare.

Let me tell you what has been happening at the Governor's bank. From the start, the

Ouida: I knew it! I just knew it! I never doubted him for a moment. I knew that if the people of Texas had any sense at all, he couldn't help but be re-elected!

Miriam: Your father is the cleverest man I ever knew.

Ouida: And I'm particularly glad because some of the girls at school--especially Julia and Deborah--are such snobs.

Miriam: They're like that group of University types in Austin that are just insufferable. They hold their noses so high, I think they'd drown in a rainstorm.

Ouida: They had the nerve to say that Daddy was going to lose!

Miriam: They probably got that impudence from their parents.

Ouida: I can relate. Well, Mother, I have to go now. Carrie is having a tea party with some guests on her family's new veranda, and I was invited . . .

Miriam: Wait a minute, young lady, I thought you were coming with me this afternoon to our missionary circle.

Ouida: Oh there are no young girls that come except Heidi, who has a German accent so strong you could

SCENE 12: Jim confronts University Official with Charges

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

Jim: If the University of Texas cannot be maintained as a Democratic University, then we ought to have no university. The bats and owls can roost in it for all that I care!

Dr. Robert Vinson: Governor, I came to you today, with answers for all of the questions you have had about our spending. I have references for all of the faculty members whose ability you question. On that subject, sir, how can I simply dismiss certain administrators or faculty members without a given reason?

Jim: Mr. Vinson, I have told you in a previous letter,

DR. Vinson: Excuse me sir. It's *Doctor* Vinson.

Jim: (*acknowledges the interruption but not the title*) ...a previous letter which I am sure you have on file

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William Hobby: Gentlemen you have proven to me the guilt of the governor on several counts.

William Hogg: As a target, the governor is a bull's-eye as big as the moon. He had a mystery loan for \$156,500, and he won't reveal the source. He has these strange, non-itemized dealings with the Achilles Grocery Store. He has lots of verbal agreements and all sorts of hedging between what is for state-sanctioned purposes and what is for his family. He mortgages real estate, and then asks that the mortgage not be recorded so he can go out and mortgage the same real estate for \$70,000 through another line. There is no limit to the number of his bank notes that raise major questions about graft, questionable consulting deals, overdue payments, neglect, and financial integrity.

Dr. Robert Vinson: For uncovering this whole unseemly story, Mr. Hogg, our university cannot thank you enough. Your sainted father was our state's best governor, and now you have rescued the University of Texas. Thank you for taking the initiative to set up a law office in Austin for the sole purpose of fighting Jim Ferguson—the worst philistine our state has ever produced.

William Hobby: Of course one problem is that heretofore, Ferguson has turned everything to his advantage.

Robert Vinson: We see that as he deals with us. He makes so many mad accusations, he so consistently vetoes every appropriation that we go after all of them, and get lost. We have to hammer the governor on at least one point.

William Hobby: Yes, the very magnitude of his bad bank notes raises the question of how it was at all possible.

Dr. Robert Vinson: At every turn, we hammer him to pieces, and yet, there, he returns. Why? I fear it is because of our success on other fronts. We have prohibition, we have the university we wanted—and so many uneducated libertines have become victims.

Hobby: This could simply be the price of change . . .

Dr. Vinson: We go about tarring and feathering Ferguson, making him the biggest victim of all, and he is able to come back and excite the prejudices of all those who feel victimized. It's incredible!

Hogg: Incredibly infuriating. You're saying that in all my accusations, all I am doing is giving "poor farmer Jim" more sympathy?

Dr. Vinson: O No, Mr. Hogg, not at all. I think you are making progress. I simply think Mr. Hobby is right, and that we should continue to be wary. Remember, he won the election of 1916 with the University and all its friends unanimously against him.

William Hobby: Somehow, in some strange way, Ferguson has become immune to criticism.

William Hogg: A man may be “immune” to criticism, (*heated*) but no one is immune to justice! He must be removed from office. U

wouldn't have enough to saddle a Junebug. W

three purposes: it will tell our story, it will thrill our people without being seen as pro-German or treasonous, and it will identify all who are on our side.

So, Mr. Brewer, what will be your response?

Until we meet again,

Jim Ferguson

SCENE 17: Jim giving speeches to gain support

elected with me in 1914, on my coat-tails, and by my approval, and when trouble came around, he turned traitor to me, seized the office, and helped drive me out.

(break, camera hones back on Jim)

Jim: Where in these times is your right to share a festive meal with your friends? Gone! With poll taxes keeping our farmers from votin', where is your right to vote? Gone! With the government running the economy in our recent war, what happened to our business freedom? Gone! What has happened to our Texas leaders in these days when we have Klandidates who have not the pride of a dirty sow, or the decency of a skunk? Gone!

SCENE 18: Ouida and Miriam discuss Political Trajectory and Marriage 1919-23

Text on Screen:

Setting: Temple, October 1923

Camera:

Miriam: So George doesn't like you shopping so much, huh?

Ouida: Unlike some husbands, he manages his finances well. (*Changing the subject*) I see your move to Dallas hasn't worked out like were hoping.

Miriam: I thought your Daddy was going to back to practicing law, but it fell through, and now he's banging on barn doors, ready to run for governor again.

Ouida: Even if he won, he probably wouldn't be seated because of his impeachment. Why does your husband insist on beating a dead horse?

Miriam: Well let me just show you something. (Miriam comes back with tan book in which she is enthralled.) Here (lays it out before Ouida).

Ouida: What's this?

Miriam: This is power, Ouida. This is your daddy's black book.

Ouida: It's tan.

Miriam: Your Daddy calls it his black book so it's a black book. You ever hear me say, 'its what's on the inside that counts'?

Ouida: More often than I'd care to recount.

Miriam: It means he keeps tabs on everyone at all times. It shows all his supporters, everyone who subscribes to the *Ferguson Forum* newspaper, all who can get out the vote, his Vest Pocket vote, all to whom he has given favors . . .

Ouida: What do you mean by his "vest pocket vote?"

Miriam: That's the vote he got in Texas when he ran for United States President. Those are the 60 thousand voters in our state who will support your Daddy through thick and thin.

Ouida: Mother, aren't you concerned about the Ku Klux Klan?

Miriam: Well . . .

Ouida: You shouldn't go out of your way to bait a bear.

Miriam: I'm not as worried as most women would be. Your father has a lot of friends who would make life very miserable for the Kluxer who tried to harm us. Between the two of us, your Daddy and I have a lot of sway in this state.

SCENE 19: Jim goes to Church; but so he can ask Miriam to run.

Text on Screen:

Setting: They begin sitting at a table.

Camera:

Jim: Coffee and cake, and the cooing of a morning dove. Ah . . . Miriam, of all the ladies of Texas you are the most practical and most beautiful.

Miriam: Thank you, Jim. It's good to see you up so early on a Sunday morning.

Jim: Miriam, I would like to go to church with you today!

Miriam: Can I believe my ears? My husband is going to join Dorrace and me on the Lord's Day. My prayers have been answered! Jim this is going to be wonderful.

Later, in the parlor at their home.

Dorrace: Daddy, I'm so thankful you came to church with us today.

Jim: Darling, sometimes the sun does shine.

(Dorrace exits)

Miriam: I hope you enjoyed the reverend Williamson's preaching today.

Jim: Miriam, I've been doing a lot of thinking lately.

Miriam: Has the Lord been pressing on your spirit?

that you and I, all along, have been taking money out of the pockets of the good people of Texas. You have to show them that the Fergusons are *for* Texas, not against it! Miriam, you *must* clear our name.

[camera pans backward to show Ouida eavesdropping]

SCENE 20: “Ma” is coined/named in New York Journal

Text on Screen: June 1924

Setting: Breakfast Table

Camera:

Jim: The campaign is going well, don't you think?

Jim: (*Elated*) Yes I can! Oh this is wonderful! This will be one of the greatest political slogans in history. “Ma” Ferguson’. I

Camera:

Woman: There is no one else to turn, Madame Governor. Please ma'am, he's my brother. I know he's done wrong, but he's all I've got.

Miriam: You understand this is a serious offence. Not only did he rob a bank, but people died as a result.

Woman: I know, ma'am, but doesn't the good Lord offer mercy? *(After a pause, she breaks down into hysteria)* Please, I'll pay anything.

Miriam: That won't be necessary, if you'll go see my secretary outside, he'll draw up the paperwork.

[Woman thanks Miriam profusely. Exits the room. Jim is waiting outside the door.]

Jim: Afternoon, ma'am.

Woman: Mr. Ferguson, how can I thank you enough for the kindness you have shown my brother and me?

Jim: Well ma'am, there's a *price to pay* for second chances.

SCENE 21: Jim Gets Miriam to Stay Home from Church

Text on Screen:

Setting: Miriam and Jim in bed

Camera:

[Jim is sitting up in bed, reading the newspaper.]

Miriam: [wakes up, realizes the lateness of the hour] Jim, what time is it? Why didn't you wake me?

Jim: You needed your sleep.

Miriam: I'll be the judge of that! Oh, I should be at church by now.

Jim: [reaches to her] I was hoping you would stay home with me.

Miriam: Jim, I can't do that.

Jim: Sure you can! You need the rest. And I need some quality time with my dear wife.

Miriam: No. No, I can't do this. I need to be at the church.

Jim: Why do you want to hear those hypocritical ministers anyway? You know they're just against us. Take a load off. Rest. Stay with me.

Miriam: [wilts back into bed] Maybe you're right.

SCENE 24: Miriam Dreams

Text on Screen

Setting

Camera

Miriam: (in bed turning)

[The dream: Miriam is walking on a trail through a forest at night. At first, she is calm and peaceful, but the trail slowly becomes smothered in leaves. Miriam doesn't notice until she is completely lost. She hears frightening noises.]

Miriam: (*Panicking*) Where's the path? Where is it?

[As a thunderstorm begins to form, she sees Jim from behind, and calls out to him. Without turning to her, he only wonders further into the darkness, and Miriam, with nowhere else to go, follows him. A lightning crash ends the dream.]

Miriam (in bed waking up): Oh God help me! (*Hyperventilating*) Just a dream, just a dream...

SCENE 25: Ma and Pa have heartfelt Conversation about bribes

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

Miriam: Jim, why have you been accepting bribes?

Jim: Miriam, you know how poor we were after I was impeached, and how our enemies pulled our farm right out from under us. The rich in our state are going to crush the ordinary people unless remarkable measures are taken. No one else will act, so we must. We live in a remarkable time.

Miriam: I can't accept this, Jim. You're telling me all these pardons, or at least good bit of them, have involved money?

Jim: Darling, only in cases where I knew the family involved deserved a second chance. You believe in mercy, don't you?

Miriam: Well of course—the Good Lord calls us to be merciful as He is merciful! But you just took their money like that?

Jim: Yes

Setting:

alone! (crowd laughs) But in all seriousness, ladies, today I must address a largely pressing matter-Fergusonism. It has once again reared its ugly head. As a writer, editor and

profit, as he has done with all things. This 'Ferguson machine' must not just be stopped, it must be torn apart price by piece until nothing is left but rubble. Let us not have our children as the

(Read by Reporters A, B, and C)

Camera:

Jim: Where would we be, if our friends hadn't gifted us with this (new) (Austin) home?

Miriam: We do have good friends. I just wish we hadn't accumulated so many powerful enemies.

Jim: Well, Mrs. Ferguson, do I get to call it my home, or do I get to call it the Ferguson home?

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Dan Moody: Though I had hoped to run for a third term, my wife and I have decided that it is necessary for us to repair our personal estate. Working full time for the people of Texas should not be a lucrative proposition. (applause) I am happy to report that we have cut the expenditures for the making of highway miles in Texas in half. We have halted the liberal convict pardon policy of the preceding administration. And we have installed a state auditor to monitor future government contracts. It is our view, that the Democratic party of Texas should maintain these reforms, enact a stronger civil service law, and serve the people of Texas with devotion during this disastrous crash of the national economy (applause). Finally, let me say a word about those in our party, still concerned about vindicating a certain disgraced politician. We could no more vindicate Benedict Arnold by a majority vote than exonerate those who have consistently stolen from the people of Texas.

Hobby: We will now hear from the former governor, Jim Ferguson.

Jim: I would just like to say that Governor Moody is a coward for not running for a third term. (camera shot on Moody shaking his head) Perhaps you have heard of another Moody running for office this time, the man they call Soapy Moody, driving around Austin in a laundry wagon. Soapy has said that there are plenty of good opportunities to see the governor lying—just watch him move his lips! You know Soapy’s antics show how the people are disgusted with politics. They are losing their jobs, and their voice in the government. I think Soapy has more brains and honesty than the governor!

SCENE 34: Houston Women’s Circle: Fear of the Depression and the Fergusons

Text on Screen:

Camera:

Oveta Culp Hobby: Annie Blanton! I am so glad you could drop by. What an honor to have the first woman elected to a state office in Texas here, visiting from the state capital.

Minnie Cunningham: It is always pleasant to get together with you. You are a wonderful

Annie: (continuing) We have faced numerous trials, with our state overrun with so many male and now female ya-hoos, but we shall overcome. (Segueing new subject) Oveta, I did receive a lot of support from a cultured gentleman I hear you have some acquaintanceship with, former Governor William Hobby of the Houston Post!

Oveta: (shows diamond ring) Yes we both have journalism in our veins. You know William thinks that it might take the state's first female leader to rid us of our first female governor.

Annie Blanton: Ha. Thanks. (squashing idea---she is now a professor and is comfortable) How dreadful it is that Ma Ferguson is jumping to the head of the line again.

Minnie Cunningham: Ross Sterling beat Miriam in the last election; where does she get the audacity to run against him again? I want to believe that the majority of the state is over their Ferguson antics, but with this depression that has hit the states, any leader

small, independent producers of oil. He doesn't care about the low price of cotton, boll weevils eating out your crop! He doesn't care about the children who lack shoes! He doesn't care!

SCENE 36: Will and Oveta Culp Hobby discuss Miriam's win

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

William: Well, Oveta, I am afraid our Texas voters of 1932 were about as rational as the mob that stormed the Bastille in 1789!

Reporter B: But how can you explain the fact that you won 95 percent of the vote there?

Dorrace: I'm sorry but you can't come in.

Text on Screen:

Setting:

Camera:

Ouida: *(Stands and places book in Miriam's hand) Mama, (Simultaneously touching the edge of Miriam's hand and the book.) I've cleared our name.*