

VERVE

**HARNESS**

by

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For the Leader  
A psalm of David

Some trust in chariots, some in horses  
But we in the name of the Lord.  
They collapse and fall, but we stand strong and firm.  
Oh Lord, grant victory!  
Answer when we call you.

**DARKNESS.**

The sound of BREATHING. Heavy. In and out.

In and out.

**EXT. UNKNOWN PLACE - DAY**

We're tight on a **BLACK HORSE**.

A nostril gaping wide, SUCKING in and out. Mouth QUIVERING, HUFFING around a metal bit.

Leather straps tightly wound on its snout.

Golden eyes still. Ears taut, forward.

There is no sound other than this horse's BREATH.

In and out. Moist and alive.

Then --

A GUN SHOT.

And now we realize this is --

**EXT. FIELD - DAY**

A horse race.

Two horses. One black, one roan.

A straightaway shorn into a field that is now a sea of mud.

It is pouring rain.

The horses explode forward into this grass river.

There are no spectators. Just these two beasts running head to head, trying not to drown --

In the distance, there is a **MAN** with the GUN that started this race.

They are charging toward him.

Their hooves slop into the muck -- every inch is a fight --

The earth is trying to suck them down.

Above, the heavens flog their flesh with razor rain.

But they don't want to stop. This is their purpose.

They want to run.

The **JOCKEYS** on their backs are SPLATTERED with mud --

Both are struggling to hold on. Hands grasping the wet reins, boots slipping in the stirrups.

They are close to one another. Close enough that their knees knock against each other.

But these horses are the ones in charge.

Unaware of their riders. Unaware of the danger.

Until --

The black horse stumbles.

Mired for just a moment, stuck for a split second, but that's all it takes --

The horse COLLAPSES. The jockey keeps going --

Thrown through the air --

Face slammed into the grass slush. A sickening, moist CRACK.

The roan horse will win now.

The black horse is already back on its feet, but --

The race is over.

It's peaceful, lying alone in the field, rain falling from a bruised sky.

The Man with the Gun trods toward us, bigger with every step.

Until he's right there, looking down at us.

Blood and mud drip down our face. But it is clear now, we are not a real jockey. We are a ten year old GIRL.

This is **RUTH**.

YOUNG RUTH

Daddy --

The Man with the Gun is our **DAD**.

DAD

Get up.

The other jockey runs and joins them. We see this "jockey" is also a LITTLE GIRL. A couple years older. Ruth's sister.

This is **DIANA**.

Diana tries to go to Ruth, but their dad holds her back.

DAD  
Your sister's fine.

Ruth looks up at him.

YOUNG RUTH  
My arm hurts. I --

DAD  
You stand on your legs.

She tries to find words to protest but --

BLOOD gurgles from her tiny mouth.

**TITLE:**

**HARNESS**

**INT. BACKSTRETCH DORMS - RUTH'S ROOM - PRESENT DAY**

Bare feet step on a scale.

A YOUNG WOMAN, wearing only cotton underwear. Small, compact.

This is **RUTH**. All grown up.

She looks down at her weight: 116.

Her face betrays no emotion.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth finishes getting dressed.

She's on the edge of a twin bed. Her apartment is one room:

Hot plate. Sheets on the windows. Few personal effects.

She ZIPS on RIDING BOOTS.

**EXT. BACKSTRETCH DORMS - PRE-DAWN**

The end of night crawls over the concrete block housing.

This is the BACKSTRETCH DORMS.

A few notches above a work camp -- it's 1986, but there's trash here from when Reagan was still an actor.

Toilet paper festoons. Shattered glass. Chicken bones.

Ruth steps outside and joins a procession of HORSE TRACK WORKERS -- **EXERCISE RIDERS, GROOMS, STABLE HANDS, HOTWALKERS.**

Riding boots. Cowboy boots. Work boots.

All men, except her. All making their way, from these far outskirts to --

#### **EXT. HORSE TRACK**

The TRACK. This is a middling racing venue in Southern Ohio.

Just over the border from elite horse country, only a hundred miles from the home of the Kentucky Derby, but a world away. It grasps at fancy, but misses the mark.

Buried in pre-dawn darkness, right now it's just a dusty black hole.

Dirt empty and waiting, the WORKERS inch around the edges like ants, headed to --

#### **INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

The BACKSTRETCH. Barns attached to the horse track.

A middle-aged man in pleated chinos and a half-zip sweater sips from a Thermos as he walks. Confident. Casual.

This is **STEVEN.**

STEVEN

We've got three races today --

He's a thoroughbred trainer. His **EXERCISE RIDERS** trail behind him as he pontificates. Ruth is one of these Riders.

STEVEN

Same mounts you been working out all week. Marco, Only the Lonely. Timmy, Mr. Mulligan's March. Ruth, War on Drugs. Keep it light, just loosen 'em up.

He doesn't look back and never stops walking.

STEVEN

Sun's up in 30. Track's already dry  
and fast. It's a beautiful day for  
making money.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - STALL**

A BLOOD BAY HORSE. Red-brown hide. Tall. Muscular.

A formidable, majestic animal. This is **WAR ON DRUGS**.

Ruth enters the STALL. The horse shuffles toward her, but she  
doesn't greet him. This is a business arrangement.

She lays on the saddle -- TIGHTENS the straps.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - ON TRACK - DAWN**

Indigo dawn.

Track dotted with HORSES on their morning work-out.

Ruth rides War on Drugs. The horse pulls at the reins,  
tossing his head. She struggles with him.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - SIDELINE**

Ruth jumps off the horse and hands him to a GROOM, **CARL**.

Steven's on the other side of the fence chatting with an  
affluent, attractive woman. This is **MALLORY**.

Ruth approaches and interrupts.

RUTH

Something's up --

Her tone is serious.

RUTH

He's tense.

STEVEN

He's excited for the race --

RUTH

He couldn't find his stride.

Steven glances at Mallory, annoyed by Ruth's disrespect.

STEVEN

Ruth. He's ready. Thank you for the work-out.

Before Ruth can say anything else --

STEVEN

New mucker didn't show today. Go help Carl --

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - STALL**

Ruth shovels shit. Her brow is dirty, sweaty.

She moves mechanically, head down, just doing the job.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - JOCKEY ROOM**

Racing silks, breeches hang from the lockers. But mostly --

**JOCKEYS** walk around naked. No inkling of modesty to be found.

Ruth enters. She's used to it. She washes her face and ignores them.

Nobody ignores her. Everyone has a look or something to say.

JOCKEYS

Oh, Work-out Girl! / You need a work-out? / I got something for you to work out --

Ruth pours coffee. Sinks to the floor with her styrofoam cup.

JOCKEYS

What are you doing down there on the hard floor? / She likes hard things, don't you, Ruthie?

A pair of HAIRY LEGS sidles close.

HAIRY LEGS JOCK

Perfect height, you ask me.

His PENIS is right in her face.

HAIRY LEGS JOCK

Come on, gimme a good luck suck.

The other jocks LAUGH --

JOCKEYS  
Suck it, Ruthie! / Suck it!

It becomes a CHANT.

JOCKEYS  
Good luck suck! Good luck suck!

The dick is very close to her mouth. But Ruth doesn't move.  
Doesn't say anything.

It becomes uncomfortable. The CHANT withers and dies ...  
Finally, Hairy Legs backs away.

HAIRY LEGS JOCK  
Fuck, Ruth. Jesus.

There are MURMURS of *dyke* ... *clam-eater* ...

But one JOCK confronts her. His tone is different. Full of real disdain. This is **DANIEL**.

DANIEL  
This room is for jocks.

He pulls on his GREEN AND WHITE RACING SILK. Stares at her.

DANIEL  
You racing today? Who you riding?

Ruth doesn't move. Stares back.

DANIEL  
Go back to the fucking barn.

After a long moment, Ruth relents. As she leaves, Daniel lifts his GOLD CHAIN from his silk and --

#### **EXT. HORSE TRACK - STARTING GATE**

Daniel KISSES his CRUCIFIX. He's on top of War on Drugs, inside the rusty starting gate.

The sky is blue and cloudless. The sun is shining.

A BELL RINGS --

Eight HORSES explode from the gates.

And far from us, we hear --

*TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*And away they go!*

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - ON TRACK - RACING**

Hooves breaking. Eating the dirt --

We're with War on Drugs. Right behind his head as he charges forward. Wind whips around him.

Faster -- like he's starving.

Faster -- like he's being chased.

Faster.

We're right in the middle of the pack -- horses in front of us and next to us. Dirt swirling. Sweat. We're packed in, rotting sardines when --

CRACK.

Somewhere, the heavens split. Thunder. And --

War on Drugs BOLTS -- THROWING Daniel -- CRASHING into the **LEAD HORSE** and:

Carnage.

A catastrophic chain reaction.

Horses collide -- JOCKEYS trampled. Bones splintered. Blood --

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTAND**

The **CROWD** erupts. Ruth watches in disbelief.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - FINISH LINE**

The Jockeys are tangled under their hooves but somehow --

The horses push forward. Still running. Still racing.

LIGHTNING spiderwebs the sunny sky. A light rain falls.

The horses cross the FINISH LINE.

All alone. No riders.

A bizarre, beautiful sight.

Wild. Almost free.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTAND**

The Crowd churns -- some pushing to glimpse the gore, some rushing to the betting windows --

Ruth's still seated -- taking in the mess. Then ...

A smile creeps on her face.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTAND - TRACKING**

Chaos near the BETTING WINDOWS. Discarded tickets underfoot, like dirty peeling skin.

It's already hard to push through the crowd, then --

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Ladies and Gentleman, we have a  
 ruling. In the Number 7 dirt race,  
 there will be no official winner.*

Everything boils over. People CURSE and YELL --

Ruth cuts through the crush with increasing speed.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE - TRACKING**

The VICTORY BLANKET OF FLOWERS hangs, waiting for a celebration that isn't coming.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*There is no official winner in the  
 Number 7 dirt race.*

Ruth stomps on stray orange mums.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH - TRACKING**

80s-era ambulances. A mess of bloodied JOCKEYS. Including --

Daniel. Nose bloody. Silk soaked in mud. His arm hangs at a grotesque, unnatural angle. He looks like mangled shit.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*With no jockeys crossing the finish  
 line --*

Ruth catches Daniel's bruised eye, but doesn't stop --

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

BANG -- Ruth opens the door to Steven's office.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
*A truly unprecedeted end to this  
race day.*

It's empty -- but there's a CORK lying on the desk.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BEHIND THE BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Steven drinks directly from a bottle of Champagne, numbing the loss. He sees Ruth approaching and knows what's coming.

STEVEN  
Just give me a fucking break, Ruth.

RUTH  
I didn't say anything.

STEVEN  
Goddamn sun shower.

RUTH  
Devil beating his wife --

STEVEN  
Goddamn horse felt it, didn't he?

RUTH  
Yes.

STEVEN  
Left two thousand goddamn dollars  
on the table.

He takes another swig, then admits --

STEVEN  
I should have listened to you.

Ruth just looks at him -- doesn't give anything.

STEVEN  
What, you want it in writing?

RUTH  
No, I want the third Saturday in  
July.

Now he understands. He puts down the bottle.

STEVEN  
The Derby.

RUTH  
Daniel's destroyed. He's out six months, minimum. You need a jock. And I know that horse.

She's right, even though it annoys him.

RUTH  
I'm the right man for the job and you know it.

He shakes his head. He cannot believe this.

STEVEN  
Luck be a goddamn lady.

RUTH  
Is that a yes?

He looks up at her.

STEVEN  
Finish up with Carl before you leave --

That's a yes. Ruth nods, holding back her happiness.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - WASH STALL**

The groom, Carl, scrubs down War on the Drugs.

The horse is wet and naked -- no tack. Bulging veins. A wildness still cracks through his body.

CARL  
The gods ordained this, Ruthie.

Ruth unbraids the horse's mane. Focused.

RUTH  
It was just a fluke storm.

CARL  
Gods or weather -- this is your chance. You gotta celebrate.

RUTH  
Think I'll wait until after the Derby --

CARL  
If I know one thing, I know this --  
Take all the victories.

**EXT. STRIP MALL - EVENING**

Neon. One sign reads: American Chinese Food.

**INT. STRIP MALL - CHINESE TAKE-OUT**

A buffet style, Chinese take-out restaurant. The **COUNTER SERVER** is Chinese and greets Ruth with familiarity.

CHINESE COUNTER SERVER  
Usual? Hot and sour, side broccoli?

Ruth looks up at the menu -- stares at the description of the *CELEBRATION FEAST*.

**EXT. BACKSTRETCH DORMS - EVENING**

Violet evening creeps over the concrete block.

**STRAY DOGS** SNARL after a lone **PYGMY GOAT**. A group of **OLD GROOMS** play horseshoes. Nearby, **TEENAGE HOTWALKERS** drink beer and grab their crotch as Ruth walks by.

Ruth's carrying a plastic take-out bag. She ignores them.

**INT. BACKSTRETCH DORMS - RUTH'S ROOM - EVENING**

Classic red and white Chinese take-out. Ruth opens and admires: Egg rolls. Kung Pao Chicken. Chop Suey.

A celebration feast.

**CUT TO:**

Meager portions on a paper plate. Ruth eats slowly.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth throws out the Chinese. She has barely eaten.

Then, realizing -- she reaches into the trash and rescues a noodle-covered **FORTUNE COOKIE**.

She cracks the cookie and stuffs it in her mouth.

As she CHEWS, she glances at a POSTCARD on the fridge from the Santa Anita Racetrack:

*Bet on a Pony in Sunny California-y!*

She doesn't swallow -- she reads the fortune then SPITS the chewed cookie back in the trash.

The fortune goes into a LARGE JAR with other fortunes.

Now we read it: *The harder you work, the luckier you get.*

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - ON TRACK - NEXT MORNING**

The morning sun droops over the track like a fat, orange egg.

Ruth rides War on Drugs. Crisp canter.

She sees Steven in the GRANDSTAND, watching and TIMING her.

Ruth leans forward. The horse goes faster -- gaining on the other exercising horses -- galloping now --

She CRACKS the crop against the horse's haunch and they accelerate past all the other horses with no effort at all.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - SIDELINE**

Post work-out. Ruth is sweaty and dirty. She hands War on Drugs off to Carl.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTANDS**

Ruth finds Steven, still in the stands.

RUTH

Felt good today. How fast were we?

She sits next to him.

STEVEN

Right 'round a buck fifty. Quick.  
Very quick.

RUTH

Stride was perfect except for a little bump around the the first turn, but we have time --

Steven interrupts.

STEVEN  
It's not going to be you.

Ruth tenses.

STEVEN  
The Derby. We're gonna go a  
different direction.

RUTH  
A different direction?

STEVEN  
Ruth. You're too inexperienced.  
That horse costs more than you --

RUTH  
I know. I know everything about  
that horse. I've been working him  
for six months now.

STEVEN  
I'm sorry.

RUTH  
We're fast together. Faster than  
Daniel. Daniel didn't know how to  
ride him --

STEVEN  
If it were up to me --

RUTH  
You broke that horse. You trained  
him. Who else is it up to?

STEVEN  
Mallory --

RUTH  
Frank's wife?

STEVEN  
Yes. She's getting the horses in  
the divorce.

RUTH  
I don't understand what their  
marriage has to do with me, the  
best jockey for this horse, racing  
this horse, in the Derby.

STEVEN

Mallory owns "this" horse, Ruth.  
It's not just about speed. She  
thinks he needs a different energy.

RUTH

I'll talk to her myself.

STEVEN

I don't think you should do that.

Ruth doesn't care. She's already walking away.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - THE ODDS CLUB**

The elite members-only club at the track. Mahogany and brass. Burgundy and forest green.

But the leather club chairs are worn. The paint's peeling. Everything is just an imitation of wealth.

Since it's morning, the club is mostly empty, but in a back booth, swathed in cigarette smoke --

Mallory. Hair red-gold. Skin pristine. Emerald earrings.

Her steak bleeds into runny yolks. She smiles at the **MEN** across the table from her and sloshes her Tom Collins.

RUTH (O.C.)

Mrs. Trivisano.

Ruth's still in her dusty work-out wear. Face dirty. Hair messy under a sweaty bandana. Completely out of place.

RUTH

I'd like to talk to you about *War  
on Drugs*.

Somehow, even though she's eating, Mallory's lipstick is still perfect. She apologizes to the Men.

MALLORY

One of our exercise riders --

RUTH

I'm a jockey. And I'm the best choice to ride for you in the Derby.

MALLORY

I'm sorry, honey, what was your name again?

Mallory is only a few years older than Ruth. There is only condescension here, no endearment.

RUTH  
Ruth.

Mallory ignores Ruth and continues talking to the Men.

MALLORY  
When's the last time you gentlemen rode? I still ride every week, since I was three years old. Named my first pony, Sugar, like every other little girl.

She LAUGHS. The Men LAUGH. Ruth doesn't.

MALLORY  
Smart horse. Found the food. Ate until his insides burst.

RUTH  
They die easily --

This draws Mallory back to Ruth.

RUTH  
Horses.

MALLORY  
I know. I've owned thirty-one. Half of those, before I even met Frank. Four hundred and sixty-two thousand in purses.

RUTH  
I can get you five.

Mallory drags more meat through bloody yolk. Shakes her head.

MALLORY  
Horses can smell us. All that extra iron from our monthly makes them crazy. Unpredictable.

One of the Men at the table raises his glass to that --

MAN  
Them and me both --

Mallory and the Men CHUCKLE. Ruth stays focused.

RUTH  
Let me race.

MALLORY

Oh honey. If you want to be on top,  
don't get on your hands and knees.

Ruth wasn't begging, but now she's humiliated.

Mallory goes back to ignoring her. The conversation's over.  
She lifts her glass to the Waiter --

MALLORY

Can I get another Tom Collins?

**INT. HORSE TRACK - THE ODDS CLUB BATHROOM**

Ruth stares at her reflection in the faux-gilded mirror.

Pissed. At herself. Mallory. She SPLASHES water on her face --

**INT. HORSE TRACK - THE ODDS CLUB**

A fresh Tom Collins. Maraschino cherry bobbing. But as Mallory reaches for the glass -- PLOP.

A bloody tampon. Right in her glass.

Ruth. She doesn't say anything. Just a look.

She can hear Mallory's outrage, the horror and disgust, as she turns and leaves.

The drink blooms RED.

**EXT. DOANE ESTATE - DAY**

A RED BALLOON bobs, revealing a BANNER: *Happy 13th, Amy!*

Bunting. Pink lemonade. Tiered cake. A birthday party set amidst verdant pastures and grand oaks. **PARENTS** in Polo, sipping ice tea and peach schnapps.

Nearby there's a gaggle of **GIRLS**, all on horseback, in a circle around --

A MAN. Mid-30s. Rugged, but not a cowboy. He looks like he's fighting to not fall into an existential abyss.

This is **HECTOR**.

HECTOR

There are five aids. Your hands,  
legs, seat, voice, and weight.

He's giving a riding lesson to the girls.

HECTOR  
It's all about communicating with  
with your body.

The birthday girl, **AMY**, wears a tiara. Not plastic.

AMY  
Like Erica's weight tells the horse  
he has to work extra hard.

Everyone GIGGLES at a **PLUMP GIRL**. Hector ignores this.

HECTOR  
You have to tell the horse what you  
want. Sometimes, this means doing  
two different things at once.  
Like, you pull your right rein to  
the left at the same time you  
squeeze your left leg --

A **SMART-ASS GIRL** interrupts --

SMART-ASS GIRL  
Like patting your head and rubbing  
your stomach.

HECTOR  
A little like that, yes.

He tries to focus on the lesson, but --

AMY  
Do it.

HECTOR  
Let's all just take the reins --

AMY  
It's my birthday.

She's a spoiled brat. And completely in charge.

A **MAN** in madras has wandered over. He's popping pistachios  
into his mouth, shells falling on the grass.

This is Amy's father, **JACK** (50s).

Jack shrugs at Hector with an entitled, matter of fact --

JACK  
Birthday girl speaks.

AMY  
Do it. Do it --

The other girls join in, CHANTING.

GIRLS  
Do it! Do it! Do it!

Hector does it. Patting his head. Rubbing his stomach.

Jack grins at him. The other parents are watching, too.

Hector looks like an idiot. He wants to die.

**CUT TO LATER:**

A **SERVANT** picks the pistachio shells from the grass. Nearby, other **SERVANTS** clean up the mess of the party.

**EXT. DOANE ESTATE - STABLES**

Hector leads one of the horses back to the stable.

A WOMAN pursues him. Denim button-down. Cartier watch. Early 50s. We saw her with the other parents earlier. This is Amy's mom. This is **VICKI**.

VICKI  
Hector!

She catches up to him. She's carrying a giant piece of CAKE.

VICKI  
I wanted to thank you again -- I  
know Amy's a handful. Jack's just a  
man used to getting want he wants  
and the apple didn't fall far --

HECTOR  
It's no problem.

VICKI  
You really helped make today  
special. Anything you need from me,  
just ask.

She touches his arm. Hector tries to ignore it, but it's unambiguously intimate.

VICKI  
We'll see you for her regular  
lesson next week?

HECTOR  
Monday, bright and early.

She starts to walk away then --

VICKI  
Oh! I almost forgot.

She remembers the cake. But instead of giving it to Hector --  
She lifts it to the horse.

The horse DEVOURS it, giant tongue LICKING frosting.

**EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DRIVING**

Hector drives his rusty Chevy truck. The same road every day.  
A band of HORSES runs in a sea of green.  
Bluegrass country. Hills like waves.  
He wishes he could drown in them.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE**

Hector drives up an overgrown gravel driveway, leading to a weathered FARMHOUSE. On the porch:

Ruth. She's surrounded by a paunch of duffel bags, a box, her JAR OF FORTUNES.

Hector gets out of the truck.

RUTH  
Spare key used to be under the mat.

HECTOR  
What are you doing here?

Tentative. Caught off guard. Maybe on the edge of combative.

RUTH  
I need a place to stay. Not long.

HECTOR  
Thought you were at the dorms.

RUTH  
"Must be employed at the track."

Now he understands. But he is not happy about it.

He unlocks the door for her, then heads to the BARN, leaving Ruth alone with her bags.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS - TRACKING**

Ruth steps inside. The house is frozen pre-war. Sparse.

There are ghosts of her past everywhere -- photos from her childhood -- Ruth and her sister, Diana. Their dad.

In the KITCHEN she puts her FORTUNE JAR down next to a line of CHERRY COKE CANS and empty bottles of JACK DANIELS.

She stops at the bottom of the STAIRCASE.

Contemplating ... Hesitating.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - UPSTAIRS - TRACKING**

On the wall at the top of the stairs there's a wedding photo: Hector and Diana. Hector is Ruth's brother-in-law.

Ruth walks down the HALL -- passes the MAIN BEDROOM with its four poster bed, swathed in a tightly-tucked quilt.

She goes into the next room:

Yellow walls. Ribbons. Trophies. A shrine to youthful glory.

This is Ruth's childhood BEDROOM.

She drops her bags, then moves to the ROOM ACROSS THE HALL.

The door is cracked open. Through the sliver we see:

Pink walls. More ribbons. More horse paraphernalia.

But there is something else inside, too.

We can hear a MECHANICAL HUMMING.

Ruth pushes open the door, tentative ...

There's a twin bed like the one in her room, but this one is at a strange angle, positioned to see out the window.

Because in this bed, there's a person. A WOMAN. A few years older than Ruth.

A tube in her throat. A tube in her nose. A tube in her arm. Ruth's sister, grown up. She is now a quadriplegic.

This is **DIANA**.

RUTH  
Hi.

Diana looks back at Ruth and GURGLES.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Cherry Coke BUBBLES into a glass of Jack Daniels. Hector's pouring. He sits across from Ruth.

Diana's at the head of the table. She's in a WHEELCHAIR with a built-in NECK BRACE. Her skin is blotchy. A trach tube is taped to her throat. There's a gentle WHEEZE from her portable ventilator.

It is extremely unappetizing, but Hector doesn't seem to mind. He's just drinking his Jack and Cherry and eating.

Ruth is not.

RUTH  
Why's her bed like that?

HECTOR  
Like what?

RUTH  
Wonky. Weird angle.

HECTOR  
She likes to look out the window at the barn. The horses.

Ruth takes this in. It's depressing. A little pitiful. Then --

HECTOR  
What'd you do to get fired?

RUTH  
I'm just not exercising for Steven anymore.

HECTOR  
Why not?

RUTH  
There was a disagreement. With an owner. ... She didn't want me riding in the Derby.

HECTOR

When was your last race?

RUTH

I clocked two furlongs in twenty-five seconds yesterday.

HECTOR

That's not what I asked.

RUTH

What does it matter?

HECTOR

Races are different than a workout.

RUTH

Yes. They are.

Obviously. She suppresses her annoyance.

RUTH

I'm the best jock for her mount.

HECTOR

The best jock, who hasn't really raced.

She has to try to stay calm now.

RUTH

This has nothing to do with that.

HECTOR

What does it have to do with?

RUTH

She says it's because horses smell women --

HECTOR

They do. Your menses.

RUTH

Our menses.

She cannot believe this.

HECTOR

Aren't that many female jockeys.  
Why you think that is?

RUTH

Does this apply to jumpers, too? Is that why that horse threw your wife?

Now she's goading him. But he doesn't get upset.

HECTOR

My wife. Your *sister* -- is sitting right here. She can hear you. Why don't you ask her?

His eyes are locked on Ruth. Ruth doesn't look away.

RUTH

Diana, did you have your period when you fell off that horse and broke your neck?

Now they're both silent. And it is only now, that they hear --

BEEPING. The emergency alarm on Diana's ventilator.

Diana's breathing tube is out. Bile BUBBLES from her mouth.

Diana is CHOKING.

Hector moves with precision. He sticks his fingers down her throat, clearing her airway. Then, he slides her tube back.

It's messy and upsetting. Almost embarrassing. He fumbles to explain.

HECTOR

She pulls her -- when she's upset -- Sometimes she manages to pull her tube --

He sits back down and wipes his hands on his napkin. Ruth gets up to clear her plate and --

RUTH

Change her. It smells like shit in here.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

A light on the porch. A light on the barn.

Night everywhere else.

Ruth paces in the dark YARD. She keeps glancing at the BARN --

There's a dilapidated sign hanging on it: *GS - Gold Stables*. A NEIGH creeps from the gaping, black hole of the ajar doors.

She starts toward it, almost there when --

CRASH. Inside the house.

**INT. FARMHOUSE**

Diana's WHEELCHAIR lays broken at the bottom of the stairs.

At the top, Hector holds Diana like a limp bride. Struggling. Embarrassed. He meets Ruth's gaze, then turns away.

Ruth nudges the wheelchair, SPINNING a twisted wheel.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - ANOTHER DAY**

WORK BOOTS. Chased by RIDING BOOTS.

Ruth pursues a **HORSE TRAINER**, a wrinkled man in a flannel.

RUTH  
Whose working out the new colt?

FLANNEL TRAINER  
Bobby's got him.

RUTH  
How about *April is the Cruelest?*

FLANNEL TRAINER  
Chris --

The Trainer goes into his office, shuts the door in her face.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - SERIES OF SHOTS**

Ruth appeals to all the **HORSE TRAINERS** at the track.

RUTH  
What about *Something Wicked?*

Another door SHUTS in her face. No one bites.

RUTH  
I was wondering if you needed  
another exercise rider --

Heads shake.

RUTH  
How about your mare?

Doors CLOSE.

RUTH  
You gotta have some horse that  
needs a work-out -- I'll take  
anyone you got -- Five dollars a  
ride, come on -- Two dollars --

Door after door SLAMS. No one wants anything to do with her.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - OUTSIDE THE JOCKEY ROOM**

A door opens to the Jockey Room.

Ruth sees Marco, one of Steven's other exercise riders, inside. Marco LAUGHS, joking around with the other Men.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTANDS**

The STANDS are mostly empty -- only a few **DEGENERATES** watching the workouts, studying the Daily Racing Form.

And Ruth. Down on track, Marco's riding War on Drugs.

Steven and Mallory are down below, also watching him. Then, Mallory turns back to the stands --

Ruth looks down, tugs at her hat, trying to be inconspicuous, but then, something catches her eye.

On the table in front of her: A FLIER.

She picks it up --

**INT/EXT. FARMHOUSE - BARN**

Hector's in the barn, finishing feeding the horses. He pets one them sweetly, WHISPERING something and --

RUTH (O.C.)  
They ever say anything back?

Ruth. She startled him.

HECTOR  
Jesus christ --

RUTH  
I need to talk to you.

HECTOR  
I'm on my way out.

He walks past her, **OUTSIDE**.

She follows him.

RUTH  
It'll only take a few minutes.

Hector gets into his truck.

RUTH  
It's important.

She plasters the FLIER from the track on his windshield. Now we see what caught her eye:

A Midsummer Day's Derby. Guaranteed minimum purse: 80,000

Hector doesn't say anything. Ruth underlines it for him.

RUTH  
Eighty thousand dollars.  
(...)  
That's almost a hundred grand.

HECTOR  
Never been much of a gambler.

RUTH  
I want to ride for you.

A flicker of disbelief in his eyes.

RUTH  
You train. I ride.

HECTOR  
No.

RUTH  
Just like that.

HECTOR  
Yes.

RUTH  
Why --

HECTOR  
I'm done with racing.

RUTH  
Too busy popping teenage cherries?

He will not be riled up by her. But she will certainly try.

HECTOR  
RUTH  
You need this money. Your wife is  
up there, right now, rotting like a  
vegetable.

HECTOR  
There's something wrong with you.

RUTH  
Diana needs better care than you  
can afford. I know it and you know  
it.

This is true. But --

HECTOR  
A wannabe jockey on an imaginary  
horse isn't going to win this race.

A crack. A moment of engagement, even if it's negative.

RUTH  
We can find a horse --

HECTOR  
"We" can find a horse --

RUTH  
Yes. For me to ride.

HECTOR  
You're not good enough.

RUTH  
Why don't you like me? What'd I  
ever do to you?

Without even realizing it, an honest inquiry. But Hector  
doesn't engage.

HECTOR  
I'm going to work.

RUTH  
Another big birthday party?

He's done with this. He turns on the truck --

HECTOR  
Goodbye, Ruth.

The Derby flier FLUTTERS to the ground as he drives away.

Ruth picks it up and looks at it again ... All that money.

**EXT./INT. COUNTRY ROAD / HECTOR'S TRUCK - DRIVING**

Hector drives down a country road. Fiddling with the radio when he notices something in the rearview mirror --

Ruth. On a HORSE.

He can't believe it. He's going 40mph. But she's gaining on him ...

She pushes, WHIPPING the horse. She is going to catch him.

His eyes are trained on the mirror, but as she gets closer, he looks over his shoulder -- BAM -- he hits a bump and --

Swerves off the road.

Ruth catches up right as Hector gets out his truck --

RUTH  
OK down there?

Fury on his face. He inspects his front tire --

RUTH  
You need a ride?

She grins.

HECTOR  
Don't talk to me.

She dismounts and climbs down to him.

RUTH  
This is a shit horse and I caught  
up to you --

He grabs his tools, the spare tire from truck bed.

RUTH  
Because I'm a good jock.

Hector turns around abruptly -- but Ruth doesn't back down.

RUTH  
I can win.

He's very close to her now. Taller. Bigger. Menacing.

RUTH  
You need this. Do this with me.

HECTOR  
Where you been the last two years?

This silences Ruth.

HECTOR  
*That's* why I don't like you.

He retreats. Drops down to the flat tire. It takes Ruth a second to center herself, then --

RUTH  
You know when Diana first met you --  
we hadn't talked in awhile. And  
then she calls me out of the blue --

HECTOR  
Gimme the wrench.

She does. He loosens the lugs as she talks.

RUTH  
She met this guy at some race, who  
just started training, but had been  
working for this fancy owner,  
working his way up at this fancy  
barn since he was a kid.

Hector slides the jack under. It's unclear if he's listening.

RUTH  
And you had just taken her on a  
first date to mini-golf --

But then as he lifts truck, he corrects her --

HECTOR  
Batting cages ---

RUTH  
-- and she felt safe with you.

Hector shifts. He wasn't expecting that. He resumes switching the tire, trying to just concentrate on that.

RUTH

Diana was -- she never saw anything but the finish line. Jumps, obstacles -- it was like they didn't exist to her. It's why she was so good when she was racing, but it made her a dumb idiot when it came to men. So I thought her gushing about you was a load of nonsense. This guy's definitely a prick. He just wants to fuck a girl steeplechaser -- she's just a good story for the backstretch.

The new tire is on. Hector stands.

RUTH

But I was wrong. And I saw. You were good with the horses. But with her, you were great. And you made her great.

HECTOR

Until she wasn't.

RUTH

You can't control everything.

A sensitive subject. He knows it's true, but hates it.

HECTOR

I'm late.

He throws his tools back into the truck.

RUTH

You really just want to live off the scraps of these filet mignon motherfuckers the rest of your life?

He looks at her. Hesitation. Then he gets back in the truck. Ruth's left alone on the road with the horse.

#### **EXT. DOANE ESTATE - CORRAL - LATER**

Hector gives a riding lesson to Amy. She canters around him -- circling -- faster and faster ...

Outside the orbit, by the fence, he glimpses Vicki. She's fingering her pearl necklace and staring at him with a gaze stronger than the sun.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM - LATER - DUSK**

Hector comes in and sits next to Diana's bed. For a moment, they both watch out the window:

**DOWN BELOW**, the horses play in the twilight. Fireflies blink.

It's peaceful. Hector kisses Diana's hand.

But he then realizes ... lifts the blanket -- there's a mess.

HECTOR

OK, OK. No big deal. Let's get you cleaned up.

**CUT TO:**

Hector washes Diana.

He cleans her naked body with tenderness, modesty. He touches her cracked lips. Her bruises. Patches of raw dryness.

And he knows that Ruth is right. He needs help.

Diana looks at him, trapped inside her useless body.

**INT. BARN - NIGHT**

Horse eyes. Hector strokes her muzzle and the horse NICKERS.

HECTOR

Goodnight, sweet girl.

There are five horses in the barn. This is the last.

Hector settles into a chair against the back wall.

Folds his arms. Closes his eyes.

**DARKNESS.**

HECTOR (PRELAP)

Ruth.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT**

Bedside lamp fumbled on -- Ruth, half-asleep. And she's confused because -- Hector's standing in her door.

RUTH

What time is it?

He doesn't answer. But she sees her clock -- 3:00am.

HECTOR

Why do you want this?

It takes her a second -- he clarifies.

HECTOR

The Derby.

RUTH

I want to get out of Ohio. I need  
to get away from this shit track --

HECTOR

Kentucky. You got Triple Crown  
dreams like every other jock.

RUTH

No. California.

HECTOR

Del Mar?

RUTH

Santa Anita.

HECTOR

You don't need to win a horse race  
to go west.

He's right. So Ruth admits --

RUTH

I'm good. I know I'm good. But I  
don't want to just disappear into  
the night. I want them to choke on  
their bourbon and grasp their  
pearls as I cross that finish line  
and spray their faces in mud. I  
want them to see.

There's fire in her eyes. But she is calm. Resolute.

HECTOR

OK.

(considers, then agrees)

OK.

Just like that. He leaves. Ruth can't believe it.

## INT. FARMHOUSE - UPSTAIRS

Hector retreats down the HALLWAY when --

RUTH

Hector.

He turns. She's wearing just a see-through wife-beater and her underwear. Her legs are muscular. Her nipples are dark.

RUTH

There's one more thing. I want the fucking money.

Now, for the first time in a long time -- and the first time we've seen:

Hector smiles.

## INT. BARN - THE NEXT MORNING

Darkness. Until Hector opens the barn doors. Ruth follows him inside. The HORSES are vocal, agitated.

Hector approaches the first horse.

HECTOR

This is **Whistler**. Five years old.  
He hates grass, but you put him in  
the dirt and he'll run all day.

He moves to the second horse.

HECTOR

**Princess Di**. Hot blooded, but hates  
the heat. Can't even think about  
bringing her out if it's above  
sixty-five.

To the third horse --

HECTOR

**PacMan** here, is a chaser. He  
doesn't care about speed unless  
someone's in front of him --

Now the fourth horse -- a **WHITE STALLION**.

HECTOR

This is **Albino Al** --

RUTH

-- He likes sunset walks on the beach. Apples and oats and feels safe when you're on top of him --

She stops by the fifth and final horse.

RUTH

These horses are worthless. They're old or slow or both. None of them can run a real race.

Off Hector --

**EXT. DIRT ROAD - DRIVING**

Driving POV. A bumpy, overgrown road.

Hector drives. Ruth's shotgun. They crest a small hill to:

A dirt oval cut into a grassy field. This is --

RUTH

(realizing)

The bush track...

HECTOR

That's right.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - TRACKING**

Rusty pick-up trucks and horse trailers. **HORSE OWNERS** drinking TALLBOYS and SMOKING as they wrangle their **HORSES**.

A **MYNA BIRD** balances on the shoulder of a **REDNECK**, chanting in its haunting, mechanical timber --

MYNA BIRD

*Luck be a pussy. Luck be a pussy.*

The air is heavy and warm. Insects HUM in the surrounding trees. Hector and Ruth cut through --

HECTOR

Racing commission doesn't exist here -- that means big betting.

They pass a **BOOKIE** openly taking MONEY from some **PUNTERS**.

BOOKIE

Handle's at 3, so far --

He smiles a TOOTHLESS GRIN at Hector and Ruth.

BOOKIE

Whatta we got? You wanna lay or  
take?

Everything feels a little unsafe.

HECTOR

Action on anything and everything --

RUTH

Yeah, it's the Wild West. No rules,  
no regulation --

HECTOR

Not true. One rule --

He nods at a **MAN** tying a **ROOSTER** to the back of a **HORSE**.

HECTOR

Gotta have a live rider on your  
mount.

He grins.

RUTH

And you want me to race here. With  
our junkyard horses.

HECTOR

You're going to *learn* how to race  
here. With our "junkyard" horses.  
And then we take the money we win  
and we buy a real horse that can  
win the Derby.

RUTH

Cut out the middleman.

HECTOR

Owner usually takes sixty-five to  
ninety percent of a purse.

RUTH

But not this way.

Exactly.

HECTOR

We're the trainer --

RUTH

Jockey --

HECTOR  
-- and owner.

RUTH  
The whole purse is ours.

HECTOR  
We take it all.

She has to admit --

RUTH  
It's a good plan.

HECTOR  
Great. First race today. Two hours  
til post --

No time to protest. Hector disappears into the **RACE STEWARD'S TRAILER**, leaving Ruth behind.

**INT. BUSH TRACK - RACE STEWARD'S TRAILER**

FAT FINGERS fidget with a good luck HOBO BUFFALO NICKEL:

The Native American face has been carved into a SKULL.

The fat fingers belong to a FAT MAN with only a fringe of hair. This is the bush track race steward, **PORK ROWLAND**.

PORK ROWLAND  
Come on, don't waste my time. You  
wanna race, you pay the fee.

HECTOR  
You're running me over --

Pork shrugs. He spins his coin on his makeshift desk.

PORK ROWLAND  
My hands are tied here. This is a  
small, family-run operation. We're  
passionate about racing and just  
want to share our love of this  
sport and these great animals.

He's the only one sitting in a room crowded with **OWNERS**:

Denim. Cowboy hats. Baseball caps. Boots -- Western and work.

Smoke in the air. Dip in their mouths. Shooting the shit.

DIP-CHEWER

What else you got at your place  
these days? Any rockets?

BASEBALL CAP

Nah, all dinks.

The Owners are all stalling, trying to enter the best race.

COWBOY HAT

OK, Pork, I'll take the slow race --

PORK ROWLAND

Seeing that's all of them, you want  
the first, the eighth or one the in-  
between?

While Cowboy Hat considers, Pork looks back to Hector.

PORK ROWLAND

Shit or make room on the pot.

He smiles wide. Hector reluctantly throws down CASH.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - RACE STEWARD'S TRAILER**

Ruth waits for Hector, still in nervous disbelief. A MOUSTACHED MAN sidles up and greets her. This is the DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

Field's tight today. How you  
feeling? How can Doc help?

His eyes are wild. Like he sampled his own stash.

DOCTOR

I got *Bute*, *Levo-powder*, *Salix* for  
the mounts. For jocks, I got  
*lightning* -- I can make you a  
*milkshake*?

The Doctor is a drug dealer. For both horse and human.

DOCTOR

*Stardust* for you or your horse --?

RUTH

I'm set.

-- CRUNCH. She steps on something as she walks away:

A SYRINGE.

## EXT. BUSH TRACK - "PADDOCK" - A LITTLE LATER

A THICK ELASTIC BAND.

Hector tightens the band around the horse's TONGUE. The tie is meant to help the horse breath, but his tongue is wagging in a way that walks the line of the humane.

Ruth's nearby in BREECHES and a SLEEVELESS RIDING SHIRT.

They're in a grove of trees that's an unofficial PADDOCK. **HORSES** and **JOCKS** milling about.

Ruth turns back to Hector and the tongue-tied horse. We see now, this is one of the horses from their barn: **WHISTLER**.

RUTH  
You give him anything?

HECTOR  
Like what?

RUTH  
Like something that doesn't matter  
because there's only one rule.

Hector ignores this, gives her instructions.

HECTOR  
He's gonna break immediately, then  
he should be out front the entire  
time -- you won't need to ask him  
for anything. Watch him before the  
start though -- he's going to buck.  
He does not like the gate.

He gives Ruth a leg up, helping her onto the horse. She settles into the saddle. He TIGHTENS a strap, then to Ruth --

HECTOR  
"Some trust in chariots, some in  
horses -- "

He PATS the horse's rump.

## EXT. BUSH TRACK - TRACKING

Ruth and her horse are led to the track by a MAN on a HORSE -- this is a **PONY RIDER**.

Ruth feels the eyes of the **CROWD** on her. So does her horse. Whistler is nervous. He PULLS his lead and TOSSES his head.

The Pony Rider tries to steady him.

PONY RIDER  
Easy -- easy, boy.

The horse's ears TWITCH, pinned back with aggression.

PONY RIDER  
(to Ruth)  
What's his name?

RUTH  
Just get us to the gate.

#### **EXT. BUSH TRACK - INFIELD**

Scores of **BYSTANDERS**. Money changing hands everywhere.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*In the fourth race today, in post*  
*position number one -- Mamacita!*

Hector JOTS down his race predictions on a scrap of paper.

#### **EXT. BUSH TRACK - STARTING GATES**

Ruth's horse does not want to go in the gate. Whistler PAWS his HOOVES at the ground.

PONY RIDER  
Stay with me, come on, boy.

Ruth SQUEEZES her legs around the horse. But he really doesn't want to go in --

PONY RIDER  
It's OK, come on now. We're right here, we're right here together --

#### **EXT. BUSH TRACK - INFIELD**

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*In post-position #2 we have*  
*Butterbaby!*

Hector FOLDS his predictions and hands them to a Bookie along with CASH.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*And rounding out the field on the*  
*outside --*

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - STARTING GATES**

Metal CLANGS -- gate finally closing. Ruth's on the outside.

NEXT TO HER: A **CHILD JOCKEY**, not a day older than 13.

IN POST POSITION: A **LATINO JOCKEY** wearing just his UNDERWEAR.

Both Jockeys WHISPER to their **HORSES**. Ruth does not.

Then, in quick succession, no time to breath --

A HORN BLARES. THE GATES OPEN. THE PA CRACKLES.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
And they're off --*

THE HORSES DART FORWARD.

But not Ruth's. Whistler REARS and SPINS. She struggles to stay on, but she loses her balance and Whistler throws her.

Ruth CRASHES into the starting gate.

**INT. HECTOR'S TRUCK - DRIVING**

Silence. Hector drives them back home after the race.

Ruth is sweaty. Hair messy. Her shirt is ripped --

There's DRIED BLOOD on her shoulder.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Ruth slumps over a plate of leftovers. Playing with her food.

Hector walks in. He picks up Ruth's FORTUNE JAR.

HECTOR  
No more relying on luck and superstitions.

He dumps the fortunes onto the table. Ruth is contrite.

RUTH  
How much we lose today?

HECTOR  
Nothing. I bet against you.

He throws a small wad of CASH into the jar.

RUTH

What's that you said to me, before  
the race? Chariots and horses --

HECTOR

Psalm 20.

RUTH

You a bible thumper now? That any  
different from these?

Ruth grabs a handful of fortunes. He takes away her plate.

HECTOR

You eat when you win.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM - MORNING (PRE-DAWN)**

LIGHT ON. Ruth wakes -- the clock reads: 4:00 am.

**INT. BARN**

The HORSES are wide awake. NEIGHING and SHUFFLING as Hector and Ruth walk by.

HECTOR

Your balance is shit.

RUTH

The horse lost it and threw me --

HECTOR

You need to be stronger.

He leads her to a stall with no horse, just a COVERED OBJECT.

HECTOR

Your whole body needs to be  
stronger --

He WHIPS off the dusty old blanket revealing: A BARREL HORSE.

This is a literal barrel mounted on a pole, used for jockey training. It looks rickety.

HECTOR

Come on --

He gives Ruth a leg up, just like with a real horse. The barrel WOBLES. A lot. ROLLING back and forth ...

She leans forward, grabbing the mounted bar that allows her to assume the "jockey position" and --

The Barrel breaks -- CRACKS off the pole. Ruth tries to catch herself, but lands on her hands and knees in the hay.

She looks at Hector.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DAWN**

Dawn blue blooms in the sky.

Ruth CLIMBS on the fence. Feet on the rails, she BALANCES with one leg on either side of a POST.

RUTH  
It's cold.

HECTOR  
Be warm in a few hours.

A few hours. He starts to walk away --

RUTH  
Where are you going?

HECTOR  
Gotta see a man about horse --

He doesn't look back.

**EXT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH**

A modest sandstone brick church.

**INT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH - BASEMENT**

The CHURCH BASEMENT after mass. **MEN**, **WOMEN** and **CHILDREN** in their Sunday best drinking orange juice and eating DONUTS.

An OLDER MAN holds court at a plastic table in the back. He's wearing a wool blazer with leather elbow patches. Claddagh pinky ring. The air of a small town gangster. This is **O'SHEA**.

Hector cuts to the front. O'Shea's surprised, but nonchalant.

O'SHEA  
So he returns.

## INT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH - NAVE

A CRUCIFIX. Ceramic Jesus, wounded body on display.

Hector follows O'Shea through the empty nave.

HECTOR

I want to buy one of your horses.

O'SHEA

Now why would you want to do that?

Rhetorical, but he sees Hector's resolve. Sits in a pew.

O'SHEA

OK. My two year olds start at ten.

HECTOR

I was thinking more like six.

Hector sits in the pew behind him.

O'SHEA

You started mucking my stalls when  
you were what, eleven?

HECTOR

Nine.

O'SHEA

Your mama bear was in the forest  
looking for honey. And I opened my  
den to you, like it was your own.

HECTOR

And I'm grateful for that. But I  
was working. I never asked for a  
free lunch. And that's not what I'm  
doing now.

O'SHEA

You're a great trainer. That's your  
calling, not the owning racket --

HECTOR

So the answer's no.

O'SHEA

Hector. You're like a son to me.  
There's always a place in my barn  
for you. But the price is the  
price.

He stands up.

O'SHEA  
I don't give discounts on  
horseflesh.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DAY - LATER**

The sun shines bright. Ruth still balances on the fence. Sweat beads on her forehead. All her muscles ache.

The HORSES are in the corral. She watches them, then looks up at her sister's window. There's nothing to see but glare.

She TEETERS. Her feet fight to center herself, but --

Ruth falls off the post. Slams into the dirt and grass.

**EXT. DOANE ESTATE - STABLES**

HOOVES paw the dirt. Thoroughbreds. Strong and shiny. Perfectly bred.

Hector stands with Vicki all the way at the last stall.

HECTOR  
He's already four --

They're next to a SORREL HORSE. This is **MATERLAC**.

HECTOR  
He's never going to win an elite race. But that's just fine for me, because I can't afford a top caliber horse. But I can afford him. Or I will be able to --

VICKI  
The buying and selling, that's really more of Jack's thing --

HECTOR  
I know. I wanted to see if you would talk to him for me.

Vicki pets the horse. Avoiding Hector's question.

VICKI  
*Materlac. Greek for Mother's Milk --*

HECTOR  
Latin.  
(off Vicki's surprise)  
Years of Catholic school ...

VICKI

Well I always liked the name -- the idea, that *thing* we all need ...

HECTOR

I don't like asking this. But I don't want a hand-out, just a fair deal.

She unbuttons her Oxford. He can see her wrinkly cleavage.

VICKI

Is it hot in here? Where'd that breeze go?

She stares at him a beat longer than is comfortable, then --

VICKI

How do you say "yes" in Latin?

She'll do it. Hector holds back a smile.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE**

Back home. Hector parks his truck. He sees immediately:

Ruth is not on the fence. But the barn doors are open ...

**INT. BARN**

Hector finds Ruth inside. She's muddy and in riding gear.

HECTOR

You got off the fence.

RUTH

Went for a ride.

HECTOR

I told you to stand on the fence.

RUTH

I'm here to work. I'm not playing games.

She hangs up her tack. When she turns around, he's gone.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - TRACKING**

Hector heads back toward the house. Ruth pursues him.

RUTH

I was up there for hours. You left  
me there.

HECTOR

I decide when you go up there. I  
decide when you get down.

RUTH

Seems like a game.

HECTOR

It's not. It's trust.

This silences her. Then --

RUTH

Trust is earned.

HECTOR

You sound like a greeting card.

He goes inside. The screen door CLANGS shut in her face.

Ruth's left alone on the porch.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

Hector brings a yogurt to Diana. He stirs it.

HECTOR

Your sister's a pain in the ass.

He settles next to Diana's bed and sees OUT THE WINDOW:

Ruth is climbing back on the fence.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DUSK**

Ruth's bare feet still grip the wooden rail.

Gnats swarm around her head. Bats fly overhead.

The sky cracks as it loses light --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

*OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS* -- Vanna White reveals the final WHEEL OF FORTUNE puzzle.

Hector turns off the TV, then glances OUT THE WINDOW:

Ruth is still on the fence.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD**

From the fence, Ruth watches as the lights go off inside the house. She shifts her weight. The front door opens --

Hector.

He crosses the yard, but continues into the BARN, without looking at her, without a word.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD**

The middle of the night. Dew gathering in the darkness.

Ruth sways. Stabbing the dark with her teetering pale body.

As we get closer we see her wound from the first race has BLED through her shirt. Her eyes droop and she collapses --

Hector catches her.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - STAIRS TO RUTH'S ROOM - TRACKING**

Hector carries Ruth. He lays her down on her bed.

She's exhausted. Half-asleep, half-delirious. Quietly --

RUTH  
Does this mean you won? Or me?

An intimacy has crept into the moment. Hector avoids it.

HECTOR  
Get some sleep, then.

Ruth falls BACK onto her pillow --

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (PRELAP)*  
*They're off!*

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - STARTING GATE - RACING**

Ruth surges FORWARD --

She's on top of **PRINCESS DI**, BURSTING from the starting gate.

Down the straightaway, they're neck and neck with the other **HORSES**, but then --

Di starts to fade. Ruth WHIPS the horse, mercilessly.  
 But the field pulls away, further and further and --  
She has no chance. She will be dead last.

**INT. BARN - LATER**

A BLOODY WELT on the flank of Princess Di. Hector looks at the wound, then to Ruth.

HECTOR  
 If we don't win, we don't get money. And if we don't get money, then this whole plan falls apart. Because money is the only way we get *more* money.

Ruth paces, outside of the stall, still dirty from the race.

RUTH  
 Maybe your plan is flawed. Maybe these horses aren't even good enough for the bush track.

HECTOR  
 These horses are not the problem.

RUTH  
 She couldn't keep pace. How am I supposed to win if the horse can't keep pace.

HECTOR  
 You're too fat.

This catches her off guard.

HECTOR  
 It's not personal.

She's momentarily speechless, then --

RUTH  
 You're wrong.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - BATHROOM**

SCALE: 118. *Impossible.* Ruth steps off the scale and back on. It makes no sense. But the number doesn't change.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

Ruth comes into the kitchen. Hector waits for her.

She doesn't say anything. And he doesn't have to ask.

HECTOR

Tomorrow, these will all be empty.

The CABINETS are all open.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth prepares a smorgasbord from the cabinets, the fridge. Pulling out bags and bottles and boxes of FOOD.

Meticulous and focused. Like with everything.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth sits alone with her Last Supper:

Pasta and tomato sauce. Mac and cheese. Beans. Canned fruit. Potato chips. Frozen french fries. Snack cakes. Ice cream.

She eats and eats and eats. There is no pleasure here.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth shoves her HAND into her MOUTH. JAMMING it in, deep.

Skin sallow in the **BATHROOM** light. Her eyes WATER.

Finally, after what seems a too horrible, too long of a time:

She GAGS.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS**

Hector can hear Ruth RETCHING. As he takes this in --

The phone RINGS.

**EXT. DOANE ESTATE - BREEDING SHED**

Harsh, sterile lighting. A **MARE** is prepped for breeding -- a **SHED HAND** ties back the horse's tail.

Hector arrives. He's surprised to find Jack. No sign of Vicki.

JACK  
There he is. Hector, my man.

Jack's hands are busy in a ceramic basin. Hector can't see with what ...

JACK  
-- From the stallion we just cut.

Jack lifts a BLOODY, FLESHY ORGAN from the basin --

JACK  
Woulda torn a mare in half --

CASTRATED HORSE TESTICLES. Large. Raw. Disgusting.

Hector's uncomfortable.

HECTOR  
Vicki asked to meet me --

JACK  
She's in back, getting ready for  
the circus --

Jack see-saws the testicles back and forth in his hands.

JACK  
Like two rats in a bag.

Fresh BLOOD drips down his hands.

JACK  
The ol' ball and chain has really  
taken a shine to you. She says you  
want to buy Materlac. Asked me to  
give you a discount --

HECTOR  
Not a discount, just --

JACK  
Materlac's a *plater*. Not sure why  
you want him, but I'll give the  
discount if you just tell me --

He PLOPS the testicles back into the basin --

JACK  
Why'd you stop training horses?  
Move to little girls?

He stares at Hector. Dead serious.

HECTOR

Jack --

JACK

Thick as thieves with my wife and  
my daughter. What is it? No  
interest in tail your own age?

HECTOR

That's not -- I would never --

JACK

Just joshing, my man. Horse is  
yours --

He slaps Hector on the back, leaving a bloody print, then --

VICKI (O.S.)

Jack tell you the good news?

Vicki. Back with the Shed Hand, who leads a **STALLION**.

HECTOR

Yes, it's -- thank you. I don't  
know what to say --

VICKI

I'd say, you owe me.

She smiles in a way that makes him feel like she means it.  
Then focuses back on the horse.

VICKI

Look at him -- one of our best  
teasers. Aren't you, my boy?

She STROKES the stallion's neck.

VICKI

It always strikes me -- It's so  
efficient. We bring him out, get  
the mare excited for the main  
event, abracadabra. I'm telling  
you, you know, you're married to  
someone for so many years ... Why  
don't we do this for us people?

She looks at Jack. Wide smile.

JACK

Million dollar idea, dear.

Grotesque smiles all around. Hector feels like a pawn in a  
game he didn't know he was playing.

Vicki's veneers gleam in the artificial light.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING**

Cabinets still open. But now, completely empty.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - BATHROOM**

Ruth's BARE FEET step on the scale. Hector watches, then turns on the HOT WATER.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth sits in the tub, knees pulled to her chest. Shower on. WATER drips down her FLUSHED face. Steam SWIRLS around her.

We hear a WHISTLE --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

Steam SWIRLS from the WHISTLING tea kettle.

Ruth waits at the kitchen table.

Hector pours her a cup of hot water. She watches him SQUEEZE a lemon, JUICE leaking between his fingers.

He replaces the kettle, then returns to the table.

From one hand he puts down: JELLY BEANS.

From the other: PILLS.

Ruth doesn't miss a beat. Eats the candy. Takes the pills.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - SERIES OF SHOTS / MONTAGE**

- Kettle WHISTLING. Hot water POURED. Lemon SQUEEZED.
- Jelly beans. Pills. Ruth SWALLOWING. Over and over.
- The bathroom mirror STEAMS as Ruth steps on and off the scale. Bare feet. Over and over.
- Ruth FLUSHES the toilet. Again and again.
- Ruth watches Hector EAT. She's hungry.
- Ruth watches Diana EAT. Hungrier.

- Ruth watches the Horses EAT. Ravenous.
- Black garbage bags. Duct tape. Hector TAPES the bags around Ruth's body. Tight.
- Ruth RUNS in the garbage bags, sweat POURING down her face.
- Hector CUTS the bags off Ruth. She can barely stand.
- Ruth looks at herself in the mirror. Her pants are getting looser. She takes off her clothes.
- Ruth's body is getting stronger. Arms and legs more defined. Abdomen cut.
- Ruth looks at herself in the mirror. She looks thin. Small. On the edge of unhealthy.
- SCALE: 107.

**INT. BUSH TRACK - RACE STEWARD'S TRAILER - RACE DAY**

Pork's trailer is packed as always. Pork gathers the CASH as Owners throw down their entry fees, but Hector haggles.

HECTOR  
That's triple from last time --

PORK ROWLAND  
What is that? Hec-tor? You don't  
look Spanish --

HECTOR  
Irish.

PORK ROWLAND  
Hmph. Well, tell you what, Hector.  
You don't wanna pay the entry fee,  
I'll make you a wager like all the  
other degenerates out there.

He pushes a slip of paper towards Hector.

PORK ROWLAND  
Call your race -- first, second,  
third, fourth. And I'll waive your  
fee.

HECTOR  
And if I'm wrong?

PORK ROWLAND  
You pay double.

HECTOR  
*Six times the amount of last time.*

Not a small amount. Pork leans back -- it's Hector's choice.

PORK ROWLAND  
 Only if you lose.

Hector picks up the pencil. He TAPS it --

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - "PADDOCK"**

A rope TUGS at the TRAILER. Attached to the other end:

PacMan. The third farm horse. RED FLY MASK. PACING. Anxious.

Ruth sits on a stump nearby, paying the horse no attention. She's watching the other **JOCKEYS** and their pre-race routines:

- A **CATHOLIC JOCK** does a superstitious SIGN OF THE CROSS.
- A **PONY-TAILED JOCK** switches a SOCK between his two feet.
- A **DWARF JOCK** walks backwards around his HORSE.

Then she sees, taped to the wrist of another **JOCKEY**:

A BUZZER. A small device used to ELECTRIFY the horse.

BZZZZ! The Buzzer Jock tests the prod. He sees Ruth watching. But he doesn't really care.

HECTOR (O.S.)  
 Whoa, boy. Good boy, good boy.

Hector has rejoined them. He calms PacMan. Asks Ruth --

HECTOR  
 He been like this the whole time?

RUTH  
 Yeah. Yes.

Hector pets the horse's nose, looks in his eyes.

HECTOR  
 Steady now. Breathe with me.

The horse's nostrils SWELL in and out. In and out.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Alrighty folks, it's a hot one*  
*today. Keep cool and let's have a*  
*good, clean race!*

PacMan is not calming down. Hector looks to Ruth now.

HECTOR  
 He's fiery today. That's good.  
 That's very good.

She puts on her helmet. Fiddles with the strap.

HECTOR  
 You stay relaxed and he will.

Hector lowers her hands and TIGHTENS the strap for her.  
 There's an intimacy here that catches her off-guard.

HECTOR  
 No sudden movements. No stick. Just  
 take it slow, let him settle in.

She nods. They're standing close.

HECTOR  
 "Some trust in chariots, some in  
 horses."

He gives Ruth a leg up onto the horse.

**INT. BUSH TRACK - INFIELD**

Malaria weather. The infield is packed with **PEOPLE** half-dressed in the heat. All sweating like pigs.

Hector loops through the crowd. It's a shitshow of betting.

BOOKIE #1  
 I got him at 5 to 1 to win --

BOOKIE #2  
 Great odds here --

BOOKIE #1  
 3 to 1 to place --

BOOKIE #3  
 Only show bets, all day.

BOOKIE #1  
 Even to show.

Hector joins the fray.

HECTOR  
I wanna quinella -- #3 and #4.

He talks to various **BOOKIES**.

HECTOR  
What's the action?

Placing multiple bets.

HECTOR  
What's the vig?

Handing over MONEY.

HECTOR  
I want an exacta --

Fives. Tens. Twenties --

HECTOR  
I'll take the field.

Quickly. A **TOUPEE-WEARING BOOKIE** with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth nods at Hector.

TOUPEE BOOKIE  
You seem confident.

HECTOR  
What's that worth?

TOUPEE BOOKIE  
Depends. You gotta ringer? You're betting like you got a ringer.

HECTOR  
I just like the way his shit smelled this morning.

#### **EXT. BUSH TRACK - STARTING GATE**

A HOOF steps in SHIT -- PacMan lifting his legs, shifting weight. Eager.

Ruth shifts too. She's sees to her left, on a **SPOTTED HORSE**:

The Buzzer Jockey. He pulls his sleeve down to hide the prod.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
OK, folks they're just about in the  
gates --

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - INFIELD - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

TOUPEE BOOKIE  
I'll do it for 20 --

HECTOR  
You're outta your mind --

TOUPEE BOOKIE  
You got someone else gonna take it?

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - STARTING GATE - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Ruth tightens her grip -- fingers GRASPING reins and mane.

THE HORN BLOWS -- THE GATES OPEN -- THE FIELD FLIES FORWARD.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*And we're racing!*

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - INFIELD - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

HECTOR  
OK. I'll take it.

TOUPEE BOOKIE  
Book's closed --

But Hector's got his MONEY out. Toupee Bookie can't resist.  
He grabs the money. Hector wipes the sweat from his brow --

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*And we're neck and neck as PacMan*  
*comes up on the rail --*

Suddenly -- GASPS all around him. Collective. Heads turning --  
necks wrenching --

Something happened on track.

Hector tries to push through the crush to see but people  
start SHRIEKING and the crowd parts like the Red Sea:

A horse is running wild through it. Riderless.

PacMan. Ruth's horse.

It's mayhem. People PUSH into Hector, trying to JUMP out of the way as the runaway horse FLIES by, but a few unlucky stragglers are MOWED DOWN, TRAMPLED under his hooves then --

A GUNSHOT.

PacMan crumples to the ground.

**INT. BARN - NIGHT**

Quiet. Drifting through the barn, past the horse stalls.

Number 1 ... Number 2 ... Number 3 is empty...

In the distance we hear BANGING --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - TRACKING**

BANG -- Ruth SLAMS a kitchen cabinet.

HECTOR

I need you to tell me exactly what happened.

Hector's at the table. Trying to talk but -- BANG. Ruth's searching all the cabinets. Even though she already knows --

RUTH

There's nothing in here.

(BANG)

There's nothing to eat.

HECTOR

That horse was ready.

BANG. More cabinets. She's getting increasingly agitated.

RUTH

We lost because you bet like an gambler, not because of the horse.

HECTOR

It wasn't a gamble. This shouldn't have happened. This race was easy.

She pulls out his cans of Cherry Coke. Increasingly frenetic.

RUTH

I don't need an interrogation every time we lose --

HECTOR

That horse was fast. The other  
horses were shit. He should have  
won --

RUTH

I need something to eat!

She THROWS a Cherry Coke and it EXPLODES against the WALL.

HECTOR

Goddamn it, Ruth!

Now, for the first time, we see her face. On the right side:

Her jaw is BLACK. A sick, MOTTLED BRUISE sucking on her skin.

From the race. She's hurt. And hungry.

RUTH

I need food.

HECTOR

Tell me what happened.

RUTH

Everything was fine. That dumb  
horse was good. Ready. Running  
clean, breath strong. But the jock  
next to me had a buzzer. And when  
he zapped his horse, my dumb horse  
went crazy.

HECTOR

The jock next to you.

RUTH

Yeah, the guy next to me.

HECTOR

*He had a buzzer --*

RUTH

What are you saying?

HECTOR

A horse doesn't react like that to  
a jolt next to him.

RUTH

This horse did.

She leaves the kitchen. Hector follows.

HECTOR  
Did you have one?

RUTH  
Maybe you gave him something? A  
little injection?

They're both moving fast now --

HECTOR  
Did you take a buzzer from someone?

RUTH  
Maybe the same shit you've been  
making me swallow?

Into the **LIVING ROOM**.

HECTOR  
Show me. Give me your wrist --

RUTH  
Don't touch me --

He GRABS her --

HECTOR  
Show me your --

Ruth YANKS free -- RUNS on the couch -- he CHASES her -- she KNOCKS over a lamp -- but he catches her -- his arms engulf her -- she FLAILS --

They fall to the ground. He PINS her down as she struggles --

RUTH  
This isn't working -- the plan --  
we aren't winning. We're just  
running the horses into the ground.

She's still KICKING and FLOPPING.

HECTOR  
You're running them into the  
ground. You treat them like a  
machine you just turn on -- Stop!

She doesn't.

RUTH  
Machines can be fixed when they're  
broken. I treat these horses like  
they are -- dumb and fickle --

There's venom in her voice.

RUTH

I hate them. I hate that I have to depend on these dumb, unreliable animals.

She GRUNTS and BUCKS Hector off her -- he falls back into the TV -- it CRASHES to the ground.

The room looks like a war zone.

Both on the floor, they find a small detente.

HECTOR

You're right. You're chained to them.

She's being naive and he's unmoved by her soliloquy.

HECTOR

Your fates are chained. And you can fight that as long as you want, but you will never win. You'll just end up broken down and slaughtered, just like that horse today --

RUTH

That's *Black Beauty* bullshit.

HECTOR

Maybe. But that horse didn't trust you. If he did, his stall wouldn't be empty right now.

RUTH

I did everything right. What am I supposed to do about a buzzer? It was out of my control --

HECTOR

You know nothing about control. Look at you.

RUTH

Look at me? Look at me?

She starts ripping off her clothes --

RUTH

Yes! Look at me! Look at me!

Her body is grotesquely small. Sinewy. Sickly.

She's covered in BRUISES and CUTS. But worst of all --

A HIDEOUS RASH SPECKLES HER STOMACH. From the diuretics.

RUTH

Look at me.

Hector does. She's almost naked. Just a bra and panties.

Everything is charged. Both of them, amped up.

They look at each other for a long, quiet moment. Then --

HECTOR

Get on your hands and knees.

She doesn't know what to say. His eyes stay on her.

HECTOR

Get on your hands and knees.

He's quiet. The words creeping out of him. And ...

She does it. She gets on her hands and knees.

He looks at her down on the floor, on all fours.

She looks up at him, hair falling in her eyes.

He leaves. We stay with Ruth.

We hear the screen door SQUEAK. Sweat DRIPS down her bruised face. Sweat BEADS on her back. It wets the edge of her underwear.

She BREATHES and waits. Then we hear the DOOR again. FOOTSTEPS. He stops in front of her. She doesn't look up.

HECTOR (O.S.)

I set the scale high. Over-calibrated it. Four pounds.

Anger. Immediate. Overwhelming. She can't believe it. But she doesn't move. There is freedom in this powerlessness.

Hector crouches down next to her.

HECTOR

You don't have to love these horses, you just need to make them feel like you do.

She can feel what he's doing. And we can see:

He's wrapping LEATHER SADDLE STRAPS around her body.

He TIGHTENS each strap around her torso. The leather CUTS into her skin. Erotic. Violent. Then --

The BRIDLE. Over her face.

Cold metal. Into her mouth. The BIT.

Hector stands up. Ruth is tacked up. Harnessed. Tightly.

HECTOR

Can you do this? Can you win?

Silence. Then, Ruth looks up at him, bit in her mouth --

RUTH

What about the whip?

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - PADDOCK - RACE NIGHT**

A RIDING WHIP dragged over the haunches of a white horse.

Ruth holds the crop, her hand tight on the shaft, drawing the LEATHER TONGUE over his skin, watching as his muscles QUIVER.

This is the fourth horse from their farm. Albino Al.

RUTH

(whisper)

Good boy.

It's night. The paddock is lit with truck HEADLIGHTS. Moths swarm and DINK into the bulbs.

A SHADOW crosses one of the lights. Hector. He's all business. There isn't a hint of what happened between them.

HECTOR

He's going to go hard right away.

Ruth straps on her helmet.

HECTOR

Don't let him. Hold him back until pole three. Then --

She puts her hand on the saddle. Close to Hector now.

HECTOR

Ask him for more -- he'll give you everything.

Leg up. There's a flicker of *something* as his fingers GRIP her calf, but neither of them says anything.

She starts to trot away --

HECTOR

Ruth --

(she looks back)

"Some trust in chariots, some in --

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (PRELAP)*

*These horses are flying!*

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - RACING**

Pole One FLIES by. Dirt CHOKES the air in a brown snowstorm.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*The pace is blazing --*

Pole Two. Two **HORSES** in front of Ruth and Al.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*We're at the third pole already --*

Pole three.

Ruth leans forward. Her legs squeeze. She extends the WHIP so her horse feels it. She's asking him.

And he answers.

Al accelerates -- CHARGING to the front of the field --

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*Albino Al grabs the win!*

Wide. The TRACK is lit up. A throbbing sore in the dark.

The Crowd CHEERS.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE**

FIZZING -- No corks here. Just **REDNECKS** cracking 40s.

Ruth's FILTHY from the race. The SPRAY of the poor man's champagne cuts lines through the dirt on her face.

The energy is raucous. Celebratory.

Pork Rowland SLAPS Hector on the back.

PORK ROWLAND  
Goddamn that horse hauled ass!

Hector SWIGS from a 40 and watches as Ruth does the same. Their eyes meet for a second and they share a small conspiratorial SMILE, but then --

An **OLD REDNECK** drapes a necklace of DANDELIONS around Ruth's neck, drawing her attention.

Hector's doesn't stray. His eyes are glued to Ruth.

He watches as Ruth KISSES the Old Redneck on the cheek with exaggerated gusto. Brash. Buoyant. Joyful.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - DRIVEWAY**

Pitch black. Then. Two dots of light, white pupils, growing bigger as they SWERVE closer and we realize:

It's Hector and Ruth. Driving home --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

Drunk.

Hector sways as he empties his pockets into the FORTUNE JAR:

Their winnings. There's a lot this time.

Ruth grabs the Jack Daniels and two cans of Cherry Coke.

CLUNK CLUNK -- on the table.

Hector reaches but Ruth moves them out of the way, before he can grab them.

RUTH  
The rules are simple.

She SHAKES the cans of soda.

RUTH  
We take a sip at the same time.  
Whoever holds it longest wins. If  
you spit or swallow --

Hector tries to ignore the innuendo. Unsuccessfully.

RUTH  
-- Take a drink.

She PLOPS the booze between them. He UNSCREWS it, while she opens the Cokes. Ready. And --

RUTH

Go --

Both of them take big swigs. They hold the FIZZY liquid in their mouths.

And wait. Looking at each other.

The sugar and CO<sub>2</sub> EATS their gums -- the inside of their cheeks -- their tongues.

They bite their lips. Their eyes dart. Neither one of them wants to lose, but --

FWHOOM -- Ruth's cheeks deflate, SPRAYING soda all over Hector. Now he loses it, too -- SPRAYING her. Both LAUGHING. Dripping and drunk. Then --

RUTH

I lost.

Silence. There's suggestion in her submission.

Somehow without either of them realizing, it became that part of the night where only bad things happen.

RUTH

I should go to sleep.

HECTOR

I should check on the horses.

For a long second neither of them moves.

**INT. BARN**

The horses are quiet.

Hector leans on the back wall of the barn. Trying to get ahold of himself but --

Ruth comes in.

She walks halfway to him, then stops. Wordless.

The horses NICKER.

Hector walks to her. He circles her. Very close. Close enough to gently touch her ass. A tap.

Then. He pulls up his chair. Sits. She fights the urge to back away.

He runs his hand up the inside of her leg and she naturally LIFTS it a little -- he WHISPERS --

HECTOR  
Good girl ...

Holding her leg between his, he unzips her BOOTS. Slowly. Unrolls her SOCKS. Deliberately.

He runs his fingers over the waist of her pants, then GRABS the front button. Undone. Pants off.

She is wearing just her racing vest and cotton underwear.

He massages up her bare legs. Very close to her crotch, her ass. His fingers edge around the seam of her panties.

Suddenly, he turns her around -- pulls her down onto his lap and slips his fingers inside her.

She is not quiet. He COVERS her mouth with his free hand.

HECTOR  
Get on the ground.

Ruth crawls onto the barn floor -- all fours again.

She waits. Eyes glassy from the drinking and the night and --  
CRACK. The leather of a RIDING CROP cuts into her ass.

CRACK. CRACK.

A PINK WELT blooms on her skin.

Hector drops the crop. He kneels behind her.

Spits in his hand.

Pushes her underwear to the side.

Grabs her HAIR.

Pulls her head back. Pulls her body back.

Fucks her.

When its over they both collapse onto the hay-covered floor. Him, half on top of her. Her, cheek in the hay. Both --

BREATHING. Quietly. In and out.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING**

Morning sun. The horses play in the field. Happy, but TWITCHING -- trying to escape the FLIES.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

A BRAND. A burn long since healed, leaving behind smooth, raised skin. Initials -- letters intertwined:

GS. The same insignia as the sign on the barn. Gold Stables.

The scar is on Ruth's palm.

She's sitting next to Diana's bed. The ventilator WHEEZES. She picks up Diana's limp left hand:

The same brand is on Diana.

Ruth presses her hand into Diana's. There's a flicker between them that we haven't seen since they were girls, racing in the field.

Hector comes in --

HECTOR  
Oh -- I'm sorry -- I --

He's caught off guard -- Ruth is never in there. She's equally embarrassed. As if she was doing something wrong.

RUTH  
I was just --

HECTOR  
I'll come back.

He quickly shuts the door.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

Hector sits at the table. He's counting the MONEY from the Fortune Jar.

Ruth comes in. Sits across from him. Neither says anything, then --

RUTH  
Is that how you fucked her?

A crack of insecurity. A little feeling seeping out.

HECTOR  
No -- I never ... No.

He takes Ruth's hand. There is something real here.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - ANOTHER DAY**

Ruth grips the SADDLE POMMEL and mounts Al.

She squeezes her thighs -- the horse GOES.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Ruth walks back toward the farmhouse. Sweaty and dirty from her ride.

She sees Hector standing on the porch and stops.

They look at each other.

**EXT. BARN - DAY**

Al is tied outside the barn. Muddy. Dusty. Sweating.

**INT/EXT VARIOUS LOCATIONS - SERIES OF SHOTS**

- Ruth TROTS on Albino Al.
- Outside. Hector UNDRESSES Ruth until she is naked.
- Sponge LATHERING. Ruth BATHES Al.
- Hector WASHES Ruth's body. Delicately. Carefully.
- Ruth CANTERS on Al.
- Ruth BRUSHES Al.
- Hector BRUSHES Ruth's hair.
- Ruth GALLOPS on Al. Fast.
- Ruth SADDLES Al.
- Hector WRAPS leather straps all around Ruth's naked body.
- Now at the Bush Track, Ruth RACES on Al. Faster.
- Money added to the Fortune Jar.

- Ruth is completely TRUSSED in leather straps -- around her body, hands behind her back, between her legs. Hector WRAPS a strap around her NECK.
- Racing. Flying.
- More money added to the Jar.
- Hector TIGHTENS the strap around Ruth's neck as he fucks her. She GASPS --
- Ruth and Al cross the finish line, WIN.
- Hector RELEASES Ruth's neck strap. She GULPS air, face flush. He's out of breath too, BITING into her shoulder.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

More MONEY into the the Fortune Jar. It's almost full with winnings. Hector looks to Ruth.

HECTOR  
It's time for you to meet him.

**EXT. DOANE ESTATE - DRIVING - NIGHT**

The grand entrance to Doane Farm. The grand house. The grand pastures. Shining in the night with perfect artificial light.

Hector's truck twists through, a rusty blight.

Ruth gawks out the window with a mix of desire and disbelief.

**INT. DOANE ESTATE - INDOOR PADDOCK**

A grand indoor training arena. Vaulted beamed ceiling.

**STABLE HANDS** put the **THOROUGHBREDS** through their paces.

And there, at the center, the reason they're there:

The sorrel horse, Materlac.

The horse trots with the confidence of a king.

Ruth and Hector approach. There's a thick blanket of cicada CHIRPING, seeping in from outside.

Hector WHISTLES -- the horse PRANCES to them.

Ruth steps to the horse. Regards him. Looks him in the eye.

Hector moves closer to her, lightly touches her back --

VICKI (O.C.)  
Careful -- he likes to bite.

Vicki. Hector reflexively drops his hand away from Ruth.

VICKI  
Carlos told me he saw you. I was  
just over in the box -- you  
should've told me you coming, I  
would've been here sooner.

Stepford smile. Hector introduces Ruth.

HECTOR  
This is my jock --

Vicki swivels from Hector to Ruth. Still smiling.

VICKI  
What do you think? You like him?

It's unclear if she's talking about Hector or the horse ...

RUTH  
Looks like a champion, ma'am.

VICKI  
His dam was. Transferred her with a  
gelding -- somehow ended up with a  
big mistake.

RUTH  
Heinz 57 blood. Like me.

Vicki smiles again. But she's done. Uninterested in Ruth.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - ANOTHER DAY**

A RAZOR BLADE. A basin of water. A bar of soap.

Ruth places each of them on table. Looks at Hector.

RUTH  
Tomorrow's race day.

Hector picks up the RAZOR.

**CUT TO:**

Hector DRAGS the razor up the inside of Ruth's thigh.

She's naked again.

He SHAVES her -- delicate, careful. STROKE after STROKE. Over and over and --

A rivulet of BLOOD trickles down her skin.

She looks at him. He wipes it and sucks it off his thumb.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*The field is tight --*

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - RACING**

Ruth RACES on Al.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Albino Al in the lead -- Looks like*  
*another easy win for the white*  
*stallion!*

They're in first, by a few lengths. Pole three FLIES by --

Ruth LEANS forward, touches her CROP to the horse's haunch and their pace QUICKENS, but as time slows down:

A DROP OF BLOOD flies through the air, lands on Ruth's HAND.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - PADDOCK - POST-RACE**

A drop of BLOOD on Ruth's hand.

Post-race. Ruth sits hunched over. Face sweaty. Anxious.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Wait, something's happening --*

She glances over to Hector. He's nearby talking to a VET, a STETHOSCOPE around her neck, taking off rubber gloves.

*BUSH TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Albino Al is falling behind --*

The Vet shakes hands with Hector and walks away.

Hector turns to Ruth.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - RACING - FLASHBACK - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

*Still slow motion. Ruth and Al still racing, but the other horses are PASSING them and then --*

MORE BLOOD flies from the horse's nostrils, SPLATTERING Ruth.

**EXT. BUSH TRACK - PADDOCK - POST-RACE - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Ruth stands up and now we see, she's right next to Al and:

Both she and the white horse are SPLATTERED IN BLOOD.

Hector joins them.

HECTOR

He's done.

Matter of fact. He starts unhitching Al.

RUTH

What do you mean?

HECTOR

I mean. We race him again and he dies.

Hector leads the horse to the trailer.

Ruth's left behind in disbelief.

**INT. BARN - LATER THAT NIGHT**

Hector leads Al into his stall. He fills a bucket, starts to clean the blood caked on the horse's nostrils --

RUTH (O.C.)

I'll do it.

Ruth's there. She takes the sponge from him.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

Hector slips a soup STRAW into Diana's mouth.

Diana's lips are CHAPPED. Hector watches them QUIVER around the plastic like peeling slugs.

HECTOR

We raced today.

Soup SEEPS out of Diana's mouth. Hector WIPES it.

HECTOR

I'm ... I know I've been gone a lot. I know it's -- I'm sorry.

Diana SPITS out more. She is clearly doing this on purpose.

Hector looks at his wife, soup LEAKING down her chin. Unable to speak or move, Diana has still ended their conversation.

**INT. BARN - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Water streams down Al's muzzle as Ruth delicately cleans the horse, hair turning pink as the blood washes out.

She looks at the horse and then, touches him, laying her hand on him, gently. Then she leaves him.

Walks to the next stall and their last horse: **HORSE #5.**

We hear TICKING ...

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DAY**

Horse #5 and Ruth FLY down the field. Hector's timing them.

CLICK. He stops the clock.

Ruth trots back to him. He shakes his head. *Not fast enough.*

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

The Fortune Jar is empty.

HECTOR

We're under. By more than a little.

Their Winnings are counted in neat piles in front of him.

HECTOR

We needed another win.

Ruth looks out the window. The horses are in the corral --

RUTH

Al's the only one fast enough.

Including Al. The white horse trots happily. Oblivious.

RUTH

What're we going to do?

She shifts her gaze to Hector.

## INT. DOANE ESTATE - DINING ROOM

A dinner party. Vicki's at one end of the table in pink pintuck. Jack's at the head. He's in the middle of a story.

JACK

We tracked for three days straight,  
eating berries and bugs -- sleeping  
in the mud -- and finally, on the  
fourth day, we find him.

Their **GUESTS** listen rapturously. Sip their wine. Chew their meat. All carbon copies of each other.

JACK

Big bull. Antlers at least six feet  
across -- my rifle's loaded and I'm  
ready to take this monster down.

The doorbell RINGS. A **MAID** shuffles by.

JACK

And then, out of nowhere, this  
Indian shows up. Says moose are  
"protected" for the Natives and we  
white men can't shoot him.

Moments later, the Maid flits by again, leading Hector.

GUEST

So what'd you do?

Jack's eyes follow them, but he finishes his story --

JACK

Shot the Indian, of course.

Dead pan. LAUGHTER erupts all around.

Jack stays serious, watching Hector disappear down the hall.

## INT. DOANE ESTATE - JACK'S OFFICE

Hector paces. Vicki comes in --

HECTOR

I'm interrupting --

VICKI

How will I live, not hearing about  
Jack's moose hunt for the hundredth  
time?

Slick with sarcasm. She pours whiskey.

VICKI  
Can I get you a drink?

HECTOR  
No, I'm --

She hands him a drink anyway, then sits down at Jack's desk.

VICKI  
It does feel dramatic coming here  
unannounced. At night, no less.

He takes a seat across the desk from her. Then --

HECTOR  
I need to talk to you about  
Materlac. About the price.

VICKI  
We agreed on a number.

HECTOR  
I know. I'm short. I don't have  
enough ...

She sips. Says nothing. He continues --

HECTOR  
I'll give you everything I have.  
And when we win, first race -- I'll  
pay the gap with juice.

VICKI  
That's gambler talk.

HECTOR  
We can deduct Amy's lessons.

Pennies. A drop in the bucket. And he knows it.

She stares at him for a long time. Sips again. Considers.  
Then scribbles on a piece of paper.

VICKI  
New price.

She slides the paper to him. He opens it and reads:

*I want to watch you come.*

For a second, he stares at the words. As if staring will make  
them change into something else ...

Then he folds the paper back up, puts it back on the desk.  
And raises his eyes to hers.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM - NIGHT**

The middle of the night. Ruth is sleeping.  
CRASH. Loud enough to wake her. And then again: CRASH.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

Ruth looks into her sister's room. Diana's asleep -- her ventilator WHEEZING --

More CLATTERING. Downstairs. Someone is in the house.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - TRACKING**

Moving slowly down the stairs, Ruth can see the SCREEN DOOR hanging, RIPPED from the hinges.

Night is right there.

She moves through the dark house. There is a RYTHMIC INDISTINCT SOUND.

It grows louder as she approaches the **KITCHEN**.

Food SPLATTERED. Dishes BROKEN. Bottle of Jack SHATTERED.

But now Ruth realizes the sound she heard is BREATHING:

Albino Al is standing there in the kitchen.

His white, muscular body towers in the small space.

The horse looks at Ruth. And nothing feels OK.

**INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS**

Ruth leads Al back into his stall. The other horses are agitated, SNORTING.

She sees the chair where Hector usually sleeps is empty.

RUTH  
OK, OK -- fine.

She settles into Hector's chair.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY**

Ruth's on her hands and knees cleaning up the mess Al made the night before.

Hector comes in. He seems like he's carrying a heavy weight.

Ruth stops cleaning. Hector's quiet, then --

HECTOR  
We got the horse.

She jumps up, knocking over her bucket of water --

RUTH  
We got the horse?!

Her excitement is pure and overwhelming and makes everything else disappear --

HECTOR  
We got the horse.

She throws her arms around him and they both slip on the spilled water --

**INT. JADE TEMPLE CHINESE RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

Beer SLOSHES as glasses CLINK together.

RUTH  
To Materlac --

HECTOR  
To Albino Al --

The Chinese cover of Pat Benatar's "We Belong" is playing.

RUTH  
L'chaim --

HECTOR  
Slainte --

The table is covered in the remnants of a celebration. Ruth and Hector are both full and drunk.

This is the JADE TEMPLE. A "fancy" Chinese restaurant replete with red arches and paper lanterns.

Other than them and the **STAFF** who clearly own and run it, the place is empty.

A **WAITRESS** brings the CHECK and a couple of FORTUNE COOKIES.

Hector CRACKS open his cookie, pulls out his fortune --

RUTH

No!

Real panic in her voice.

RUTH

If you read the fortune before you  
eat the cookie, it won't come true.

HECTOR

You're serious.

Very serious. Hector can't hold back his amusement.

HECTOR

OK, OK.

Both of them dutifully CRUNCH their cookies in silence. Then with great fanfare, Ruth opens and reads hers aloud.

RUTH

"Sometimes winning means coming  
second."

Her face falls. Hector can't hold back his amusement.

RUTH

This isn't funny.

She may actually be upset here. Or pissed. Or both.

HECTOR

It doesn't mean anything. It was  
printed in some factory in Hong  
Kong.

RUTH

And I opened it. It traveled around  
the entire world just to be my  
fortune.

HECTOR

Read it again. Come on.

RUTH

"Sometimes winning means coming  
second --"

HECTOR

In bed.

He smiles at her. Goofy and endearing and --

**INT. JADE TEMPLE CHINESE RESTAURANT - BATHROOM**

Ruth's legs are WRAPPED around Hector's face. She's sitting on the bathroom sink while he devours her.

Mandarin Pat Benatar is still BLARING.

She PULLS him up to her mouth by his HAIR, while he fumbles with his zipper and starts to FUCK her.

It is extremely physical. Like he's trying to split her in half and --

RUTH  
Don't stop, don't stop --

They CRACK the bathroom mirror.

**INT. JADE TEMPLE CHINESE RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM**

Ruth and Hector come out of the bathroom. The Staff exchanges awkward looks. There is no doubt what was going on.

They head straight to the door. On the way, Hector tosses a couple bills on the check and grabs his FORTUNE.

HECTOR (PRELAP)  
Why California?

**INT. HECTOR'S TRUCK - DRIVING**

Driving down the long gravel driveway back to the farmhouse. Woods on both sides.

RUTH  
I don't know, you know, it always seemed so far away, it might as well be the moon. But then one summer, well, you know our dad was a real piece of shit degenerate --

HECTOR  
Some might call it a gambling problem ...

RUTH  
Yeah and when we were kids the "gambling problem" brought us to the track every weekend.  
(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)  
And in summer, when school was out,  
we were there with him every day.

Hector's at the wheel. Ruth next to him.

RUTH  
Diana and I would get bored and hot  
and we'd wander to the barns to  
look at the horses. And one summer  
there was a jock, Ricky the Spic-y,  
who had just come from Santa Anita.

She shifts a little, remembering.

RUTH  
Ricky said it smelled like oranges  
during the day and jasmine at night  
so you never even smell the horse  
shit. Palm trees along the  
backstretch. Mountains cradling the  
whole thing.

The memory seeps from her. The warmth when the dream was  
born, still there.

RUTH  
He said it was the edge of the  
earth, the edge of everything. And  
in the twenty years since then,  
I've never heard of any place that  
sounds better.

HECTOR  
Come here --

She scoots toward him. He puts his arm around her, pulling  
her close to him. He kisses her head. Her fingers weave  
through his -- intimate and full of love. But then --

HECTOR  
Do you see that -- ?

There something in the distance, a FLICKERING light.

RUTH  
What is that ... ?

Growing bigger as it gets closer --

Until it's clear:

FLAMES running straight toward them -- A HORSE ON FIRE.

**EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS**

Flames WHIP sparks into the night.

Their barn is burning.

Engulfed in fire, agitated by the hot summer wind. It's clearly already too far gone, beyond saving, but --

Hector runs to get water from the spigot. He yells to Ruth --

HECTOR  
Get help! Call someone!

He fills a small bucket -- David vs burning Goliath.

RUTH  
Stop, stop -- it's too late --

HECTOR  
Ruth, go!

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS**

Ruth bursts into the house. She goes into the kitchen, toward the phone, but then -- she hears it ... a familiar BEEPING:

The ALARM on Diana's ventilator.

**EXT. BARN - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Hector dumps water -- throwing it on the flames.

His efforts are obviously futile. Nonetheless, he heads back to the spigot. But before he gets there, he sees:

Stuck to a pole on the front porch -- FLAPPING in the wind:

A familiar piece of paper. Vicki's note.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

The BEEPING grows louder as Ruth approaches Diana's room.

She sees immediately as she walks in the door:

Her sister's hand hangs limply off the bed.

The breathing tube lays disconnected on the floor.

**EXT. BARN - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Hector rips down the PAPER.

He knows what it is before he opens it, but he reads it anyway. As he realizes what happened, who burned the barn --

RUTH (O.C.)  
Hector ...

He looks up and sees Ruth standing there.

The wind BLOWS her hair into her face, but she doesn't push it away. It's hard for her to talk. She doesn't know which words to use --

RUTH  
Diana ... She must have seen the  
fire ... the horses --

She doesn't need to say more. Hector's already moving into the house.

He drops the paper as he leaves. Ruth sees it flutter to the ground.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

Hector slows as he crosses the threshold into Diana's room.

The ventilator alarm is still BEEPING. He sleepwalks to the machine and turns it off. Then, he turns to the bed.

He looks down at her and it feels like he can't breath.

The gold of her wedding band catches light from the barn fire that still rages outside the window.

He picks up her hand and falls to his knees.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Ruth picks up the paper and sits on the porch steps.

We see Vicki's handwriting.

Her fingers tremble as she finishes reading. As the words sink in, the dots connect, she stares at the burning barn.

DAD (PRELAP)  
Get up --

**EXT. FIELD - DAY - FLASHBACK - CONTINUED FROM OPENING**

*Right after ten year old Ruth fell off her horse while racing twelve year old Diana.*

*Blood and mud drips down young Ruth's face.*

*Her dad stands over her.*

*DAD*

*Get up.*

*Young Diana runs over and joins them. She tries to go to Ruth, but their dad holds her back.*

*DAD*

*Your sister's fine.*

*Ruth looks up at him.*

*YOUNG RUTH*

*My arm hurts. I --*

*DAD*

*You stand on your legs.*

*She tries to protest but BLOOD gurgles from her tiny mouth.*

*Now, Diana pulls free from their dad and goes to Ruth. She holds her sister, wiping the blood, WHISPERING to her --*

*YOUNG DIANA*

*You're OK, Ruthie. You're OK --*

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING**

Grey morning sun. The **CORONER** closes the doors to his van.

*YOUNG DIANA (VO)*

*You're OK.*

Ruth still sits on the porch.

As the van pulls away, she sees behind it, standing amidst the rubble of the burned barn, somehow still alive:

Albino Al.

**CUT TO:**

Al stands in the ruins of his stall. His coat, his mane is gray with soot. Ruth gently approaches him.

RUTH

Come here, come here, boy --

She sees a few burn patches on his body.

RUTH

Come on, let's get you out of here.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth runs water into a bucket, soaks a sponge. She strokes the soot, revealing streaks of the horse's white coat.

She moves to his nose. He has a raw burn on his muzzle. She touches him tenderly, looking into his eyes.

She starts to cry.

It's unexpected and intense. Her body heaves.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Hector's in Diana's bed. He sees Ruth outside, collapsed next to Al.

Tears leak from his eyes.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER**

Al, now clean, is tied to the front porch.

**EXT. BARN RUINS**

Ruth has a bandana tied around her face, to mask the smell.

Flies already SWARM the remains of the other horses. It's mostly bones. Hooves. Some hide.

She throws down a tarp.

**EXT. FIELD**

Ruth rides Al slowly through the field. They are dragging the tarp of horse remains behind them.

**EXT. FARM - HORSE "GRAVEYARD"**

Ruth finishes burying the horses. She nails THREE HORSESHOES into the ground as markers.

She crouches on the ground and wipes the sweat and dirt off her face with her bandana.

Al nuzzles her. She touches his nose.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - UPSTAIRS - TRACKING TO DIANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Ruth finds Hector still lying in Diana's bed.

She hovers in the door. She doesn't know what to do, where to go, if she's allowed to touch him, if she's even allowed near him.

RUTH

Al's alive.

There are dark circles under Hector's eyes.

RUTH

The others are gone.

He doesn't respond.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM**

Ruth gets into bed. She's by herself. There's a photo of her and Diana as kids, next to her bed.

She turns off the light.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING**

Ruth feeds Al.

RUTH

OK, just a little more --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM**

Hector's still in Diana's bed. Ruth stays in the door.

RUTH

Can I bring you something to eat?

HECTOR

No.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE**

Ruth jerryrigs a makeshift shelter for Al.

**CUT TO:**

Ruth ties Al to the porch, under the new shelter, then sits on the stairs near him.

She starts crying a little. The horse looks at her.

RUTH  
My sister died.

Al doesn't care. He paws at the ground with his front hooves.

**EXT. FIELD / CORRAL - LATER**

Al runs in the field.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

Al's tied under his shelter.

Ruth's curled up on the porch swing, asleep.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DIANA'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING**

Morning light seeps in the window.

Hector's awake. Still wearing the clothes from the Chinese food celebration, the night Diana died ...

This time Ruth doesn't stay at the door. She climbs into bed and wraps her arms around him.

HECTOR  
Stop ...

He WHISPERS, barely able to speak.

HECTOR  
Please leave.

He tries to pull away from her.

HECTOR  
Please --

She pulls him back toward her, wrapping her body around his. They lie there together. The breeze BILLOWS the curtains --

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - DAY**

Colorful BUNTING festoons the grandstands.

A BANNER unfurls that reads: *A Midsummer Day's Derby*.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTANDS**

Ruth SLUMPS in the STANDS. She sips a beer in a paper bag and watches the morning work-outs.

Steven and Mallory are at the fence. Watching War on Drugs. But then -- Steven notices Ruth.

She quickly takes a last swig of beer and gets up.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - UNDER THE STANDS**

Ruth's leaving. But --

STEVEN (O.S.)  
Hey! Ruth -- hey!

Steven jogs up behind her. She doesn't stop walking.

STEVEN  
I just wanted to say -- I heard  
about your sister. Ruth, Jesus --  
can you just hold up?

He grabs her arm, makes her stop.

STEVEN  
Diana was a damn good jumper. I was  
sorry to hear.

RUTH  
She died when that horse threw her.  
Two years ago. This was overdue.

Seemingly cold. But she doesn't want his sympathy. Steven's not sure what to say. Ruth starts to walk away again --

STEVEN  
You can come back to work.

His words stop her. She turns around.

STEVEN  
Things shouldn't have gone down  
like they did... I talked to  
Mallory.  
(MORE)

STEVEN (CONT'D)

You can start back as an exercise rider. And if you work hard, I think, in a few months, I think you'll have a good shot at a race.

Ruth takes this in.

STEVEN

Be here Monday after the Derby and I'll get you on a mount. You're coming to the Derby, right?

(...)

Think about it.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - DRIVEWAY**

Ruth arrives back home.

She stares at Al, harnessed to the porch.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

Hector sits at the table. Glassy-eyed. Still wearing his Chinese food clothes.

There's a near empty bottle of Jack that says the glass in front of him is not his first.

RUTH

I want to show you something.

He looks up to see her standing in the door. She entreats.

RUTH

Please come with me. Please.

**EXT. FIELD - HORSE "GRAVEYARD"**

The far edge of the field. Ruth and Hector walking.

RUTH

Diana and I each had a horse growing up. Dad won them in the years when winning still happened now and then. He had this dream of his own stables ... Those were the good years, when he was infected by this manic, compulsive optimism.

HECTOR

The good years --

RUTH

Yeah.

HECTOR

The good years when he branded you  
two ...

RUTH

Yes.

She glances at the brand on her palm.

RUTH

Then came the bad years. He started  
to lose. All the time. Never a win.  
We ate cereal every meal for two  
years straight.

They pass the HORSESHOES Ruth used to mark the horse graves  
from the barn fire.

RUTH

Rock bottom -- he made Diana and I  
race each other. We did it all the  
time, but this time was different.  
It was storming like Noah's flood  
and he still made us come out here.  
He told us the stakes before ... he  
didn't even hide it --

Matter of fact.

RUTH

Winner keeps their horse. Loser's  
get sold for dog food.

She stops walking.

RUTH

I fell during the race. I broke my  
arm. A couple of ribs.

Looks down at the ground --

RUTH

Diana tried to protect me. She told  
him to take her horse instead, he  
was already old.

Nestled in the grass is a RUSTY HORSESHOE. It's painted in a  
child's handwriting: *Moonbeam*.

**EXT. FIELD - DAY - FLASHBACK - CONTINUED FROM OPENING**

*Post-race. Diana is crouched with Ruth on the ground.*

*It's raining hard.*

*The two little girls watch as their dad goes up to Diana's roan horse, Moonbeam, and SHOOTS the horse in the head.*

*Then, without hesitation, he goes up to Ruth's black horse, Midnight, and does the same.*

*The dead horse FALLS to the wet grass. Ruth runs to it.*

**EXT. FIELD - "GRAVEYARD" - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Another RUSTY OLD HORSESHOE: *Midnight.*

RUTH

The track ate our Dad. It made him  
the worst version of himself.

Ruth's even, despite the horrible memory.

RUTH

And then it ate Diana.

Hector shifts. She looks at him.

RUTH

I'm not letting it eat us.

Full of resolve.

RUTH

I want to race Al. In the Derby.

Hector's floored by the absurdity of her suggestion.

HECTOR

What are you -- Al can't race  
anymore, Ruth.

RUTH

He can do this, I know he can.

HECTOR

He will break down. He will die.  
And he will take you with him.

RUTH

You'll give him a shot of Salix to  
push him through. It's one race.

HECTOR  
Spoken like your father's daughter.

RUTH  
That's who I am. That's who we both are --

HECTOR  
Ruth. It's over.

RUTH  
-- Track rats. *Backstretchers*.  
Poor, desperate, horse people. You said it yourself -- we're chained to it. No real education. No skills. No future aside from these dumb beasts.

She's right and he knows it.

RUTH  
Making these horses into winners so someone else can cross the finish line. Giving birthday pony rides for spoiled brats. I can't do it any more. I can't. We'll never catch up like this. We're not even on the same track.

She's impassioned, but grounded. Honest.

RUTH  
We have to take this chance if we want to win.

Hector's astounded at Ruth's audacity.

HECTOR  
Your sister is dead because of me --

RUTH  
Her tube got caught --

HECTOR  
-- because of what we were doing, trying to chase this --

RUTH  
You didn't burn that barn, Vicki's husband did.

HECTOR  
Ruth! Because of what I did with his wife!

His outburst silences her for a second. Then quietly --

RUTH

You paid the price they set. They used you.

Plain and simple. Strong.

RUTH

We have to try. This isn't about the money anymore. It's about breaking free.

She looks at him.

RUTH

Maybe we are bad people. But we are good together.

Hector can't handle any of this.

He looks at her then walks away, leaving her alone in the field.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT**

The middle of the night. Ruth's awake in her bed.

She stares at her childhood horse paraphernalia:

Medals and ribbons. A small helmet. Old boots.

A riding crop.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS**

Moonlight in the windows. Hector asleep on the couch.

Ruth approaches. He stirs from her presence.

Without speaking, she extends the riding crop to him.

They're staring at each other, crop between them, then --

He slides his hand around the handle.

She gets on the ground. On all fours.

THWACK. He WHIPS her with the crop.

THWACK. THWACK. Again. Again. Ruth CRIES OUT --

Her pain unleashes him.

Hector GRABS her -- lifting her up by her WAISTBAND -- her panties TEAR.

He RIPS them more, exposing her skin -- her ass. She's flat on the ground. She rises back on her knees --

He WHIPS her. She collapses back down.

He WHIPS her again -- over and over. Violent. Intense.

She shoves her hand underneath her body. THWACK --

Wincing, but turned on. Touching herself. THWACK --

THWACK! THWACK! THWACK --

She breathes heavily. Her skin is RED -- starting to split --

She CRIES OUT and MOANS, finishing.

Hector stops whipping. He crumples next to her. Cradles her.

They both look hollowed out. But they cleave to each other.

**INT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH - MASS**

A **PRIEST** stands at the **ALTAR** in front of the **CONGREGATION**.

**PRIEST**

Let us also pray for our local jockeys as they prepare to race in the Derby this coming week. May the Holy Spirit carry them with skill and safety to the finish line --

**CONGREGANTS**

Lord, hear our prayer.

**DEACONS** gather at the end of the PEWS.

**PRIEST**

My dear brothers and sisters, as we prepare to offer our gifts to God, let us also remember the words of Paul the apostle --

They pass out DONATION BASKETS.

PRIEST

"Each man must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver --"

Everyone empties their pockets into the money baskets.

HECTOR (PRELAP)  
I need your help.

COINS. ONES. FIVES. TENS --

**INT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH - BASEMENT**

Hector sits across from O'Shea. Ruth's next to him.

O'SHEA  
Boyo, I already told you, no favors.

Hector puts a pile of MONEY on the table.

O'Shea leans in. Now he's listening.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - RACING OFFICE**

DERBY PAPERWORK. Hector fills it out, then slides it to the **RACING SECRETARY**.

The Secretary reviews the documents. Hector glances at Ruth.

RACING SECRETARY  
It looks like we're missing your registration form, your horse's breeding history --

HECTOR  
I believe, uh, Mr. O'Shea was taking care of that for us.

The Secretary shifts at the mention of O'Shea. She exchanges a glance with the **RACE STEWARD**.

**CUT TO:**

**CHURCH BASEMENT.** Hector pushes the MONEY toward O'Shea.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - RACING OFFICE - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

The Race Steward nods. The Secretary STAMPS their paperwork.

**CUT TO:**

**CHURCH BASEMENT.** Hector counts out another pile of MONEY.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Hector and Ruth watch as a **VET** finishes examining Albino Al.

The Vet takes off his stethoscope and approaches them.

**VET**

This horse should not race. He has signs of extensive damage and scarring in his lung tissue, due to progressive pulmonary hemorrhaging. The probability that this ends with him breaking down in a catastrophic event is extremely high.

His tone is extremely grave.

**VET**

It is dangerous and completely unsafe to the animal, to your rider, the other riders. It is unethical --

Hector cuts him off.

**HECTOR**

Thank you. I believe Mr. O'Shea handled your fee?

**CUT TO:**

**CHURCH BASEMENT.** Hector pushes the second pile of MONEY toward O'Shea.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

Hector extends his hand to the VET.

**HECTOR**

When can we expect the clearance certificate?

The Vet walks away without shaking Hector's hand.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - RACING OFFICE - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

The Racing Secretary pushes a final FORM to Hector and Ruth.

RACING SECRETARY  
Sign here --

*I, the undersigned Owner acknowledge that horse racing is a dangerous activity that involves inherent risk of injury or death to both horse and rider ...*

Hector looks Ruth. He puts the pen to the paper --

**INT. HORSE TRACK - JOCKEY ROOM**

The Race Steward leads Ruth to the JOCKEY ROOM.

STEWARD  
You can take number eight --

He hands her MASKING TAPE and a PEN. Ruth enters --

She walks through the sea of half-dressed **JOCKEYS**, familiar faces and dicks. All the men's eyes on her.

Some grab themselves. Some SNIDE COMMENTS. She doesn't care.  
She slaps the tape on locker eight and CLICKS the pen.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNS**

Hector and Ruth, leading Albino Al, follow a STEWARD through the BACKSTRETCH BARNS.

They follow a **STEWARD**. He stops before a stall.

STEWARD  
You'll board here through the  
Derby.

He hovers by a chalkboard outside the stall.

STEWARD	Pony name?	HECTOR
RUTH		HECTOR
Albino Al --		Virgin Birth.

The Steward's confused. Hector looks at Ruth, then covers --

HECTOR  
Registered name, Virgin Birth.

**INT. SERIES OF SHOTS - CONTINUED FROM ABOVE**

- Hector SIGNS the liability waiver: *Hector Morgan*.
- Ruth WRITES her name on her locker: *Ruth Gold*.
- The Steward CHALKS Al's new racing name: *Virgin Birth*.

**INT. ST. MARY'S CHURCH - BASEMENT**

Hector counts out a third pile of MONEY. The biggest yet.

O'SHEA  
What's this?

HECTOR  
Post position.

He pushes the money toward O'Shea.

HECTOR  
We want a middle draw. 3, 4, 5 --

O'Shea exhales. Considers the ask, the pile of money. Then --

O'SHEA  
Boyo. Even I can't help with that.

He pushes the third pile of money back toward Hector.

O'SHEA  
That's up to the racing gods.

O'Shea gets up, starts to walk away, then --

O'SHEA  
I'll give you a tip. I love ponies,  
but took me my whole life and at  
least two wives to figure out the  
key to winning with them.

HECTOR  
And what might that be?

O'SHEA  
Only bet on a sure thing.

He winks at Ruth.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - POST-POSITION DRAW - ANOTHER DAY**

An uninspiring room. Nonetheless filled with energy.

**OWNERS, TRAINERS, JOCKEYS** all gathered to see what position their horse will run. Among them:

Mallory and Steven. O'Shea. Vicki and Jack.

Ruth and Hector.

There's a large BOARD with the STARTING GATE NUMBERS. We're in the middle of this -- some horse positions have already been drawn, including Vicky and Jack's: #4. A very good draw.

A **RACE STEWARD** reads from a form.

RACE STEWARD  
*Horse, War on Drugs. Owner, Mallory Hoffman. Trainer, Steven Faust. Jockey, Marco Medina.*  
 (DICE ROLLED)  
 Number 6.

Mallory EMBRACES Steven. This is a good position.

RACE STEWARD  
*Horse, Virgin Birth. Owner and Trainer, Hector Morgan. Jockey, Ruth Gold.*  
 (DICE ROLLED)  
 Number 11.

This is the worst starting position. Ruth looks at Hector, panic creeping in --

HECTOR (PRELAP)  
 It's just a gate.

The Steward SLAPS their marker on the OUTERMOST GATE.

#### **INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

THE SILVER HORSE MONOPOLY GAME PIECE. Hector places it at the very end of a row of Monopoly pieces and jelly beans.

HECTOR  
 A shitty one, yes. Yes, you'll have to make up ground from the start, but --

OVERTURNED CASSEROLE DISHES on the kitchen table emulate the horse track.

HECTOR  
 You can use it -- it'll let you set your own pace.

Ruth listens. Hector moves the game pieces to the first turn.  
The HORSE piece is at the back of the pack.

HECTOR

No matter how clean your break is,  
 you're going to be at the back.  
 Don't let Al panic. Hold him, but  
 start gaining ground at the  
 clubhouse --

Pieces moved again -- to the backstretch.

HECTOR

There are ten other horses in this  
 race. The only ones that matter  
 are:

The SHOE.

HECTOR

O'Shea's mount, *Pilgrimage*.

The WHEELBARROW.

HECTOR

*Smell the Roses.* A white-socked  
 very strong chestnut outta Findlay.

The TOP HAT.

HECTOR

Vicki and Jack's --

He chokes on their names, but rights himself.

HECTOR

*Triumph of Wilhelm Tell.* White star  
 right between his eyes. Sired by  
 champions, but still looking for  
 his first win.

He picks up the CANON game piece.

HECTOR

And the favorite, courtesy of your  
 former boss -- *War on Drugs*.

Hector removes the six remaining jelly beans.

HECTOR

The others will start to burn out  
 on the backstretch.

(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You need to be fully in the pack by  
then -- You're going to feel like  
you're strapped to a freight train  
made of flesh.

HORSE piece moved to middle of the pack. CANON to the front.

HECTOR

This is where War on Drugs will  
make his move. And if he manages to  
get out clear, he's strong enough  
to stay there.

Then, the WHEELBARROW.

HECTOR

Smell the Roses will try to hold  
him.

Final turn. He moves the TOP HAT forward next to the HORSE.

HECTOR

Triumph will challenge for the  
lead. He's your late worry. You'll  
be head to head with him, pushing  
on War.

Home stretch.

HECTOR

Find the opening. It'll be there.

HORSE piece moved to the inside.

HECTOR

Hug the rail home.

Ruth SLIDES the HORSE across the finish line.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - THE ODDS CLUB - NIGHT**

The door SLIDES open to THE ODDS CLUB. The scene of the  
bloody tampon crime that got Ruth kicked out of the track.  
But now the lights are dim and moody and the place is packed.

It's a party. A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DERBY PARTY:

Ivy. Fairy lights. Floral crowns. Horns.

All eyes turn towards us as we move through the CROWD:

Hector and Ruth.

It's not just their clothes, which seemed nice at home but here amidst the puffy dresses and shiny shoes, feel ordinary.

It's everything. Their presence. Their very existence.

They settle at a cocktail table.

The stares have drifted into the thick smoke and now they have the opposite problem --

Waiters swirl by with trays of champagne but no one stops. Everyone ignores them.

HECTOR

I'm gonna get us a drink.

Ruth's left alone. She shifts uncomfortably.

HECTOR (PRELAP)

You got Cherry Coke?

**CUT TO:**

A **BARTENDER** shakes his head at Hector.

BARTENDER

No.

His disdain is thick. Hector ignores it.

HECTOR

Two whiskeys.

The Bartender turns away. As Hector waits, he sees:

Vicki. With her husband, Jack.

They're holding court. Vicki's smoking a cigarette and sloshing a drink. Jack LAUGHS at his own joke.

Then he notices Hector.

Hector's watching him.

For a second, Jack tries to continue his conversation, eyes just darting back to Hector. But Hector's gaze is unwavering and eventually Jack meets it.

The two men stare at each other. Nothing else exists.

BARTENDER (O.S.)

OK I got two whiskeys --

The Bartender tries to get Hector's attention --

BARTENDER (O.S.)

Hey man --

But Hector doesn't hear him.

There isn't malice to Hector's gaze. No threat. Just a stark, bare acknowledgement: *I see you. I know what you did.*

Finally, it's too much. Jack breaks and looks away.

Hand on Vicki's back, he pushes her into the CROWD.

**CUT TO:**

The CROWD dances, drinks, eats -- circling around Ruth, a jagged rock in their ocean of Reagan-era excess.

Among them: Mallory.

Flirting and smiling. Surrounded by men, including Steven.

But as Ruth watches, as her eyes trace this woman who she will never, could never be and --

Something shifts.

Maybe it's the run in Mallory's panty hose, or the lipstick on her teeth, but the veil has lifted --

It's not just Mallory. Everyone looks different.

Ruth sees the sweat stains. Fondue cheese dripping down stubbly chins. Wine spilling. The tails of devoured shrimp. A missed price tag hanging from a zipper.

Everything an imitation of wealth. A replica of how people think they should look, behave, want. A grotesque display of middling money.

And Ruth realizes she doesn't want to be them.

Hector comes back. Still in a daze, then realizing --

HECTOR

I forgot the drinks.

Ruth looks at him, shook from her own daze, and asserts --

RUTH

I don't want to be here.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - TRACKING**

Ruth and Hector walk the empty track.

They take in the dirt under their feet, the turns.

They don't talk. But --

Hector takes Ruth's hand.

DINK. DINK. Moths careen into the lights above, electricity BUZZING in the night sky.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - RUTH'S ROOM - DERBY DAY - MORNING**

Ruth lies in bed. She's awake, her eyes already open when her alarm RINGS --

Derby Day.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - DERBY DAY - MORNING**

BEEP BEEP BEEP. Hector's Timex wakes him.

He's slouched in a chair, across from Albino Al's stall. He slept there, but he's awake now.

He crosses a ribbon of sunlight and puts his hand on the horse's nose.

HECTOR  
You ready for a miracle?

**INT. FARMHOUSE - BATHROOM**

Bathroom filled with steam, Ruth showers her battered body.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Hector washes Al.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - BATHROOM**

Ruth wraps her bruised ribs. Wincing. Tight.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Hector WRAPS Al's legs.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN**

The Monopoly pieces are still on the table, lined up:

Wheelbarrow. Horse. Canon. Thimble. Shoe.

Ruth stares at the pieces, slowly eating her OATMEAL.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Hector feeds Al. The horse INHALES, ravenous.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - JOCKEY ROOM**

Ruth arrives at her locker. Someone has crossed off her name.

She RIPS a new piece of tape and WRITES her name again.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

A THICK NEEDLE plunges into thick white horse hide -- Hector, injecting Al in the jugular vein.

Hector removes the needle. A smear of red blood remains.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - JOCKEY ROOM**

Ruth gets dressed for the race. She tucks her SILK into her BREECHES -- ZIPS her boots.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs**

Hector TACKS up Al. His bridle. Harness.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - WEIGHING ROOM - TRACKING**

Ruth holds her SADDLE and steps on the track SCALE.

The Steward notes her weight.

STEWARD

Next --

Ruth steps off and the next Jockey takes her place. She hands the SADDLE to a Groom --

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNS**

The Groom hands the SADDLE to Hector. Hector places the saddle on Al and TIGHTENS the straps.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - TRACKING TO PADDOCK PARADE RING**

Ruth tightens her helmet STRAP. She carries it as she walks in line with the other Jockeys to the **PARADE RING**.

She steps outside.

Now, for the first time since the sun has risen on this race day, Ruth sees the sky -- a perfect Robin's egg blue.

Kelly green trees. Sun saturating the race silks, red and orange and yellow. Everything shining.

Dorothy in Oz.

There's a **CROWD** gathered around the fence. All the horses are there. The gang is all here. There is no going back now.

Hector's waiting for her with Al. She touches his muzzle.

RUTH

How is he?

HECTOR

Gave him a shot. Maybe it'll hold the bleeding.

RUTH

Don't need forever. Just two and a half minutes.

HECTOR

You finish this race in less than two-forty and I'll eat my hat.

RUTH

That a bet?

Ruth grins and puts on her helmet. Hector focuses.

HECTOR

Listen to me. If you feel anything wrong, if you see anything -- pull him.

He tightens her strap.

HECTOR

This is not a suggestion. Say it.

RUTH

I will pull up if there's anything out of the ordinary.

HECTOR

You are a tool for this horse. He will tell you what he needs. Let him use you.

A trumpet BLOWS.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*Ladies and Gentleman, the Derby parade is about to begin. Post-time in twenty, please make your way to the grandstands if you wish to wager.*

HECTOR

Doesn't matter that the odds on us are long. You have to watch yourself.

Ruth's eyes rove to the other horses and jockeys, owners and trainers:

Vicki, Jack and **TRIUMPH OF WILHELM TELL.**

Mallory, Steven and War on Drugs.

HECTOR

If it looks like there's even a sliver of a chance that your snowball isn't melting, all Hell will be turned on you.

He's deadly serious. Ruth nods.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*Riders up!*

Ruth puts her hand on the SADDLE HORN. Hector gives her a leg up. His hand lingers on her leg.

HECTOR

"Some trust in chariots --

RUTH

-- Some in horses."

She looks at him. They share a short, quiet moment before she TROTS in with the rest of the parade --

And then she's gone.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTANDS**

**PEOPLE.** Lots of them. In pastels and Polos, audacious hats. Living out a Derby dream here at this mid-size track. Betting money they don't have. Drinking more than they should.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*Ladies and gentleman, the race will begin shortly. Find your seats and get ready for some exciting action!*

Roiling, kinetic CHAOS.

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*Please note your favorite horse's position and good luck!*

Hector moves through it --

*ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*

*In post-position number one --*

CLANG. The betting windows begin to close. CLANG -- CLANG --

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - STARTING GATE**

CLANG! The **HORSES** load into the STARTING GATES. **POST 1** --

Time slows.

The metal TREMBLES with each horse. **POST 2, 3, 4** --

Their nostrils FLARE. Their muscles TWITCH. Their eyes SHIFT.

These horses are beasts. Hoofed, mythic monsters.

And they are ready.

**POST 5, 6, 7** --

Each of them wants to be the strongest. The fastest.

They will run until they kill themselves.

They have no sense of limit. No sense of control.

Just the desire to run.

**POST 8, 9 --**

Only the jockey can harness this --

And turn a death wish into victory.

**POST POSITION 11 -- Albino Al. Ruth.**

Ruth's hand grips mane and reins.

For two minutes she will feel this horse and nothing else.

The bell SCREAMS --

The gates BURST --

*TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*And they're off!*

The horses RUN.

They **BREAK FROM THE GATES** with a unified force that feels unfathomable --

Ruth has never raced with this many horses, never been part of so much shared power. It coils around her even though --

She's on the outside.

This should be a disadvantage, all the way on the edge, far from the rail and the shortest path to the finish. But --

Maybe here with Al, maybe this outside position will allow them to set their own pace --

Ruth makes a SHARP CUT to the left, careening in, trying to obliterate the extra ground. A horse in front of them BOBBLES and they almost collide --

Mud SPLATTERS.

It's the **RUN TO THE FIRST TURN** and they're running VERY FAST.

Al DRIVES forward but the added track from their outside start punishes immediately -- they're in a clot at the back.

Impossible to see who has the lead from way back here. Ruth has to hold Al back so he doesn't burn out --

They are in NINTH PLACE.

Ruth RIPS down her GOGGLES and pulls down a spare pair.

They WHEEZE around the **FIRST CLUBHOUSE TURN**.

She sucks air as the wind cuts into her --

Two horses on either side, into the **BACK STRETCH** -- She hasn't gained ground yet, but --

Al PUSHES to become the head of this small arrow. He doesn't like to feel boxed in, will not be --

And Ruth feels this. If there's another horse next to them, he runs harder. Something more than desire -- a need.

He needs to be out front, he needs to be free.

And Ruth needs to get him into the main pack, so she can use that -- jam through the field -- turn it into a win.

It feels like the earth is shattering under her, around her. Her body, her horse tangling with the wind, fighting forces older than God --

But Al's lungs are the real enemy here. Ruth can't see, but:

BLOOD now pools in both Al's nostrils.

Still, he pushes forward. His HOOVES devour the damp dirt -- slop into the mud:

All the horses are at FULL SPEED.

It's a traffic jam. Horses on all sides.

But they SURGE, horse and human PROPELLING FORWARD, knocking off one horse, then another and another, chasing the lead --

Riding a DEAFENING, rolling wave of flesh and blood.

But now we're at the **FINAL TURN**, which means --

Horses are starting to fade.

Now's their chance. Now they must move. Now they must go.

Ruth ignores the drop of BLOOD that lands on her face.

She leans forward.

Al feels her body on top of his -- feels her thighs squeeze around him, urging -- feels his hair twisted in her fingers -- feels the leather of the bridle tightening -- feels the metal bit move in his mouth with the rusty taste of blood -- feels the whip bite his haunch -- feels her saying --

I am riding you.

RUTH

Go.

Quiet. But she is not asking. This is a command.

This is the **HOME STRETCH.**

Ruth and Albino Al eat the ground, but as they make their move --

BLOOD flies from Al's nose and mouth, SPLATTERING Ruth.

Now there is a moment --

As the warm blood hits her face --

Calculations:

Distance to the finish line.

Their speed.

The force that will smash her skull into the rail if Al falters and she falls.

But then it's just --

The RHYTHM of Al's BREATHING. In and out -- quicker than the wings of a butterfly --

But steady.

She feels every part of him. The leather of the reins between her fingers and Al PULLS --

He does not want to stop.

So she lets him go. Loosens the reins --

Al surges forward.

They are close enough now to see clear air and the win.

They are in FIFTH PLACE.

Just in front of them is O'Shea's horse: Pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage VEERS into Al's shoulder, knocking them off balance --

They ROLL into the horse on their left and Ruth needs to JERK them back -- ROUGH.

She is close enough to taste sweat flying from the other jocks -- she makes another SHARP cut to the left --

TO THE RAIL.

They storm up the inside, now, passing Pilgrimage.

Triumph is there next to them.

He tries to SQUEEZE her into the fence. Ruth's calf grazes the metal, but she HOLDS firm, PUSHING back and they LURCH through, leaving Vicki's horse behind.

She's in THIRD PLACE now.

There are TWO HORSES between Ruth and the win. One of them:

War on Drugs. Steven and Mallory's.

The giant gray horse is mashed in, nose for nose with the white-socked chestnut, SMELL THE ROSES.

War and Roses trade off first at the front of the line --

One and two -- two and one -- but Ruth sees it -- it's tight, but it's there --

An opening.

It sounds like heaven is splitting behind her, but this opening is all that matters, all that exists.

They FLY forward -- squeezing in -- banging -- jostling -- MUD everywhere -- HEAVING hot breath -- covered in blood like a grotesque candy cane --

Ruth and Albino Al OVERTAKE War on Drugs --

They are NECK AND NECK with Smell the Roses for first place --

There's the wire --

Ruth SCREAMS --

#### **EXT. HORSE TRACK - GRANDSTANDS**

They cross the finish line.

Hector can see the CROWD explode around him as the race ends. But everything is far away and muted.

*TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*It's a photo finish!*

He hears only his BREATH -- And Ruth's.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - RUNOUT**

BREATHING. Ruth collapses forward onto Al.

Al is BLOWING, inhaling rapidly. Ruth closes her eyes. Her body moves up and down with the horse.

The other Jocks can't believe it. They stare --

**TRAINERS** and **OWNERS** flood the RUNOUT of the track.

Everyone stares at Ruth and Al.

*TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Demolishing the spread --*

Both Ruth and Al are SLICK with sweat and blood.

Neither she nor horse should be here and yet ...

*TRACK ANNOUNCER (O.S.)*  
*Virgin Birth in second!*

Second place. And Al is alive.

Then -- a HAND on the back of Ruth's neck.

HECTOR  
Ruth.

She opens her eyes. Hector's there.

She's still holding tight, gripping the the reins. But now, her hand relaxes and --

She lets go.

**INT. HORSE TRACK - BACKSTRETCH BARNs - STALL - LATER**

Ruth sits in the straw, on the ground next to Al. She's still in her riding breeches and bandana, tired and dirty.

PSHHHHH -- A hose SPRAYS her.

Hector.

She jumps up. He grins.

HECTOR  
Go clean yourself up. I got him.

Ruth hesitates. He puts down the wash bucket, reassures her.

HECTOR  
It's OK. He's OK ... he's OK.

She relents and starts to walk away, then --

HECTOR  
Hey, cash this out for me while  
you're up there?

He hands her a BETTING TICKET.

**EXT. HORSE TRACK - BETTING WINDOWS**

Garbage everywhere. Spectators long gone.

A **CASHIER** smiles wide from inside a BETTING WINDOW as Ruth approaches.

CASHIER  
Just in time. About to close up --

Ruth doesn't meet the enthusiasm. Slides in Hector's ticket.

CASHIER  
Whatta we got?

The Cashier scans the ticket. And for a moment, can't believe what she sees. Almost can't speak. Then --

CASHIER  
Ma'am. This is a pentafecta. Do you  
know what --

Yes. Ruth knows what it is.

RUTH  
A Super Hi-Five.

As she says it, she realizes what's happening --

CASHIER  
First five horses to cross the  
finish line --

Knows the incredible odds against this --

RUTH  
-- All guessed correctly.

Knows what this kind of win means --

CASHIER  
It's the jackpot.

Complete awe and wonder.

RUTH  
 Are you sure -- ?

But she still can't quite believe it. The Cashier starts reading the ticket --

CASHIER  
 "First place, number 4, *Smell the Roses.* Second place, number 11 --"

HECTOR (O.S.)  
*Virgin Birth.*

Ruth spins around. Hector's there.

HECTOR  
 "Sometime's winning means coming second."

The fortune cookie. He smiles at her.

HECTOR  
 How much a place cost in California?

He's very pleased with himself.

She wants to punch him and yell at him because how did this happen and how did he not tell her right away, but also --

She is happy.

Actually happy.

And then his arms are around her.

They won.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - MAGIC HOUR**

Albino Al's in the field. Clean white in the gold dusk light.

Ruth's there, too.

They're both quiet. Still.

Calm.

She looks at him, into his watery black eyes --

And removes his harness.

For a second the horse stares back at her but then he JERKS away, trotting into the golden field.

Ruth turns away and starts back to the house.

**INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER - TRACKING**

The kitchen table is covered in MONEY.

Lots of it. A pile.

CASH everywhere -- some on the floor --

We follow the stray bills, **UPSTAIRS** --

**INT. FARMHOUSE - MAIN BEDROOM**

Here we find:

The saddle straps. The bridle bit. The riding crop.

Ruth and Hector.

We've been here before.

But this time --

Ruth picks up the whip, looks at Hector and says:

RUTH  
Get on your knees.

**BLACK.**