

The Boy from Horse Mountain

Written by

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Based on the book

Finny and the Boy from Horse Mountain

by Andrea Young

FADE IN:

SLOW FADE FROM BLACK

An old, tattered-but-still-glossy color 8 X 10 photograph slowly comes in to focus. It's a winner's circle shot from a horse race. There is a crack from a fold, but the picture is flat and straight now, albeit dog-eared.

The date on the picture is May 28, 1981. Like all these pictures, the horse is in the center of the picture with the jockey on. The picture's colors are fading but the jockey's uniform is as bright as the big grin on his face.

The camera slowly zooms in on the other biggest grin in the picture - an older man holding the bridle with one hand, his other hand on the horse's face. The man's eyes are as kind as the horse's and even here you can tell they have an affinity for one another. His voice comes to life..

CHESTER (V.O.)

His father was blazing fast, girl,
blazing fast... unbeatable on the
track, set to be the next
Seabiscuit, no question about it.

The man in the picture is CHESTER. The horse is BROOKE'S BOY, which it says on the picture, right after the words "FIRST PLACE:"

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D

His first race... won by three
lengths, second race, seven...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A HORSE RACE IN FULL-OUT SPRINT FOR THE FINISH - DAY

as the hooves pound the dirt, thundering!
HUGE CROWDS CHEER FROM SIDELINES

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D

By the third race people were
showing up just to see him.

FROM THE JOCKEY'S POINT OF VIEW

Raging, galloping horses, massive in size -- all heart and muscle - working to please their jockeys who are barely holding on for the ride. The horses are tightly packed. This is where it gets dangerous.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Sean's Surprise takes the lead
followed by Jabber Girl,
Milwaukee's Finest and Nobody's
Fool...

As the Announcer's voice fades to the background, the jockeys are checking each other to see who is doing what and everyone is looking to break free of the grouping for the win. Horses, thrusting hard, also move side-to-side ever so slightly in response to their jockey's subtle cues; shoulders touching, bumping here and there. This is literally where the phrase "jockeying for position" comes from.

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D

I had the jockey hold him back,
didn't want everyone to know what
we had. That's strategy girl. It's
not just fast horses that win
races.

And we see the strategy - and confidence - in our jockey's eyes. He knows his horse has more. All he needs is the window of opportunity. Suddenly - the two horses blocking him come together too hard - and bounce off each other -- moving far enough apart that our guy can move up. And he does!

It's like when the afterburners kick in on a fighter jet. The other two jockeys realize their mistake and try to close the gap. But it's too late as Brooke's Boy slides through, literally squeezing past them to take the lead and pulls away.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And without a doubt folks, it's a
repeat of his last race and the
race before that as Brooke's Boy
turns on the gas and doesn't look
back; Sean's Surprise is in second,
followed by Jabber Girl...

CUT TO:

EXT. FINISH LINE - FROM THE "PHOTO FINISH" POV

Brooke's Boy crosses the finish line and the flash snaps, turning it into a black and white photo freezing the moment for eternity - with no other horse even close.

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D
 His fifth race was his last. I'd like to think it wasn't by a man's hand and it was an act of God, but I'll never know for sure.

CUT TO:

EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

Very nervous, jumpy horses being loaded into the starting gate.

CHESTER
 Horses are an explosion waiting to happen. They have to -- they're prey. It's how they have escaped from predators for millions of years. It's what they do. We make a sport of it.

This moment is all tension and adrenaline. The horses are tense - champing at their bits to do what they are bred, trained and practiced to do: take off and run like nobody's business. Their muscles are tense. One big rubber band stretched as far as it can go - looking for the breaking point.

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D
 When a 'one in a million' horse shows up, it gets some people nervous. Throws things out of kilter. Suddenly what was a great horse no longer measures up. People don't like it.

The horses are loaded into the starting gate as Chester narrates what happens next.

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D
 Bell rang and the gate stuck half open. All thousand pounds of him crashed into it. He got all jammed up half through then thrashed and fought to get loose. The jockey thankfully was able to jump clear
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHESTER (V.O.) CONT'D (cont'd)
but the horse panicked and flipped.
By the time we got the gate opened,
it was too late, his leg was
broke...

Brooke's Boy lays on the ground, panting, squirming, unable to get up. Terror in his eyes. The man from the winner's circle photo - Chester - at his side.

CHESTER (CONT'D)
Second saddest day of my life. Doc
said there was nothing they could
do...

DISSOLVE TO

CLOSEUP -- CHESTER, (PRESENT DAY) - DAY

Chester is a thin man in his late seventies who needs a haircut, a shave... and probably a shower; he blinks away something in his eyes to keep them from tearing up.

CHESTER (CONT'D)
...a part of me died with him that
day.

He's talking to FINNY, 14 (a nickname for Josephine).
Finny's eyes get watery from the emotion in Chester's voice.

CHESTER
Sorry girl, got lost in the past,
just wanted to let you know about
your horse and where he's from.

FINNY
No, that's fine. I'd like to hear
all about him if you don't mind.

Chester cleared his throat and scratches his chin.

CHESTER
So, that was the end of an era for
my wife and me, God rest her. I'd
planned after a few years of racing
to retire him to stud. He could
pass on his lightning speed and we
could sit back and collect the stud
fees... but of course that never
happened.

DISSOLVE TO THE PAST AGAIN

EXT. CURRENT LOCATION - CHESTER'S FARM -- 12 YEARS EARLIER

The grass is green. The paint is new. Life was good. This is before Brooke's Boy died. Chester had profited nicely from those first four winnings and he had put it all into this place. And it showed. It's like the sun shines here even at night. CHESTER'S WIFE is hanging laundry.

Brooke's Boy is cantering in a pasture. A mare in the pasture next door whinnies to him. He whinnies back.

CHESTER (V.O.)

Well, we didn't know it happened.
Never saw it.

Suddenly Brooke's Boy breaks the canter and gallops to the fence. It looks like he's going to just crash into it. At the very last second he plants his feet at the base and launches up into a huge arc - jumping over the five foot fence effortlessly.

CHESTER (V.O.)

Turned out the little rascal, not even three years old, jumped the fence into the neighbor's pasture.

Brooke's Boy and the mare nuzzle, nose-to-nose. Checking each other out. The mare bounces around him playfully, asking him to join her. They bounce around each other like happy colts on a spring day as Chester continues narrating the scene.

CHESTER (V.O.)

This neighbor's horse was a champion warmblood -- expensive German jumping horses. I'm talking World Cup, best you can get.
(during this speech we see the neighbor's practicing their horse over BIG jumps)
Cost more than my house. The next morning the groom found him and walked him back over. It happened a couple of times.

The handler gives Brooke's Boy back to Chester, who is apologizing - again - for his horse's trespassing.

We see the mare is alone in the field, eating the thick green grass. And her belly is large.

(CONTINUED)

CHESTER (V.O.)

He didn't know my horse wasn't a gelding so he never mentioned a thing to anyone. But as months passed my neighbor noticed his most prized horse, his world-cup winning mare, kept gaining weight. When the vet told him she was just pregnant, it hit the fan...

NEIGHBOR'S RANCH IN THE PAST -- BARN -- DAY

The vet pulls his stethoscope off the horse and turns to the OWNER and says something.

CHESTER (V.O.)

And lordy, he was beyond mad. If steam could come outta ears, he would've been doing it then.

The owner throws his hat to the ground and stomps off.

DISSOLVE TO:

CHESTER'S RANCH IN THE PAST -- YARD -- DAY

The OWNER is holding a six-month-old colt by the halter - screaming at Chester at the top of his lungs.

CHESTER (V.O.)

His warmblood was scheduled to fly to Europe to compete in the Olympic trials. Had to stay home to have a thoroughbred's baby. He only wanted pure warmbloods. He had no use for a cross.

The owner throws the lead rope down, startling the colt as the owner stomps off, leaving the colt with Chester. Chester picks up the end of the lead rope, calms the colt by petting his neck as the previous owner stomps back to his house.

DISSOLVE TO:

BACK TO THE PRESENT -- EXT. CHESTER'S RANCH -- DAY

Chester is smiling. It's funny now. He cocks his head, laughing inside.

(CONTINUED)

CHESTER

It had been only three months since Brooke's Boy died. I was thrilled to have a part of my great horse alive, but as a thoroughbred-warmblood cross he was too big to race... been with me ever since.

FINNY

Wow. That's amazing.

CHESTER

Of course, those were better days.

We see now that Chester is holding the lead rope to a tall horse that is all skin and bones. Long hair, mud-encased tail. Looks like a malnourished, mangy dog. Finny steers gets back to positive things.

FINNY

So what's his name?

CHESTER

Sky. I named him that 'cause sky's the limit for this horse. I bet there ain't nothing he can't do. He don't look it, but he's only twelve.

FINNY

How is he to ride?

CHESTER

Don't know, never broke him.

Finny is taken aback. Tries to hide her disappointment.

FINNY

Oh... I was planning to ride him home. I took the bus out here.

CHESTER doesn't realize this means she has to walk this horse 10 miles to get home.

CHESTER

By the time he was old enough to train, my wife had passed, I've been sick and now my kids are making me move into some concentration camp they're passing off as a retirement village.

(CONTINUED)

Chester gives a pained chuckle at his statement, not bitter, just resolved.

CHESTER , CONT'D

Never had anybody on his back.

(then)

Sorry. I'm glad Sky here has someone now who can get him trained up. He'd never run but I bet like his momma he could jump and if he has half the speed of his papa, well... the sky's the limit.

Finny pets Sky. He leans into her scratch of his jaw.

FINNY

I'll take really good care of him.
I will.

CHESTER

I know. I asked at the feed store about you. They told me you'd treat him right and that's what matters to me.

FINNY

I will, I promise.

CHESTER

Okay girl...good luck.
(rubs Sky's neck)
Sky, prove me right.

Chester gives Sky a final pat, turns toward house, heads off. He can't watch Sky leave.

Finny stands there, pats Sky, realizes Chester's done. She sees him wipe his eyes as he walks away.

She watches Chester walk up his porch steps and disappear into the house.

Sky just stands there. She pulls the rope. He doesn't want to go. Not because he doesn't want to leave, but because he's weak and tired. She tugs hard and he finally starts following her down the long, dusty road home.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUSTY DIRT ROAD -- DAY

Sky tugs Finny's arm as she leads him. He's like a huge baby seeing the world for the first time. He's not afraid of the new things around him. He sees a big patch of cactus, goes to it curious. He pops his head back when he gets pricked. He's a big, curious dog. Finny is quickly falling in love.

They come up to the main road they have to cross. There's a car coming. Finny tries to get Sky to hurry across, to get away. She recognizes the yellow convertible. But she can't get him going.

It is too late. They are spotted. The yellow convertible turns down the road after them. Finny stops and holds Sky, worried about his reaction to a car as it pulls up beside them. BRITNEY DAVENPORT, the driver, studies Sky as they approach. There are two other TEENAGE GIRLS in the car.

All are well-dressed in the latest fashions. Britney is the girl who has everything... except a dad who pays her enough attention. She is always trying to make sure the world knows she is better than anyone else. Britney shakes her head in disapproval, giggles at the condition of Finny's "new" horse.

BRITNEY

Finny, seriously, that mangy bag of bones is the horse you've been telling everyone about?

Finny ignores her, finally manages to drag Sky across the road

BRITNEY

I'm going to tell Jeff right now that if your diseased bag of bones steps on the property, putting my horses at risk, I'm moving them all from his ranch immediately.

Britney's words trigger evil snickers from her posse. She backs out, turns, and peels out, kicking up dust and spooking Sky. Finny has to hold him and calm him.

FINNY

(to horse)

Hag or wench, Sky? I'm inclined to go with wench.

(then)

We don't have to go to the fancy ranch. I know another place.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK -- NIGHT

Not the worst, not the best. Not many streetlights. The road is not paved. Finny makes her way quickly down the road to a trailer with no lights on and lots of tall grass growing around its steps. She takes Sky around back, through a gate in the rusty fence. He picks at the grass for a moment then stops eating. Finny gets an old plastic garbage can, starts filling it with water. Sky comes over and sniffs the water, begins to drink. She pets his neck. She takes a drink from the hose.

FINNY

I wish you'd eat some of this good grass. You're too skinny.

Sky doesn't eat. Finny checks the gate to make sure it latches properly. Sky doesn't move, doesn't eat. She can't wait any longer, has to head home. Sky watches her go.

CUT TO:

EXT. FINNY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

In contrast to the trailer, this is a nice house in a nice neighborhood. The porch light is on. Finny, goes through the front door.

FINNY

(calling out)

Mom... I'm home.

As she closes the door...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

The moon is full. The leaves are wet. Something, someone is running through the bushes and trees. Frantic. Panting. The person pulls something out -- it's a cell phone. He clicks it to check the time. We see his face in the light. He's about 15, dirty and sweaty from running. Besides a busted lip and dried blood, his face shows fear and determination. His name is Joe. He's panting from running. He listens nervously for his pursuers.

EXT. BESIDE MAIN ROAD -- NIGHT

Crouching in the grass of the deep ditch, he scans for cars and sees a semi-truck approaching. Seconds later he is startled by a loud

SFX: Ding-Ding-Ding

as red railroad crossing lights flash just down the road from him.

Joe ducks back down in the tall grass, hiding from the glow of the semi's headlights. The air brakes of the semi-truck engage as it comes to a stop at the railroad crossing. Making his way up the embankment toward the road is slow and painful. His right knee does not work very well. He gasps in pain every other step. The noise of the train is loud.

Approaching headlights behind him cause him to drop down into the tall grass again. A large pickup pulls up behind the semi. Attached to the pickup truck is the biggest, fanciest horse trailer you've ever seen. In the red glow of the crossing lights we see a large silver spur painted on the side of the trailer -- with a horse jumping through it. From his hiding place Joe quickly limps towards the rig; the noise of the train masks his groans and dragging feet. At the front of the trailer he sees the doors of multiple storage lockers. He tries the first door; it's locked.

Joe looks behind him, scared -- expecting his pursuers to jump out and find him at any second.

The railroad crossing alarm / ringing stops. The semi's air brakes hiss in anticipation. The gates begin to go up. The brake lights on the trailer go out. It inches forward. The second door is locked too. Joe frantically grabs the third handle. It is locked but has more play in it. The truck moves a foot and stops. This throws Joe off and he moans in pain. He yanks the handle hard and the door opens.

As the truck starts moving Joe throws himself into the storage locker without a second to spare. He closes the door as the trailer moves off.

INT. INSIDE THE TRAILER STORAGE LOCKER

A dim light from somewhere lets us see how cramped Joe is. His face is glistening with sweat. He breathes deep and labored from the pain. He closes his eyes...and passes out as we...

DISSOLVE THROUGH BLACK TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK -- EARLY MORNING

Finny comes around the backside, relieved to see Sky still there, standing but not eating. Her happy face turns to worry when she notices the small enclosed yard -- it is destroyed. So is everything in and around it.

The damage is fresh and extensive. The ground is dug up, the siding on the trailer has large strips torn away. Sky, bored with the grass, worked on the walls. The small porch cover has one corner post knocked off -- tipping the cover down at a precarious angle. Finny takes a deep breath -- lets it out with a sigh. Puts her hands over her face, trying to hold back the tears. She can't.

FINNY

(to self)

Oh my God... mom's gonna kill me...

CLOSE ON FINNY -- hands over her face. She hears and feels the blowing of warm air on her fingers. Opening her hands she sees Sky standing in front of her blowing his warm breath on her face. He is instantly forgiven. She hugs him. After a quick look to make sure no one is watching Finny snaps the lead rope on his halter and brings Sky out as fast as she can. It is still early and Finny is confident she and Sky haven't been spotted as they make their way out of the trailer park.

CUT TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- DAY

Finny leads her horse past long, beautiful white plastic horse fences and the large, new sign of the SILVER SPUR EQUESTRIAN CENTER. The white new fence ends as they come to a wooden fence badly in need of paint and repair.

She turns down the driveway. We see a sign with cracked and faded paint: "Azzure HILLS RANCH -- Boarding, and Horse Rescue Center". With a firm shove, Finny opens the gate that hangs from the one working hinge and goes to the house. A woman's voice startles Finny from behind.

VEL

Hi, can I help you?

It's the owner, Vel MOORE, in her forties. Sun-weathered skin, typical for a lifelong horse-person. Grey in her hair that isn't colored because there was feed to buy and stalls to clean. It makes her look older than she is.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Yes. Hi. Uh, my name is Finny and I've got a horse and nowhere to keep him. I was sorta wondering if I could work here for his board?

VEL

How old are you?

FINNY

Almost fifteen.

Vel ponders Finny's request, fingers drumming her hip.

VEL

Don't you work at Silver Spur?

FINNY

I do, but I don't think I can keep him there...

Vel gives a disdainful look across the pasture where her neighbor, Silver Spur is.

VEL

They can be like that.

(softening)

My name's Vel.

They shake hands.

VEL

This boy has seen better days.

Vel walks over to Sky, examines him.

FINNY

I got him yesterday. His name is Sky.

Vel gives Sky a thorough once-over before looking back to Finny. She chews her bottom lip.

VEL

(serious now)

This horse is going to need a lot of care, he needs a vet. His feet are a mess. He's going to take more than work, he's going to take money.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

I have some money saved up, so I
can have the vet look at him.

VEL

The patches of missing hair that
looks like mange is ringworm. We'll
treat it, but you can get it too,
so wash your hands after you handle
him... and it can take a long time
to clear so be ready.

(then)

Well, let's find him a stall.

Finny realizes they have a deal.

FINNY

Oh my gosh, thank you so much!

As they walk to the barn.

VEL

He'll have to be quarantined until
the ringworm clears, he can see
other horses, just can't touch
them. And you'll need to come over
and take care of him as well help
alittle with the others...

FINNY

Okay. Thank you. I'll work hard
Vel, I swear.

Vel smiles, she likes this kid.

CUT TO:

INT. AZZURE HILLS BARN -- DAY

Finny walks out of Sky's stall, closes the door and goes to
the sink. At the sink, Finny is scrubbing her arms like a
surgeon prepping for a heart transplant. She rinses off --
not touching anything, turns the water spigot off with her
elbow. She looks at Sky in the stall before walking out.
He's all skin, bones and bald patches.

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- DAY

Finny walks down the driveway and cuts over to go to the ranch next door -- Silver Spur. She quickly makes her way to the barn -- we can tell she knows her way around.

CUT TO:

INT. SILVER SPUR BARN -- DAY

Most people don't know modern barns can be this nice. Brick, finely finished wood, brass and wrought iron handles. A lot of fine craftsmanship and money went into building this place. Silver Spur has twenty-five beautifully irrigated acres that stay green year round; surrounded by miles of gleaming white fence. No expense was spared when the barn was designed to look like an English country estate. All the walkways were made from a specialized brick designed to be beautiful and with enough give to let the horses walk comfortably. The ornate beauty no longer impresses Finny as she grabs a halter and grooming tote off the hook, opens the stall door for her first horse.

MONTAGE OF SCENES -- Finny brushing, combing horses, picking hooves, pulling a bent/stray nail out of a hoof, turning a horse out (putting him in an area to play and get some exercise -- watching a horse run around and buck. Leading different horses in and out of different arenas to get their exercises. Washing a horse... scraping the water off his sides, putting hoof polish on the hooves, pulling manes.

INSIDE THE SILVER SPUR BARN

-- Finny is closing a stall door when LOUD CURSING AND YELLING gets her attention. She runs to a window, peeks out to see the large horse trailer -- which we might recognize from the previous night scene at the railroad tracks.

She hears RAMON, the man who drives the rig for the ranch, cursing from inside the storage room at the front of the horse trailer. There is a commotion as he drags someone out into the sunlight. It's Joe, the boy who stowed away at the railroad crossing. Joe struggles but is no match for the large, six-foot-two Mexican.

RAMON

(into back of trailer)

Carlos, make sure nothing's missing. I just caught us a thief.

CARLOS, Ramon's brother, appears at the door.

(CONTINUED)

CARLOS
Nothing's missing.
(holds up backpack)
Found this.

JOE
That's mine!

RAMON
Check it.

Ramon easily throws Joe to the ground. Joe sits there, trying not to let the pain show. He slowly gets up. He is out-manned and knows it. And he can't run.

CARLOS
(pulls out a small wad of
bills)
I think I did find something that
was stolen.

JOE
Hey, that's mine!

RAMON
We don't need no thief here. Where
did you get on, boy?

JOE
Give me my money!

Joe grabs for his backpack. Carlos kicks Joe's leg out from under him. He collapses to the ground again, writhing in pain, gasping in pain but otherwise but not making a sound. Holds his knee.

CARLOS
Had to be Phoenix, that's the last
time we stopped for gas.

Ramon peels off a \$20 bill, puts it in the backpack, pockets the remaining wad.

RAMON
Take him to the bus stop.
(to Joe)
Kid, if I see you again, I ain't
gonna be so nice.

Ramon drops Joe's backpack on top of him, walks away.

ON FINNY IN THE BARN -- Finny drops back out of sight. She doesn't know what to do.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIRT ROAD -- AN HOUR BEFORE SUNSET

Finny walks on a ridge about 10 feet over the main road. She is completely comfortable walking the four miles home. Below her she notices the bus stop with its little lean-to and bench. There is someone sleeping on the bench. As she gets closer, she can see it is the boy (Joe) from earlier at the ranch. She gets closer and sees he is asleep. She approaches the bench.

AT THE BUS STOP

She can see blood dripping from his mouth, notices his eyes and cheeks are purple and his lip is split.

Finny taps/pokes his shoulder.

FINNY

Hey, you okay?

He doesn't move. Afraid he might be dead, she shakes him again, harder. He jerks awake, tries to get away... groans in pain that snaps him out of his daze. He picks up his backpack, is going to walk away, but can only limp. It hurts a lot, so he stops.

FINNY

Sorry. I thought you were dead.
(looking at his bruises)
Did Carlos do that to you?

Joe doesn't answer, just looks away. The sun is setting. Finny notices Joe is sweating profusely.

FINNY

I think you need a doctor.

Joe shakes his head no.

JOE

I'm fine.

FINNY

My name's Finny.

She extends her hand. He shakes it.

JOE

Joe.

(CONTINUED)

Joe closes his eyes again... staggers a little, dizzy. Finny grabs his arm, steadies him.

FINNY

I think I better call an ambulance.

JOE

No. I'm okay.

Joe struggles to right himself as if to appear strong, takes a seat again on the bench. Finny is struck by his vulnerability and realizes they are probably the same age.

FINNY

It's after six, I don't think the next bus comes until tomorrow morning.

JOE

Not waiting for the bus. I just need to rest a little.

Joe touches his split lip. Speaking made it bleed again.

FINNY

What happened? I saw you drive away with Carlos. I work at that ranch.

JOE

They took 300 dollars from me. I didn't touch their stuff.

Using his tee shirt, Joe blots the blood from his lip.

FINNY

You should call the police.

JOE

No. I just need to get it back.

FINNY

Is there anybody I can call for you?

Joe looks at Finny for a moment before giving an almost indiscernible shake of his head. For the third time Finny glances up and down the road as if that action would lead to an answer. The boy seems as pitiful as her new horse, Sky. Finny wants to help him now since she couldn't help him earlier when they were being mean to him.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Do you think you could walk a little over a mile? I know a place you could stay. There's a bed....

JOE

Why would you help me?

The question catches Finny by surprise. She shrugs.

FINNY

Why wouldn't I help you?

Joe runs his hand through his thick dark hair. He has no answer. He gets up, Finny tries to help him.

JOE

I'm fine...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK -- NIGHT

It's the trailer where Sky was kept. Finny helps him up the steps -- looks around to make sure know one is watching. They go in the door.

INT. TRAILER -- NIGHT -- CONTINUOUS

It's not much, but there's furniture and there's no trash on the floor. Finny has to help Joe take the last step into the door. He's really hurting now. He flops onto the couch. She goes to the kitchen, fills a plastic cup with water. He drinks the entire thing in five seconds.

FINNY

This is where we lived until my mom remarried. They're gonna fix it up and sell it. Nobody lives here now.

JOE

Are there other ranches around here? I need a job. I'm a good hand, good with horses.

FINNY

You don't want to go back to Phoenix?

(CONTINUED)

JOE

I'm not from Phoenix. I need a job... anywhere.

FINNY

Are you eighteen?

Joe shakes his head no.

FINNY

Sixteen?

Joe shakes his head no again.

FINNY

You're fifteen? Did you run away from home?

Joe closes his eyes. Enough questions.

JOE

I'm almost sixteen.

FINNY

I'll ask at the feed store. They might know who's hiring. I'll bring some food tomorrow. Early...

(leaving)

Well... feel better.

JOE

Thank you.

(then)

Very much.

Finny nods, gives a quick wave as she closes the door behind her.

Joe glances around the room. Not bad. He feels his swollen eye and split lip and wishes he had some ice. He is dead tired and his knee is killing him. He pulls up his pant leg and looks; his knee is purplish yellow, swollen and ugly. Joe's eyes grow heavy as he looks around the small modest trailer. He lays his head back, closes his eyes and is asleep almost immediately.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -- DAWN

Finny is riding her bike which is now too small for her. She wears a backpack that is full.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAILER -- NIGHT

Joe is asleep on the couch. Hasn't moved an inch. Finny unloads the backpack. There is a loaf of bread, peanut butter and jelly. A large box of cereal and a half-gallon of milk. She puts the jelly and the cereal in the fridge.

She also pulls out a pair of jeans and a shirt, unfolds them out on the counter.

Finny touches his forehead - reacts with a frown. It's hot. He has a fever. She goes to the kitchen, wets a washcloth, folds it and places it on his head. She then goes to the kitchen and unpacks the food, puts it into the fridge. Before she leaves she places a bottle of ibuprofen and a cup of water on the table next to the couch.

She leaves, quietly closing the door behind her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AZZURE BARN -- DAY

DR. MONIE is done with his exam of Sky. Sky is sedated, doesn't move much. Dr. Monie runs a hand down Sky's neck before stepping back and taking in the whole picture.

DR. MONIE

You got yourself a project here,
I'm afraid. More than a couple of
things wrong with him. I fixed his
tooth problem. He'll be eating in
no time.

Finny holds out her hand as Dr. Monie puts four funny looking teeth into her palm.

DR. MONIE

The sedative will take a few hours
to wear off. He'll be fine. He has
to be on these antibiotics twice a
day for two weeks for the infection
in his mouth.

The doctor hands Finny two large bottles of meds.

(CONTINUED)

DR. MONIE (cont'd)
 Next, he needs to be treated for
 intestinal parasites every day for
 five days with these.

He hands her five large tubes of de-wormer. She drops the
 lead rope to hold them.

DR. MONIE (CONT'D)
 He's not going anywhere. He should
 go on a daily wormer with his
 supplements. This medication here
 is for the ringworm and this is for
 his feet.

Dr. Monie hands Finny more bottles and containers than she
 can hold. She realizes he is not charging her. He is putting
 away his tools in a metal cabinet on his pickup.

FINNY
 How much do i owe you?

DR. MONIE
 (ever so slight grin)
 You'll do somethin' nice for me one
 day.

She realizes he means there's no charge.

FINNY
 Thank you Dr. Monie, for
 everything.

He closes up the panel on his pickup cabinet, gets in.

DR. MONIE
 Good luck. Call me if you need
 anything.

He closes the door and drives off., Finny looks down at all
 the stuff in her arms, takes a deep breath and turns back
 toward the barn.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SILVER SPUR ARENAS -- DAY

Britney, the girl from the yellow convertible, is having a
 private lesson in the pristine arena with the fancy,
 colorful jumps. She sits on her horse, very still, as her
 instructor, JEFF, (handsome, early 30s, probably gay but not
 overtly feminine) gestures with his hands explaining how to

(CONTINUED)

position her horse in a bending line (corner) between two jumps.

Britney (and her horse) are dressed in the latest clothing and tack. No one else is allowed in the arena with Britney and her expensive horses. Across the way we

We can see the arena next door where Finny leads Tank out of the barn. Other kids are riding horses in the arena, too. It is a sunny, beautiful California day; an idyllic scene.

ON FINNY -- as she stops her horse (Tank), at the mounting block (a small step-ladder-like block for getting on horses). She notices he is jumpy and tense. She talks to him to sooth him, strokes his neck, but he fidgets and she has difficulty keeping him still enough to mount. She is finally able to get on. In the background, Britney is going around a jumping course, taking her horse over several jumps in a row.

FINNY is pulling hard on Tank's reins but he's not paying attention to her. He bolts toward the end of the arena and throws a huge buck...

ON Britney -- Tank's sudden movement has spooked Britney's horse which abruptly jumps to the side, flipping Britney off into a cartwheel almost like a gymnast doing a dismount -- only this was not planned and she lands on her side, rolling her face in the deep sand of the arena.

FINNY takes a few seconds, but is able to get Tank under control by turning his head so he circles and comes to a stop. Finny looks over to see Britney sitting on the ground, Jeff and another trainer assisting her. Britney is ranting, pointing at Finny.

Jeff looks at Finny, shakes his head no, points to the barn. Finny slides down out of the saddle, leads Tank back into the barn, a bit dejected. Jeff goes back to focusing on Britney who is dusting her nice riding tights off.

CUT TO:

EXT. SILVER SPUR -- BEHIND BARN

ON FINNY -- walking Tank (now with no saddle) into his stall. She closes the door, latches it and stops and sees someone walk quickly by the entrance to the barn -- she does a double-take and goes to the barn window -- where she sees Joe limping but carrying a short step-ladder. He puts it down under the window of a small mobile home (house trailer) behind the barn. This is Ramon's living quarters. She

(CONTINUED)

watches as Joe painfully pulls himself into the window and disappears inside. She runs out of the barn.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAMON'S TRAILER -- DAY

Finny runs up to the window, looks around to see if anyone sees her, climbs the step ladder and looks into the window.

FINNY

Joe! It's Finny!

(waits, no answer)

Joe!

No answer. Finny looks around again, afraid Ramon or Carlos will come around the corner any second.

FINNY

Joe! Are you crazy!? Get out of there!

Joe comes to the window, panting, in pain.

JOE

That three hundred dollars is all I got. Tell me if you see them coming.

He ducks back in. Finny is beyond nervous.

FINNY

Joe! It's probably not even there. He probably took it with him or spent it!

Joe appears at the window, comes out. Finny gets out of his way, tries to help soften the landing, but she can tell Joe's leg is still really hurting. He can barely walk. He throws the step ladder back in some bushes.

JOE

I have to get my money back.

FINNY

You're insane. And limping worse...

JOE

I know. I walked here.

Finny takes him into to the barn, looking for a place to hide him. She notices he's clean. And wearing the clothes she brought him.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

You're wearing the clothes I left
for you. They're my step-brothers.
He leaves clothes all the time.

JOE

(noticing his clothes)
Thanks. Yeah, they fit pretty good.

FINNY

I'll make sure the coast is clear,
then I'll help you over to Azzure
Hills where I keep my horse, Sky.

Joe nods "okay".

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS BARN - DAY

Joe plops down on an old chair next to the barn, exhausted.

FINNY

Wait here, I'll bring Sky out.
Don't be shocked. I just got him
yesterday.

Finny goes to get Sky. Joe rubs his knee. A few seconds
later Finny reappears with Sky.

FINNY

(to Sky)
Sky, this is Joe.

She moves Sky's head close to Joe, who scratches the horse
under his jowls. Sky likes it and lowers his whole head into
Joe's hand. Joe looks him over carefully. After a few
seconds...

JOE

When he's fat and better, he'll be
a nice horse. His conformation is
really good.

FINNY

You think so???

Finny smiles, walks Sky in a circle as Joe carefully scans
the horse, nodding in approval.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

His neck is arched right and his shoulder angle is correct. All four legs are straight, short back and long hip. Built to be an athlete.

FINNY

Wow, you do know a lot about horses. You really think he's that good?

Joe's eyes are wide with honesty; he isn't just trying to be nice. Finny's heart leaps.

JOE

I really do.

FINNY

He's twelve and has never been broke.

JOE

Shouldn't be a problem.

Joe continues to study the horse. Runs his hands up from a hoof, feels along the cannon bone.

FINNY

You know about breaking horses?

JOE

I've broke a ton of horses.

Joe winces and sits down to rub his knee.

FINNY

We need to get you to a doctor.

Joe shakes his head no.

JOE

I just need time. Besides, they'll turn me in.

FINNY

What did you run away from?

Joe lets out a deep sigh. After a beat...

JOE

A lot of people wouldn't have thought this horse would be worth it.

(CONTINUED)

Finny looks back to Sky and pats him.

FINNY

Way to change the subject there,
Joe.

Finny lets it go with a sigh. Joe keeps his eyes on the horse. Finny pulls up a bucket with her grooming tote.

FINNY (CONT'D)

Make yourself useful... his tail is
a mess.

As Joes expertly attacks the tail with the comb Finny hands him.

JOE

This tail looks a like Mustang's
from the mountains. Never seen a
brush in its life. If any of the
Mustangs looked like they'd go for
saddle horses, I'd clean them up
real good so they'd go for more.
I've un-knotted my share of tails
like this.

Finny can tell by the way his hands go to work that he's well versed in horse tails. He's working fast. Vel rounds the corner unexpectedly.

VEL

Hey, kids!

Finny is startled. Joe turns a little pale, sits down in the chair in pain. This is not lost on Vel.

FINNY

Hi, Vel. This is Joe. My friend...
from school.

VEL

Hi Joe, nice to meet you. I see
you've started in on Sky's tail...

FINNY

Yes, Joe knows about horses too;
thinks he'll be beautiful when he's
all fixed up.

VEL

(patting Sky)

I agree with you there, Joe.

Joe nods.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Hey, Vel, I hate to ask, but do you think you could give us a ride to the trailer park? My parents got their weeks messed up again and I don't have a ride and Joe's leg is too hurt to walk.

VEL

Sure. Joe, Did you get kicked by a horse?

Joe nods yes.

VEL

Ouch. Sorry to hear that. Have you seen a doctor?

Joe shakes his head no.

FINNY

He's going tomorrow.

Finny didn't like to lie but knew it would stop the questions.

VEL

Good! Let me grab my keys and we'll go.

Vel walks off.

FINNY

(quietly, to Joe)

There's a free clinic downtown. You can take the bus tomorrow. Tell them you're 17. They won't care. I have a friend who goes there.

Joe's look doesn't say yes or no...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS - EARLY MORNING / DAY

A city bus pulls up, stops. The door open and nothing happens for a beat or two -- then slowly Joe appears, wearing a large leg brace and walking on crutches. It takes him a minute to get down the stairs.

The bus drives off and Joe heads down the driveway.

INT. AZZURE BARN -- EARLY MORNING / DAY

Sky knickers as Finny puts a halter on him. He's energetic, keeping his head high. Joe walks in on the crutches, a full leg brace, no cast. She runs over... would like to hug him, but it would hurt.

FINNY

Hey... how'd it go? What'd they say?

JOE

The knee cap is fractured. Not too bad. I can't ride or anything for a month. Said I was lucky to have thick bones. How's Sky?

FINNY

Guess his teeth don't hurt anymore -- he ate everything. I mean everything.

Joe rubs Sky's back. He is looking better, thicker.

JOE

Awesome. I don't see much left of the ringworm. His bald spots have already started growing in.

FINNY

(sarcastic)

And only two more days and you'll be done with his tail...

Joe smiles at the tails -- it's always knotted.

JOE

That tail is a piece of work. Still, he looks a lot better.

(then)

Looks like he needs shoes.

Joe picks up a hoof. It's in sad shape. It's overgrown, splintering.

JOE

I can trim these and put shoes on if you gott'em. You'll have to help. It's killing my knee.

FINNY

(in awe)

You can shoe, too? Vel has some in the back.

(CONTINUED)

Joe nods okay and grabs his crutches.

FINNY
No, I'll get the shoes.

Joe relaxes as Finny heads for the barn to get the shoes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE ARENA -- DAY

Finny lets out some rope and tries to get Sky to move around her in a circle. Sky keeps turning to face her instead.

JOE
You have to drive more from the hindquarters. That will send him forward.

FINNY
Okay. How?

JOE
Point at his butt with your hand -- and really focus on his rear end -- stare at it.

Finny takes a step back and extends the arm holding the rope towards his rear end and that's all it takes; he moves forward and around in a brisk walk.

FINNY
Joe, that totally worked!

Sky walks with a spring in his step. He is feeling better as well as looking better.

JOE
Try a trot.

Finny gives a cluck of the tongue and he steps instantly into a trot.

FINNY
Oh! He knows how to lunge! This is so great!

JOE
This will make breaking him much easier.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

I can't wait. How long till you think we should try?

JOE

Well, let's wait at least two weeks before putting the saddle and bridle on. If he gets some fat over his bones the saddle won't rub sores.

FINNY

Makes sense. Gosh, Joe, look at him move. His feet aren't even all healed and look how big his step is.

ON SKY -- he does have a big, majestic step. The natural grace of a strong horse.

JOE

He's getting there.

FINNY

Wouldn't it be amazing if he could jump? It'd be a dream come true.

Joe shakes his head in acknowledgment. He doesn't want to set her hopes too high. But she is so happy. It's contagious. It makes him smile. He hasn't felt the urge to smile in a long, long time.

JOE

I hope he can, Finny, I really do. Let's let him cool a little bit and graze. Don't want to do too much too quick.

Finny relaxes her focus -- which is Sky's cue to slow to a walk. She keeps him walking. After a round or two she takes up the long rope and pulls Sky to them, gives him a pat. They walk over to the pasture to let him graze and cool off.

FINNY

So... where did you come from? I mean... where did you grow up?

JOE

That's kind of hard to answer.

FINNY

You know you can trust me...

(CONTINUED)

JOE

It's not that... It's just - I've been living all over the country the last few years, but I grew up in Horse Mountain, Montana.

FINNY

Wow, I like the sound of that - Horse Mountain, Montana.

JOE

That's what the Indians called it -- probably named something else on maps. We were right outside Sweetgrass, on the Canadian border.

FINNY

It must be beautiful up there.

JOE

Totally was. Heaven on earth... When I picture my parents in heaven, I picture Horse Mountain.

Vel appears around the corner.

VEL

Hey! Who wants breakfast!?

Joe smiles -- he's hungry.

CUT TO:

INT. VEL'S HOUSE / KITCHEN -- DAY

A modest three-bedroom house. Old, but tidy and clean. The kitchen is retro because it is old, not by choice. But it's nice. Finny and Joe are sitting, eating pancakes. Joe takes the last bite of what was a big stack. Vel sets another three pancakes on his plate.

VEL

Plenty more, so don't be shy. Not that that has been a problem, ever, for a teenage boy.

Vel sits down with her modest plate and a cup of coffee.

VEL

So what do you kids have planned for today?

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

We'll feed, muck, medicate and turn out, then go to Silver Spur for my lesson.

VEL

I see you got your leg looked at.

Vel notes Joe's brace. Joe nods. He doesn't know she recognizes the sticker on his brace from the free clinic.

JOE

Yes, ma'am

VEL

And... I'm guessing you're a runaway.

Joe half chokes up his pancake. After coughing, sputtering, and a slap on the back from Finny he is able to breathe again. Joe shoots Finny a look, thinking she betrayed his trust.

FINNY

I didn't say anything.

VEL

She didn't have to Joe. The first day I saw you, you had bruises on your face and a split lip on top of older fading bruises.

Joe is no longer hungry, pushes his food around on his plate, in silence. Vel's words carry no judgment -- just fact.

VEL

You're staying in Finny's old trailer and your clothes are the same just about every day, not to mention torn and worn out.

JOE

Are you going to call the police?

VEL

(reassuring)

I was sixteen when I left home. I left for what I'm guessing is the same reason you did, so no. I'm not calling anybody.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VEL (cont'd)
 You kids know you're going to have
 to figure out another living
 arrangement...

On their simultaneous realization of the truth here, she
 let's them off the hook for now.

VEL
 More pancakes?

They both nod yes, smile politely.

DISSOLVE TO:

SHOW PASSAGE OF TIME -- WORKING ON THE HORSE.

buying clothes at a thrift store.

buying beans and hot dogs at grocery store

EXT. AZZURE ARENA -- DAY

Finny leads a better looking Sky into the arena. He has more
 weight on him and no longer looks mangy. Joe, slower on his
 crutches, is much further behind them. As soon as Finny
 unclips Sky's halter from his lead rope he spins away in an
 explosion of energy, gallops away at full speed. Joe
 approaches.

FINNY
 Wow. He's never done that.

JOE
 He's got his energy back. He
 shouldn't pull away like that. You
 better use a stud chain. He needs
 to respect you.

They watch as Sky races around the arena bucking and
 playing. Finny is amazed at his energy.

JOE
 You said he wasn't broke, right?
 How much was he handled?

FINNY
 No idea.

Sky continues to tear up the arena, bucking, throwing dirt
 as he gallops at a speed that is just too fast. Too furious.
 Finny moves toward SKY, to catch him.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

No, wait a few minutes; let him get all that steam out of his system.

Finny nods. She's fine with that. He almost looks dangerous. For the next twenty minutes the kids watch as Sky prances and dances around, his movements fluid and beautiful.

TIME DISSOLVE:

BURNS HAND-- AT THE DOOR TO THE BARN

Joe and Finny appear, look over at the arena where Sky is rolling in the dust, rubbing his back hard into it -- feeling good. He stands up, doesn't move. Just stands there. He's done.

JOE

I think it's okay now.

Finny walks into the arena and Sky trots right over to her. Gives her a solid shove with his muzzle.

FINNY

Joe, did you see that, he came to me!

JOE

Yeah.

(concerned)

He shouldn't push you though. It means he considers you a plaything -- not a superior. We need to work on that.

Finny nods understanding.

FINNY

That's what Vel always says - "Horses outweigh us 10-to-1, that alone makes them dangerous -- without respect, they can be deadly."

Joe nods full agreement. Finny clips the lead rope to Sky's halter. Sky paws the ground.

FINNY

Why is he pawing like that?

(CONTINUED)

JOE

I think he's irritated because he's bored. Let's go lunge him .

FINNY

Really? He just ran around, like, forever...

JOE

Let's just see if it helps.

Finny clips the lunge line (much longer line) on him and begins letting out the long line and Sky bolts again, explosively, taking out rope and burning Finny's hand. She drops it and grabs her hand in pain. Sky, like a maniac, runs around the ring full speed trailing the lunge line behind him.

JOE

Finny get out of the ring!

Finny doesn't move. Sky is going nuts -- running full speed again, bucking...

FINNY

I gotta stop him, he'll tangle the line around his leg, he'll get hurt!

JOE

You can't stop him, get out -- now!

Finny waits to make sure Sky is not headed her way then runs out as Sky continues to run in furious circles... bucking and snorting again.

FINNY

(to Sky)

Come on, boy. Calm down. It's okay, Sky...

FINNY

(to Joe)

Why is he acting so crazy?

JOE

I'm not so sure you're gonna like my answer.

Finny looks at Joe

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Tell me!

JOE

I think he's wild. Completely wild.
 I don't think he's been handled
 much at all in twelve-years. What
 looked like a calm, docile horse
 when you got him was a sick, weak
 one.

(beat)

He's healthy and eating now.
 Gettin' his strenght back.

The teens continue to watch as Sky tears up the arena.

DISSOLVE TO:

XXXX EXT. AZZURE BARN -- LATER

Finny is running water from the hose over the long red line
 about an inch wide that runs across the inside of her hand.
 Joe walks over on crutches.

JOE

How's your hand?

FINNY

It's fine.
 (then)
 You really know horses.

JOE

I feel so useless with this bum
 leg. At least I can muck.

Joe gets a mucking rake, starts scooping up horse poop into
 a wheel barrow.

FINNY

Well, a horse hurt you once, you
 don't need a...

JOE

A horse didn't...

Joe stops. Finny looks at him -- her face telling him it's
 time for him to start being more open, about his experience
 with horses and otherwise.

Joe continues shoVeling.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

I used to race. Illegal, big money races that weren't even on a track. They happen after the rodeos close and the crowds are gone. No rules or anything; just a lot of money to be made if you won.

Finny looks up, turns the hose off, wraps a bandana around her hand.

JOE

My uncle...

Joe, looks down, closes his eyes, takes a breath and begins again. Finny walks over. He has her full attention and respect.

JOE

Losing wasn't an option. I liked to win and I did. Enough that the other riders started to threaten me. I thought they were trying to psych me out or something.

(beat)

I was wrong. I was jumped and beat on pretty bad. The last thing I remember was this man standing over me holding a board in his hand. He said my racing days were over. Then... my knee exploded...

(beat)

I'm sorry I lied to you, Finny, I won't do it again.

He keeps shoveling. Finny puts her hand on his shoulder, he stops, looking away from her. He's ashamed of being secretive, especially to someone who has helped him so much.

Finny doesn't know what to say. A tear rolls down her cheek. She wipes it. Joe has not looked up to see it. Finny squeezes his shoulder.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK -- DAY

Joe and Finny walk up to the mobile home -- and spot a brand new FOR SALE sign in the front yard. And the grass is mowed.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Ah! I'm sure my mom went around back... saw the damage! I'm so dead!

JOE

No problem. I made sure no one could tell anyone was there. And I wanted to surprise you but I fixed up everything in the back yard.

Finny runs around the back. Joe limp-runs behind her. She gasps.

FINNY

You did! How?

The back yard, siding, fence -- everything looks great.

JOE

(proudly)

Tools in the carport, not to mention two big pieces of siding. Everything's fixed, you'd never know

FINNY jumps up and gives Joe a hug. This catches him off guard. He locks up. Unsure how to respond.

FINNY

You are a life saver...

Finny quickly lets go. Trying to think of anything to break the awkwardness. They go around the back yard and make their way into the trailer.

INT. TRAILER -- DAY

It's clean, tidy. Looks empty. Joe sits on the couch, puts his leg up on the coffee table, sighs due to the pain relief.

FINNY

Vel wants you to enroll in high school.

JOE

High school? Finny, I haven't been to school since... fifth grade.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

You're kidding, right. How did you learn... stuff?

JOE

Don't need school for learning how to ride, break, rope, work cattle, tend sheep, shoe horses, mend fences. I can heal a horse that's sick, or hurt. I can fix cars, trucks, tractors, anything with a motor. I know most of the drive-lines through the country and how and when to run them. I can hunt, fish, and track a missing animal for miles if we lose one. I know how to survive the desert in the summer and the mountains in the winter. What do I need school for?

FINNY

Wow. That's more than I could ever hope to do.

JOE

And I watched my uncle and how he did business. So I know how to lie, cheat and steal if I had a mind to.

They laugh.

JOE

I just want to work with horses. I gotta figure out how to get paid to do it.

FINNY

Me too, Joe. I want to be a trainer and teach people to ride and go to horse shows just like Jeff at Silver Spur.

JOE

Is he any good?

FINNY

I think so -- he wins a lot.... yells a lot, too.

They just sit there. Nothing to say. Nothing to do. Joe is just happy to be anywhere and not in pain.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Okay. I guess I better head home.

JOE

Oh. Okay.

Finny searched his face for telltale signs he wants her to stay. There are none. He would like her to, but he's clueless about how to show it.

FINNY

(fishing)

Do you get bored here all by yourself with no TV or anything?

JOE

No. It's peaceful here.

FINNY

That's good then... I'll see you tomorrow.

Joe stands to see her off.

JOE

See you tomorrow.

He waves and watches her leave. He just stares at the closed door. It's awkward for Finny. Joe just wants rest and privacy.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER -- DAY

Finny stands in the yard, looking at the door. She doesn't want to leave either. She sighs, walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. FINNY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT -- ESTABLISHING SHOT

CUT TO:

MAKEUP MIRROR INT. FINNY'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Looking at her face in the mirror again. Finny pulls her hair back, then up. It looks good up. She lets it drop down. It looks good down. She examines her face a few seconds, then opens the medicine cabinet. All the makeup is brand

(CONTINUED)

new. Shiny. She picks up a concealer, reads the label. Then mascara. She sighs, drops it all back in the drawer, closes it, walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRAILER -- DAY

Joe wakes up. He's sleeping in his underwear with the brace on. He wasn't sure if he had to sleep in it, but he didn't want to take chances. He sits up, take the brace off -- rubbing his knee, scratching it. It feels good. He stands, carefully, without the brace -- puts weight on the knee. It feels good. He walks carefully to the kitchen, but by the time he gets there his gait is normal.

He stands there, bounces a couple of times.

JOE
(to his knee)
Good boy. Good knee.

He opens the refrigerator, pulls out the milk, a box of cereal and a clean bowl with a spoon in it -- they were all stored in the refrigerator. He pours himself a bowl of Cheerios and starts scoffing it down too fast. He's always hungry. You couldn't tell -- there's not an ounce of fat on him. KNOCK at the door. Must be Finny.

JOE
(calling out)
Hold on... One sec!

He scrambles to the couch, limping to make sure he doesn't stress his knee -- falls onto the couch and pulls his jeans on quickly -- gets up with his shirt. He opens the door. Finny's trying not to grin. She's never seen him shirtless. She likes it. Looks at his chest, stomach. Joe instantly gets self-conscious, pulls his tee-shirt on quickly.

JOE
Sorry. Just getting dressed.

He heads back to the kitchen. Finny follows

FINNY
Sorry, I'm an early bird.

JOE
Want some breakfast?

Joe takes a few more huge bites of cereal.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

No thanks. I ate. Plus... we're in a hurry. Some people are coming to look at it around nine... we need to clear out now.

JOE

Okay. No problem.

Joe finishes the bowl, quickly rinses it and the spoon and puts it all in a bag. He then sits on the couch and puts his boots on. Then his brace.

JOE

I don't think I need my crutches today.

FINNY

Awesome. Can't wait to see you ride.

(then)

Speaking of, I talked to Vel this morning. She wants to offer you a job. You can live there and train horses.

JOE

Really???

Finny nods yes, excited. Joe is not sure what to say.

FINNY

This is a good thing, Joe. Say something like "great"... "okay"... "thanks!"

JOE

(after a confused beat)

Great... okay... sorry... Thank you! ...

Finny smiles as Joe starts packing as quickly as he can in the splint -- stuffing his clothes into his backpack. He's too slow, so Finny grabs a bunch of his shirts and quickly starts stuffing them in, too.

JOE

Thanks.

She smiles as they continue to pack.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIRT ROAD -- DAY

It's a gorgeous morning as they walk to Azzure Hills. The grass is golden brown from the lack of rain, but still beautiful. Joe is wearing a large duffel bag as a backpack filled with this stuff. His limp is almost gone. They're walking slow for Joe, but he's moving without pain and normally except for the brace. Finny carries the crutches and Joe's smaller, original backpack.

FINNY

Maybe today he won't attack the saddle.

JOE

That'd be nice. We'll try a bridle today too.

They walk for a moment in silence.

JOE

Do you think its hard to get a driver's license now that I'm sixteen?

FINNY

When did you turn sixteen?

JOE

Yesterday.

FINNY

Yesterday was your birthday!?!?

Joe does not feel guilty. Nobody cared that it was his birthday before.

JOE

Yeah.

FINNY

Why didn't you say anything? I can't believe you didn't tell me.

JOE

(incredulous)
Finny, I just did.

FINNY

I mean yesterday, for crying out loud! Or sooner!

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Sorry...?

FINNY

Well, happy damn birthday! I can't believe you didn't tell me it was your birthday!

Finny shoves him hard. He half-trips -- falls to the ground, holding his knee, writhing in pain, calling out. Finny drops to his side, frantic, guilty, pleading...

FINNY

Oh, Joe! I'm so sorry! Ah! Are you okay???

He looks up -- the pain in his face dissolves to a laugh. He was faking.

FINNY

Oh! I hate you!

She stands up and throws the crutches down on him, hard!

JOE

Owww!

Joe laughs as Finny stomps away.

Joe gets up and follows after her. It's going to take him a while to catch up. He starts using the crutches. His knee is not 100 percent yet.

DISSOLVE TO:

SKY JUMPED EXT. AZZURE BARN -- DAY

Finny and Joe walk up to the corral. It's empty. The gate is closed.

JOE

I don't see Sky...

FINNY

That's weird. Maybe Vel put him in the pasture.

JOE

(points)

He's over there grazing. I think he jumped. See the hoof prints on the ground.

(CONTINUED)

Vel approaches -- Joe and Finny are looking at the two marks at the base of the fence where Sky's front hooves dug into the dirt before he launched over.

VEL

Yep. He's a jumper.

They look up.

FINNY

Hi Vel.

VEL

That fence is about five feet.
That's a huge jump.

JOE

At the Mustang round-ups the fences are built seven feet just to keep them in.

FINNY

(goofy excited)

Wow. I got a jumper!

JOE

That barely takes a saddle... we've got work to do.

VEL

That's true.

They start walking toward the barn.

VEL

(to Joe)

Finny tell you about my offer?

JOE

Yes ma'am. I appreciate it. I'm very obliged to accept.

VEL

You're very welcome.

They enter the barn, walk to a door that Vel opens.

VEL

This is yours. There's a bathroom with a shower around the side. I have an old TV you can put out there, too, if you want. Dinner is whenever I get around to it.

(CONTINUED)

Finny beams. Joe puts his big duffel bag down.

JOE

Thank you. As soon as this leg is good, I can exercise and train.

VEL

(smiling)

I'm countin' on it.

Vel walks, nods for them to follow her. They walk over to a beat-up 1978 Ford pickup truck -- it's hood is half open and it's on cement blocks with the front wheels are missing.

VEL

You any good with engines?

JOE

Oh yeah.

VEL

Get it to work and it's all yours.

JOE

Really?

She nods yes.

JOE

That is so awesome. Thank you!

VEL

Get to work on Sky first, I think he needs it more.

Vel smiles. Joe nods, Finny grabs a halter and they head out. Vel smiles as she watches them go.

DISSOLVE TO:

SKY SADDLE -- CRAZY EXT. AZZURE ARENA -- DAY

Joe pats Sky's back while Finny holds the halter tight. Sky moves back and forth as Joe places the saddle gently on his back. Sky knows it's there and doesn't like it at all. Joe pats his neck and talks calmly to him.

JOE

It's okay, boy. We're gonna take it really slow. Easy.

(CONTINUED)

Joe is putting the girth on in slow motion. Saying "easy now" and "good boy" and "that's it..." all the while. It's finally on and Sky just stands there.

JOE

Okay, let him go. Let's see what happens.

Finny lets go and takes three slow steps back. Sky doesn't move. After a second, Sky reaches back, grabs the skirt of the saddle and rips off a piece with his teeth -- throws it across the ring.

FINNY

Oh man, thank God that's an old saddle.

JOE

Don't move.

Sky is still frozen. Finny and Joe wait for the explosion... Sky reaches back, trying to grab the saddle with his teeth again. He tries the left side, then the right side. He can't get to it. After a few tries on each side Sky flings himself to the ground and rolls over on the saddle, repeatedly crushing it into the ground.

Finny has her hand over her mouth in disbelief. The saddle is getting flattened. No shape to it.

FINNY

Think he'll ever... get over this?

JOE

Yes, as hard as that is to believe now, I do.

Sky suddenly jumps up and starts running around the arena in earnest. Bucking, leaping, screaming. The kids do the only thing they could: sit back and watch. Joe starts moving out of the arena. Finny instinctively follows him.

JOE

Let's go to Vel's and watch him through the window. I want to see what he does when he thinks we aren't watching.

Finny nods, following Joe into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. VEL'S HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM

They watch from the living room window, standing back to make sure the horse can't see them. Sky notices they are gone and instantly stops fighting the saddle.

Vel walks in from the kitchen.

VEL
What are you kids...

Joe points out the window. Vel watches with them as...

ALT CUTS -- BETWEEN THE LIVING ROOM AND FRONT YARD OF THE HOUSE

Sky walks around, slowly -- looking for the teens. He starts pacing faster... up and down the fence line. Suddenly he jumps the fence and trots over to the house. He bends down, eats some flowers out of the flower bed, then goes to the railing of the front porch -- paws the stairs, then takes a big bite out of the wooden railing. INSIDE -- Joe moves toward the door.

JOE
We gotta get out there, he's going to jump up on the porch.

Finny makes a dash for the door. She opens it, startling Sky just as he is starting up the steps. He's like a puppy -- his ears are up and he's happy to see Finny and Joe. The saddle, seemingly no longer a problem. Finny backs him down off the steps, patting him to calm him. Finny pats Sky on the nose and is able to snap on the lead rope.

JOE
Let's get the bridle and try to lunge him.

CUT TO:

AT THE ARENA

Finny stops in the middle of the ring. A second later, Joe comes over, holding the bridle and a jar of honey. He squeezes honey onto the bit. He puts it to Sky's lips. Sky accepts the bit enthusiastically, doesn't care what it is -- it tastes great. Sky licks, sucks, chews on the bit.

Vel watches from the fence, letting Joe be in charge.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Well, that was easy.

JOE

They usually don't mind.

FINNY

Nice to have something go easy.

JOE

Go ahead and ask him to circle.

Finny gives him some slack and clucks her tongue. No longer full of energy after running around the yard, Sky trots normally, properly at the end of his line.

JOE

Put him through the paces -- walk a little, then trot and canter.

Finny does just that -- takes him from a walk to a nice trot. She clucks and he speeds the trot up like a finely tuned machine. She clicks her tongue loud a few times and he breaks into a perfect, slow canter.

VEL

(impressed)

That was good. He did everything he was supposed to do.

FINNY

He's really listening to me.

Joe nods in agreement. It's good.

JOE

Take him through it again, then we'll cool him down.

SLOW MOTION -- Sky canters... you can see the moment when all four hooves are floating in the air, not touching. He is a glorious thing -- beauty in motion.

JOE

That's enough. Let's cool him down.
(then)

This is really good.

FINNY

What?

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Hard work makes him happy - it's
play to him.

VEL

Yep.

JOE

We need to put him in the stallion
pen, the walls are over six feet.
That'll keep him in.

Finny nods as she leads Sky to the barn.

VEL

Good work, Joe.

Joe just smiles.

DISSOLVE TO:

MAKEUP SCENE -- WEARS IT INT. FINNY'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Finny wakes up, rolls over. A dog barks outside. She pulls her pillow over her head. She does not want to get up. A lawnmower starts up. She pulls another pillow over her head. She hears her twin half-sisters playing, screaming down the hall. She jumps with an "ugh!" of teenage frustration and goes into the

BATHROOM

Finny is just out of the shower - hair wet, wearing a robe. She opens the medicine cabinet and pulls out some mascara. She pulls the seal off the cap, takes about 10 false starts trying to figure out what goes where. After a minute of this, she just puts it down and pulls out the next item -- foundation. She reads the label -- turns it around.

FINNY

These things should come with
instructions!

She grabs the mascara again and starts applying it. She does a good job. Then she puts the foundation on. Then some lipstick. She makes faces at herself in the mirror as she does this. Model faces, funny faces, serious faces... she twists her nose up with her thumb... she gives herself a coy look, a sexy look, a stupid look.

She is very cute -- and looks older with the makeup.

(CONTINUED)

Finny takes another item from the cabinet, studies it like a pharmacist studies new medications. It's blush. She tries some. Doesn't like it, washes it off. She puts it back on, washes it off again. She looks at herself. Better. She grabs the blow dryer and starts drying her hair.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARENA AT SILVER SPUR -- DAY

Finny takes her lesson horse around the arena in a slow canter -- warming up before jumping. Joe is all smiles, watching Finny ride a good horse. She's good, too, flowing with the effort of the horse, back and forth, as he canters fluidly. Suddenly Joe runs over to the fence where Finny is.

JOE
(urgent)
Finny! Finny! Look!

Joe points toward Azzure Hills and Finny and everyone in the arena turns to see Sky cantering towards the ring. Looks like he jumped the fence, not only out of his corral, but the fence that separates the two properties.

FINNY
How did he get out???

Joe just shakes his head.

JOE
He figured out how to work the
latch. Damn horse is too smart for
his own good.

Sky is running toward the flood control channel that separates Azzure Hills from Silver Spur. He is coming to see Finny. It is probably 15 feet wide and 8 feet deep. Finny can't breathe -- afraid he'll fall in if he tries to jump it.

FINNY
Joe, stop him!

Sky is running at it full steam and at the last second he slams on the brakes right at the edge. He looks down, snorts and does what he always does when aggravated, paws at the ground viciously. He then starts cantering in circles. Joe walks that direction, not wanting to run due to his leg.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Finny, ride over there, fast! So he doesn't jump!

Finny spins her grey horse around and takes off at a gallop towards Sky. As she does this, Sky starts running again toward the channel. He's going to try and jump it.

FINNY

Nooo!!!! Sky!!!!

He doesn't pay attention. Finny knows if the fall doesn't kill him, she'll have to put him down.

Jeff, at Silver Spur, looks irritated but watches in amazement as Sky launches over the ditch -- the distance is at least fifteen feet. He clears it with ease, landing softly on the other side. He then canters up to Finny with a snort and dances around her. Joe gets there as fast as he can (with his limp) - he's holding a halter.

JOE

Whoa, boy, settle down.

Joe has to "walk-chase" Sky around Finny's horse as Sky dances, full of energy. Joe can't catch Sky. He stays just out of arm's reach.

JOE

Finny, hop down. I need your help.

Finny dismounts and Sky comes right up to her. She pats his nose. Joe puts on the halter.

FINNY

Did you see him jump that?

JOE

I did...I don't know whether to be happy or horrified.

Jeff comes up.

JEFF

Finny, whose horse is this?

FINNY

He's mine. I keep him at Azzure Hills...

JEFF

If you have a horse that can jump like this why aren't you lessoning on him?

(CONTINUED)

JOE
He's not broke yet.

Jeff runs his hand down Sky's neck and shoulder. Britney is not happy at all Finny and her horse are getting attention from Jeff.

JEFF
He looks warmblood.

FINNY
He's half warmblood, half
thoroughbred.

Jeff is interested in the potential money -- not making Finny happy.

JEFF
Let's run him through a chute, see
what he's got.

JOE
He's not really ready yet, he's
green and still putting weight on

JEFF
He looks pretty ready to me.

FINNY
(to Joe)
It's just a chute, what could it
hurt?

Joe starts to explain, but see's that Finny really wants (and needs) this attention from Jeff -- the top trainer in the area.

JEFF
I'll have it set up, give me a sec.

Jeff walks off to the side, we hear him calling...

JEFF (O.S.)
Ramon, get the chute in area four
ready...

As Finny and Joe walk Sky over toward the gate to the next area...

FINNY
It's just a chute...

JOE

I dunno, Finny. Sky doesn't like to listen to people. Especially if they get tough.

(re: Jeff)

Vel doesn't like Jeff very much and I'm afraid anything Jeff does will piss her off at this point.

FINNY

Jeff's been training horses like forever. I'm sure he knows what he's doing.

Britney rides back over to Joe and Finny as they enter the arena with the chute.

BRITNEY

I can't believe this is the same horse I watched you drag across the road.

JOE

He's not really ready to jump...

As they enter the center of the arena, Jeff takes the lead rope from Joe -- attaches a lunge line to the horse.

JEFF

Finny, has he been lunged today?

FINNY

No, but he likes to do things on his own terms. I sorta have to talk him into lunging.

JEFF

Well, that's going to change.

With that Jeff takes a lunge whip and cracks it across Sky's hindquarters. Sky freezes for a split second before blasting off across the arena, ripping the lunge line out of Jeff's hand. He is wearing gloves, so it's only mildly annoying.

Finny runs into the arena to try and get Sky to stop. Joe is there just seconds later. Britney strolls out to watch, a small snicker of a smile on her face.

It takes some dodging around, but Joe finally manages to corner Sky and stop him. Jeff comes stomping over to Joe who is quietly reassuring the horse. Jeff jerks the line out of Joe's hand.

(CONTINUED)

JEFF

This thing needs to learn some manners.

JOE

(to Jeff)

He doesn't think like a horse...

Joe's words of warning fall on deaf ears. Jeff walks Sky over to the jumping chute. (Three jumps in a row enclosed in a fence with no escape.) Without warning, Jeff lashes Sky across his hindquarters.

Instead of going forward Sky twists around and backs up, falls to the ground. Finny runs over, starting to cry.

JEFF

Kids, you've spoiled this thing rotten. He's not hurt, he's throwing a tantrum.

JOE

(quietly to Finny)

Let's get him out of here.

Finny nods okay, moves toward Sky, picks up the lunge line...

FINNY

Come on, boy. No one is gonna hurt you.

Jeff comes over abruptly, whip in hand. Sky's eyes go huge as he sees Jeff. Sky leaps to his feet and charges forward, smashing Jeff to the ground. Jeff goes down hard.

FINNY

Oh my God!

Sky sprints off as Jeff rolls around, dazed and moaning. Finny checks on Jeff.

Joe

(to Britney)

Call 911!

Britney (still on her horse) pulls out her phone and dials. Sky continues to tear around the ring at break-neck speed, the lunge line trailing out behind him. Sky slides to a stop, spins the other way and opens up his stride. Finny knows he is going to jump out... and he does, and clears the fence but just as he clear it, the lunge line snags between two boards.

(CONTINUED)

As Sky hits the ground on the other side of the fence the line goes taught and flips him end over end. The line snaps as Sky lands in a heap outside the arena. He just lays there.

Finny leaves Jeff -- moaning in pain, holding his shoulder -- with Britney -- and runs to Sky. Joe is already there when Finny comes running up.

FINNY

Tell me he's not dead, Joe!

Finny drops to her knees next to Sky, hands over her eyes, crying. Joe puts his cheek to Sky's muzzle and feels a faint breath.

JOE

He's alive. He's definitely breathing.

FINNY

Oh God, Joe, why isn't he moving?

JOE

I'll stay with him. You go check on Jeff.

She runs back over to Jeff, who is sitting up, but groggy and hurting.

BRITNEY

(to Finny, harsh)

That maniac horse of yours almost killed him! This is all your fault!

Britney turns to Jeff who isn't even listening. His shoulder hurts too badly. SIRENS can be heard in the distance. An ambulance is on its way. Finny jogs back over to Sky and Joe.

FINNY

How is he?

JOE

I don't know for sure, but...

FINNY

Oh, Joe, you told me not to come.
Oh God, what am I going to do? This
is all my fault!

Finny starts sobbing as she runs her fingers down Sky's face.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

It's going to be okay. I think he's just knocked out. He's still breathing. And look, Jeff is sitting up talking to the paramedics, he's okay.

Finny is sobbing and really doesn't hear Joe.

JOE

Sky, come on buddy. I know you're alive.

Joe keeps patting Sky's neck. His eyes are moving and a moment later he lifts his head.

JOE

Finny look.

Joe steps back. Sky, beginning to rouse slowly, staggers to his feet. Joe holds him steady by the halter. Finny sees the paramedics helping Jeff into the ambulance; no stretcher needed. They turn their attention back to Sky.

FINNY

(re: Sky)

Can he walk?

JOE

Yes, but you see how his eye rolls every few seconds?

FINNY

Yes...

JOE

That's a sign of a brain injury... a concussion probably.

FINNY

Oh, no. Is he going to be okay?

JOE

I don't know, I've only seen this one other time.

FINNY

What happened to that horse?

JOE

The other horse was a lot worse off than Sky.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

It died... didn't it.

JOE

Yeah, but Sky looks better already,
let's see if we can get him home.

After a gentle tug Sky moves forward but lurches from side to side like he's drunk. Finny is wrought with guilt as they head back to Azzure Hills.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIELDS -- DAY

Finny and Joe lead a wobbly Sky back to Azzure hills.

JOE

(working hard to be positive)
See, he's fine. Tell you what.
We'll give him a week -- and my leg
another week, then we'll start
again.

The relief is obvious on Finny's face as they walk back to Azzure.

FINNY

Okay, if you think so. Besides, I
go to my dad's this weekend. I
can't come here anyway.

JOE

You're not going to be here?

FINNY

No, I leave tomorrow night and come
back Sunday night. School starts
the next day.

Joe looks disappointed.

FINNY

I wish I didn't have to go.

JOE

You don't like going to your dad's?

FINNY

Not really, I mean, he's okay...
it's just... different than it used
to be and it's a hassle for him to
bring me here... so I can't come.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Sorry.

FINNY

No, I'm sorry, at least my parents are here to complain about.

Joe nods, glances away. They get to the barn, Finny opens the stall and Joe leads Sky in, rubs Sky's neck.

JOE

You're gonna be okay, boy.

(then)

There was a lot of fighting in my family. My mom was Indian and my dad was white. Dad's parents never came around.

FINNY

Did their family try to stop them?

JOE

I think so, I'm not sure what happened but I don't remember ever meeting my dad's parents and before I went to live with my uncle... and I'd only ever seen him one other time.

FINNY

You're kidding. You weren't close to him?

Joe shakes his head no.

JOE

The day after my parents died, he was there. The only other time I saw him he was fighting my dad. I think I was nine.

FLASHBACK -- YARD - DAY

JOE'S UNCLE and his DAD are going at it.

JOE (V.O.)

My uncle and my dad were in an all-out fist fight.

The two men tumble, wrestle. JOE'S MOM is frantically trying to separate the two men.

(CONTINUED)

JOE (V.O.)

My mom was screaming and trying to break them apart. I didn't think they'd ever stop fighting.

Joe's mom grabs a nearby shovel, hits Joe's Uncle. Knocks him loopy.

JOE (V.O.)

My mom finally grabbed a shovel and just nails my uncle across the head. He goes down and the fight's over.

BACK TO PRESENT

They go through the gate into Azzure Hills.

FINNY

Ugh. How horrible, what was the fight about?

JOE

No idea. My dad gets up, he's all bloody. He stands over my uncle and tells him never to set foot on Horse Mountain again.

FINNY

Then two years later he's your guardian?

Joe nods yes. Finny shakes her head in disbelief.

FINNY

What made you finally run?

JOE

I thought he was going to kill me. For real.

FINNY

Oh my God...

JOE

Right before winter we'd round up Mustangs and drive them to lower ground.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. - HORSE MOUNTAIN - ROLLING FOOTHILLS-- DAY

We see the spectacular landscape of rolling green foothills that sit at the base of beautiful mountains. Horses dot the skyline everywhere.

JOE (V.O.)CONT'D

When the spring grasses came they'd graze for thirty days and get fat. I'd break and gentle as many as I could, then come May we'd take them to the sale for broncs and saddle horses.

Throughout the next speech we see various cuts of Joe slowly walking up to a small herd of wild mustangs.

JOE (V.O.) CONT'D

That part was great. I'd spend all day with the horses. Really got to know them and understand how they think and why they do like they do. They were wild but I could walk with them and touch them. I was accepted by them, like I belonged.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Joe closes the door on Sky's stall. Sky nibbles on hay.

JOE

He'll be fine.
(to Sky)
Won'tcha boy.

Finny takes Joe's hand, holds it in both of hers. They sit for a moment, then Finny gets some energy, stands.

FINNY

Will you walk me home?

CUT TO:

EXT. FINNY'S NEIGHBORHOOD -- DAY

Finny and Joe are walking toward her house. They're close. It's a nice little tract neighborhood.

FINNY

(smiles to herself)
This is it.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Wow.

It is a quaint, sunflower yellow, two-story house. The perfectly maintained lawn stretches up a small hill to a stately white porch.

FINNY

Wow, what???

JOE

It's so big and... beautiful.

FINNY

It's just another tract house in just another neighborhood. You want big you should see Britney's.

Joe continues to study the house and the surrounding neighborhood, mapping it out in his head.

FINNY

Okay, wait here. I have something for you.

Finny runs up the porch, dashes inside, and just seconds later comes running out. She hands a small gift-wrapped box to Joe.

FINNY

Happy birthday!

JOE

Really?

Finny nods.

FINNY

Go, on. Open it!

Joe carefully unwraps the box. It's an small smart phone -- the kind you get at Walgreens and buy minutes for.

JOE

Finny... these are expensive.

FINNY

Not all of them...

(hands him a card)

This is credit for 12 hours of unlimited voice and data.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
(confused)
What? Who's voice?

She smiles at him, shoves him playfully, thinking he's teasing -- then she realizes he's not kidding.

Joe shrugs, he has big gaps in his knowledge and knows it. It embarrasses him.

FINNY
Your voice, silly. It's for talking and texting... or SnapChat... that all takes data or is data... you have to buy it.

JOE
(nodding, but not really understanding)
Oh. Okay. Thanks.

The moment gets awkward.

JOE
I guess I better get going

FINNY
Okay... See you Monday?

Joe nods yes. She kisses him on the cheek quickly, then heads up into the house. Joe waits till the door closes, heads back home.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BARN ROOM AT AZZURE HILLS -- NIGHT

Joe lays on the couch/bed, listening to his iPhone, tapping his toes. He turns it off, sets it on the coffee table. He leans and switches off the lamp. He can see the stars out the window. There is a sliver of the moon.

SFX: PING -- the phone announces a text.

Joe reads the screen. It's from Finny. It says "Good night Joe." He smiles. Touches the screen at the top... it goes to the desktop. He touches it again and the game "BeJewled" comes on in progress. He is confused... sets it down.

He looks back out the window,

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Good night, mama. Good night, dad.

He continues looking out the window as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE CORRAL -- DAY

Finny sees Joe standing next to the corral with Sky -- all tacked up and ready to ride. She speeds up her pace -- she wants to run to him, but doesn't (gotta stay cool...). Her heart definitely flutters though. She's grinning when she gets to them.

FINNY

Hey! Wow, he looks amazing.

JOE

So do you.

(then)

You look so... high school!

It's a compliment.

FINNY

Thanks, I think! Give me a minute to change.

Finny runs to Vel's house to change

JOE

Sky is ready to go!

DISSOLVE TO:

BUCKS FINNY OFF EXT. AZZURE ARENA - DAY / LATER

Finny slowly climbs from the mounting block onto Sky. Joe stands next to her. It all looks good. She walks him around slowly.

FINNY

Should I ask for a trot?

Joe rubs his chin, contemplates the horse.

JOE

(unsure)

I don't know. How does he feel?

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Good.

Finny looks at Joe who doesn't make eye contact. He's looking at Sky's eye.

JOE

He's been good, but I think he's starting to get bored and he acts out when he's bored.

FINNY

Well, I'll give it a shot and see what happens.

Joe nods okay, takes a step back. Finny gives a squeeze for Sky to go faster -- into a slow trot. Sky just jerks his body a little. She does it again, same thing. His ears go back. She gives a cluck of the tongue and a squeeze -- he breaks into a trot -- for one step and then let's go with a massive buck.

The clear blue sky is all Finny sees -- not the horse -- the big blue canvas above -- as she flies through the air -- lands smack on her back. Joe runs over to her. Sky stops like nothing happened and just walks. He got the annoyance off, so he's fine. Joe puts his hand on Finny's shoulder...

JOE

You okay???

FINNY

Yeah. What happened... I was on him and now...

Joe puts his arm around her, helps her sit up.

JOE

He bucked you off. Sorry, he showed no signs of doing that.

FINNY

He was soft and relaxed then boom...

JOE

Can you walk?

FINNY

Yeah, I'm fine, just got my bell rung a little.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Sit over here. I'm going to get on him.

Joe leads Finny to the side of the ring, puts her under the shade of a tree. She gives him her helmet.

FINNY

Be careful, Joe.

(then)

I finally get to see you ride.

JOE

Riiiiiiight.

Joe walks over to Sky, and with surprising agility and grace swings up on the horse with no need for stirrups or a mounting block. He was already impressive and hadn't moved an inch. Finny stands, rubbing her hip. The pain of the fall is replacing the shock of the impact. Joe walks Sky around the arena. She can tell right away he is a natural. The back of a horse is where he belongs. Joe walks Sky in a circle.

Joe

(patting Sky's neck)

Good boy...

Finny was even starting to relax. Joe asks Sky for a trot, with leg and voice at the same time while in a tight turn. Sky responds and moves out at a trot. Joe is trying to keep Sky's mind occupied -- turning him in a left circle. Then a right. Then a figure eight. Sky's ears go from pointing back to pointing forward.

Joe sees this as he feels Sky relax. He knows Sky understands what he is supposed to do. Knowing he doesn't have much time before Sky's attention-deficit kicks in, Joe gently pulls on the reins and asks him to come to a walk. Joe rides over to Finny and slides to the ground.

FINNY

Okay, he dumps me and you get on him and he turns into a show pony.

(then)

I guess he likes you.

JOE

It doesn't have anything to do with like or dislike. He's easily annoyed and acts out big time. As soon as you give him something to think about he is good to go. Remember that.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Okay. Well, I feel a little better
I guess. My butt doesn't though.

JOE

(smiles)

I bet... you hit pretty hard.

Finny punches Joe in the shoulder. They walk to the barn with Sky. This time it's Finny who limps. Not big, just sore.

JOE

I know I've said this a bunch of
times but he doesn't act like a
normal horse. He's going to be
tough.

FINNY

But he'll come along -- right? I'll
be able to ride him...?

JOE

I can't tell yet, he needs to deal
with pressure better. And the fact
he's so big and powerful makes it
all the harder.

FINNY

You're the expert. Whatever you say
goes.

JOE

Tomorrow , we'll just take it slow.
I'll ride him first, then you get
on.

FINNY

Okay. If he doesn't try to kill me
it will be a great birthday
present.

JOE

Speaking of birthday
presents...hold him for a sec.

Finny does, Joe darts around the corner, comes back. Joe has his hand behind his back... he pulls it out to reveal a beautiful English show bridle with a beautiful, simple red ribbon on it. Finny gasps.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Joe! It's beautiful! You shouldn't have...

Joe just looks down, smiles. He's very happy she's happy. Finny gives him a big hug. He hugs back -- for the first time.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE ARENA - DAY / LATER

Finny is standing next to Joe, who holds Sky at the mounting block. Finny puts her helmet on, fastens it. Joe pats Sky on the neck, holding him by a halter that has been placed over the bridle. There is a short rope on it... he holds the rope with one hand and the halter with the other. If this horse goes, he's going with it. Finny looks at Joe...

JOE

(to Finny)

Ready?

FINNY

Oh, yeah.

JOE

Okay, first, just lay across his back.

Finny looks confused. Joe nods "just do it..." She rolls her eyes "okay". Finny carefully climbs up and lies across the saddle. Sky is good.

JOE

Rub his belly. Say nice things to him.

FINNY

(rubbing Sky's side)

Good boy. Did you miss me?

Joe starts walking Sky around with Finny lying across his back like a dead man.

FINNY

(to Sky)

I feel really stupid, Sky.

(to Joe)

I'm sure I look really stupid.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
(smiles)
Yeah, kinda.

FINNY
Thanks!

She groans. They make a circle and come back to the mounting block.

JOE
Okay, he's ready for the next step.
Swing your leg up slowly and sit on him.

Finny does; slowly and carefully. Sky doesn't flinch at all.

JOE
I'm just gonna walk you around. 'K?

FINNY
Yep.

Joe walks them around the ring one time. Sky is a little fidgety but he doesn't mind Finny on his back at all.

FINNY
Okay, this is a miracle. He's perfect. You are a miracle worker.

They walk some more, then Joe stops.

JOE
He hasn't been put under any pressure. When we start to ask for things, that's when we could hit resistance.

FINNY
Do you think he's being good because he likes me?

JOE
Don't know about that, but instinct overrules anything a horse likes or doesn't like. If he gets spooked at this point, he'll dump you and bolt again. No matter how much he loves you.

Finny nods. That's true. Joe continues leading Sky (and Finny) around the arena.

JOE

I do know one thing, if a horse trusts you, you can get a lot more out of him.

FINNY

Joe, you are the horse whisperer!

JOE

(laughs, stops Sky/Finny)
Okay, I'm going to take the halter off. Let you walk him normally.

Finny tightens her grip on the reins. Sky's ears flick backward -- they go back forward. He notices the tension.

JOE

(to both of them)
Relax. It's all good.
(to Finny)
No pressure on his mouth.

FINNY

I think he knows it's me sitting on his back.

Joe slides the halter off.

JOE

Oh, yeah. He knows.
(then)
Okay, I'm going to walk beside you. Give him a squeeze for a walk.

Finny's calves tighten around Sky's belly -- the cue to walk forward. And Sky does just that. Joe stays with him as they walk about 30 feet.

JOE

Okay, see if he'll circle around me.

Finny moves her left rein out from her body and squeezes her right leg a little -- asking Sky to move away from her squeezing leg -- and follow the guiding rein. Sky does so beautifully.

JOE

Now ask him to halt -- then go.

FINNY

(pulling on reins gently)
Whoa, boy.

(CONTINUED)

He stops.

JOE
Okay, do that again. Walk and halt.

She does. Vel walks over, watching, admiring.

FINNY
(to Vel)
Watch this.

Finny squeezes her legs; Sky takes about five steps, and Finny halts him.

VEL
Nice. Wow, Joe, you've really made some progress.

JOE
It's a start. I lunged him for half hour before she got here.
(to Finny)
We're done for the day.

FINNY
(disappointed)
Really? But...

JOE
Yes. Sky's had a big day and he's probably one more halt away from dumping you again.

Finny slides off of Sky.

VEL
Kids, I just got a phone call for a boarder.

FINNY
That's great.

VEL
It gets better. They're looking for someone to train and get their horse going.
(she looks to Joe)
I told them we have the best trainer in the state that just happens to specialize in green horses... I told them \$450 for the board and \$500 for the trainer.

Joe's mouth hangs open.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY
Vel, that's great!

JOE
Five hundred dollars a month???

VEL
Yep!

JOE
Wow. Thank you.

VEL
Don't sweat it. I'll do all the
talking... they'll be here in two
hours -- if you want to work Sky
you need to do it now.

Joe smiles. He will know what to do.

JOE
(laughs)
Okay. Thank you!

FINNY
I'll get Sky!

JOE
Okay!

Joe -- still a little in shock -- breaks from his trance and
darts away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS SIGN -- SUNSET

Joe is standing there with Finny, leaning on the boulder by
the entrance.

JOE
You sure you want me to meet your
mom?

FINNY
Yeah, she'll love you.

A car appears down the road.

FINNY
There she is.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Finny's mom, BETH, pulls up, rolls the passenger window down, leans over.

BETH

(to Joe)

Hi! Hello, you must be Dale! It's so nice to meet the young man who was sweet enough to send birthday flowers to my daughter!

FINNY

What? Flowers...? Mom this is Joe, not Dale. My friend Joe.

BETH

Oh, sorry, let's go, Finny. Nice to meet you, Joe.

Beth had already looked away. Joe realizes he isn't interesting to Finny's mother since he isn't flower-sending Dale.

FINNY

Sorry, Joe, my mom...

(then)

I'll see you tomorrow, same time?

Joe nods okay, the moment hanging awkwardly, then turns back toward home.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- EARLY MORNING

Finny rides her bike down the long entrance road to Azzure Hills.

INT. AZZURE BARN -- MOMENTS LATER

Finny rides her bike into the barn, goes to Joe's door, KNOCKS.

FINNY

Joe?

Finny opens the door, not here. Finny walks through the aisles and up to Sky's stall. There's a note on the door.

She pulls it off to read it.

(CONTINUED)

Finny, I think I know why Sky acts out. I'm not sure it will work but I'm going to try. You deserve a great horse. I'll be back as soon as I can. I'm sorry I let you down. You looked like a princess in your dress tonight. Please give me one more chance. Joe

Finny holds the note to her chest, sobs.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN -- SUNSET

On a slope that is the hill at the base of a mountain, Joe and Sky are running full out, going for broke up a fire road. Sky spent almost twelve years in horse isolation half starved with no care. He was a horse filled with anger and confusion with a lifetime of frustration to get out of his system.

CLOSE on Joe's face. He's sweating and he's trying not to cry. His face is dirty, determined. His jaw is fixed. He's in a trance-like state moving with the movement of the horse. Joe has his own anger and frustration to deal with. And this is how he'll deal with it.

WIDE ANGLE -- in silhouette -- we see that Sky and Joe are running up a large mountain. They have barely started their journey, and the sun has set. Sky thunders over the ground out of pure spirit -- pure energy. He is soaring. This is to him as flying over this mountain is to an eagle. Joe knows it was his job to make Sky better. And that's a promise he intends to keep. Somehow, this seems to be what needs to happen. For both of them. After about an hour, Joe feels a change. The running is still fast -- but not as urgent.

Miles are disappearing and the moon is in the night sky -- but the horse is not tiring. Joe doesn't know how long they've been running, but he is sure a lifetime of misery lay in the dust and hoof prints behind them. He needs the run as badly as Sky, but Joe's body is human and wearing out. Joe knows he has to slow this horse down. With all his strength Joe pulls on the reins. He leans back using his body's weight, but it does no good. Sky bears down hard on the bit, yanking Joe to his neck -- and there is a burst forward -- Joe clutches Sky's mane to keep from falling. The road has given way to a narrow trail.

Trees whip by in the dark. Sky jumps ditches and low spots in the landscape that Joe cannot even see. Sky runs as though his life depends on getting to the top of this mountain. Sweat and foam pour from Sky's body making the reins almost impossible to hold. Joe laces his fingers

(CONTINUED)

through Sky's thick mane for a better grip. Exhaustion is taking over. If he doesn't stop Sky soon, he'll fall off. And at the speed they are going he wasn't sure he'd survive it. Out of desperation, Joe begins to talk to Sky.

JOE

You go, Sky. Give me all you've got. Let it out. I don't have anywhere to be. Run all you want. If you want to run off the top of this mountain, we'll go together.

Joe sees Sky's ear flick back toward him. He's listening. There is the slightest reduction in pace.

JOE

Come on, boy. You can do it. Whatever you want, whatever it takes. But you don't have to. You don't have to run anymore.

Joe sees the ears come back again and takes the opportunity to haul back on the reins. Sky slows a little more. Another hard pull and Joe cuts his speed to half. One more pull and Sky jerks to a sudden stop. Joe collapses on Sky's neck before rolling to the ground in a tangle of underbrush, his knee on fire from the bouncing horse. He holds his knee, moaning.

Joe lays there exhausted, gasping for air. He looks at the big horse hovering over him, blowing warm breath in his face. He rubs his aching knee, tries not to moan. Above Sky the stars were flickering on, night was coming, and it was beautiful.

He pets Sky's nose.

JOE

You don't have to run anymore...

Joe closes his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN -- MORNING

Joe opens his eyes to a rising sun. He is on the top of the mountain and made dizzy by the vastness around him, by the beauty of the brilliant blue sky. He hears hawks screaming. To his amazement they soar beneath him. Their giant wingspan keeping then aloft on the warm up-swell current. Joe turns his face to the sun and fills his lungs with the crisp, pure

(CONTINUED)

air letting it energize his body and spirit. Joe stares into the distance not understanding what he is seeing before him. It looks like the edge of the Earth.

As he stares, he realizes, for the first time in his life he is looking at the Pacific Ocean -- spread out in all its glory before him. The glory of the site is pure grace. Joe understands fully why his Indian ancestors worshiped nature. The proof was all around him. He felt one with the earth and part of the sky. He closes his eyes, tilts his head up.

JOE

(quietly)

Thank you, Mom. Dad. I miss you.

(then)

Thank you, God. Thank you for this horse. Thank you for Finny and all the people who have helped me.

There is no "amen". He makes the sign of the cross on his chest, pulls a rein and Sky turns -- ready to go home.

CUT TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- LATE AFTERNOON

Finny stands in the pasture, one of the other horses next to her. She scans the horizon toward the low hills. In the faint distance you can see the bigger mountains. Vel walks up to her. She carries a cup of coffee.

VEL

It's been over 24 hours. We should call the police...

Finny shakes her head no. She's been crying for a long time.

FINNY

Joe knows what he's doing. He's coming back, he said he would. He'll come back.

She hates to think of the alternative. But it is heavy in the air. Vel turns back, unsure what to do. A touch of cold tickles Finny's shoulders. The sun has now dropped past the horizon and left the shadows long and the last rays of the sun burning the clouds.

Finny gazes longingly up the mountain she's been staring at for the last two days. As she stares up, movement catches her eye. A horse and rider break through the trees. It's too far away to recognize them, but she knows it's them. Her

(CONTINUED)

hearts stops. She rubs her eyes. It's a big horse and a small rider. It has to be.

Finny takes off running, making her way through the tall grass. She gets to them -- Sky is sweaty, dirty and happy and healthy. Without a word, Joe slips off the horse. Finny holds him in a huge hug -- kisses him on the cheek -- and then the lips. Joe pulls her closer; kisses her again and again.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- DAY

Finny takes Sky over a full course of jumps. The last one is a two-six oxer (a double jump 2.5 feet tall). He takes it all with ease. He's going smooth and Finny looks great on him. Vel and Joe are watching.

VEL

Wow.

Finny rides over.

FINNY

(to Vel)

Did you SEE him???

VEL

(impressed)

Yes, I did. I just told Joe we need to show him. Just take him to one and let him get the feel of the crowds, see how he deals with it. This horse is a little unbelievable.

(then)

In fact, now that Joe has a license -- he can take the old truck down to the feed store -- get one of the bulletins for the next show...

FINNY

I'll just check the website with my new phone.

VEL

They haven't updated it yet.

They're old school.

(smiles)

Like me. Meanwhile you two can also pick up my alfalfa.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
(smiles)
You got it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FEED STORE -- DAY

Joe and Finny stand staring at the bulletin board covered in horses and livestock flyers -- most are for sale. There's a more formal plastic brochure holder that has show flyers in it. She pulls one out and starts reading.

FINNY
There's one in two weeks over in...

Finny sees Joe staring at someone -- a ranch hand she does not recognize -- and he is staring at Joe. Joe turns and walks quickly out of the store. Finny follows.

EXT. FEED STORE -- TRUCK

Finny walks to the truck, looks in the window.

INSIDE THE TRUCK -- Joe is laying low on the seat.

FINNY
What's going on???

JOE
Get in. We gotta get out of here.

Hearing the seriousness in Joe's voice, Finny does so immediately.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUCK -- DRIVING HOME

FINNY
Joe, what about Vel's feed...
what's wrong?

JOE
I saw someone I used to know,
someone who works for my uncle.

FINNY
Oh, God, did he see you?

(CONTINUED)

JOE

I don't know. I don't think so.
(then)
I hope not.

Joe looks over his shoulder. Checks the rear view mirror.
He's driving fast.

FINNY

Do you think your uncle is out
here?

JOE

I don't know, but the man in there
runs horses and cattle... among
other things. He's really a low
life; he'd steal from his own
grandmother.
(then)
Is there a fairground around here?
Like where a rodeo would be?

FINNY

Yes, but not too close -- like
twenty miles or so.

Joe nods, doesn't say anything. Finny pulls out her cell
phone, types in some text. Joe checks the rear view mirror
some more.

FINNY

There's a rodeo in town all week.
You think your uncle's looking for
you?

JOE

I don't know. I crossed the line,
betrayed him. Lost him a lot of
money... I was pretty sure he was
going to kill me.

FINNY

Are you serious???

Finny grabs Joe's hand. Squeezes tight.

JOE

I don't know why I waited so long
to run away. I was stupid.

FINNY

You were fifteen, striking out on
your own isn't supposed to come up
for three more years.

(CONTINUED)

(beat)

Please, tell me what happened.

Finny looks at Joe -- no reaction. She won't push. Finny looks out the window. Eventually Joe starts to speak. As he does, we see images of his prison -- the small camper on the back of his Uncle's pickup.

JOE

As I got older, I started to ask questions. Uncle John didn't like it when I asked questions. He didn't like it when I spoke, period. We didn't live normal. I know I told you we traveled in a truck and a camper. Uncle John slept in the camper and I slept in the backseat of the truck unless we were working a rodeo or a sale. Then he'd get a hotel room and sleep there. I still slept in the truck. I always thought we were poor because there was never enough to eat. One day I realized food was scarce to keep me thin as a jockey.

Finny squeezes Joe's hand tighter. It gives him the strength to tell the story.

JOE

The horses in the mountains: they were my only real family.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS -- DAY

Wild horses graze on the slopes. Joe walks among them. Two colts play chase. It is an amazing thing to behold, horses in the wild. As he continues telling his story, we see images of Joe ... RUBBING a halter on a Mustang's face -- to get him used to it. RUNNING his hands up and down a Mustang's leg. The horse grazes nonchalantly.

JOE (V.O.)

The babies I'd watched being born were four years old and down with us at the sale. I'd gentled most of them and they were fit and ready for families. You know, it may seem mean to take horses out of the wild, but these days, horses don't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOE (V.O.) (cont'd)
survive to old age out there and
the government needs to keep the
population down so sometimes
they're killed.

Joe places a rope across the neck of a horse -- just to get
him used to feeling something there.

BACK IN TRUCK

Joe goes quiet and Finny sees his face change. He doesn't
look like the self-assured person she knows. He looks like
the scared kid she found beaten up and limping at the bus
stop.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT/INT. RODEO GROUNDS -- DAY FLASHBACK

The sun is low. It will soon set. The day is over at the
grounds. Joe comes up to his UNCLE JOHN's truck, where the
uncle and some other men are sitting on the tailgate next to
an ice chest drinking beer.

JOE
Uncle John, six of our horses are
in the pen marked for slaughter.
You gotta tell somebody...

Uncle John laughs.

UNCLE JOHN
They're small and plain. People
want pretty horses. We'll get more
money per pound for the meat than
we would in the sale.

JOE
(his voice cracking)
You can't do that! All those horses
are broke and gentle -- perfect for
teaching little kids how to ride!

Uncle John has been drinking. He has no patience when he's
sober.

UNCLE JOHN
They're gonna be perfect for
someone's dinner table in Mexico,
boy!

The other cowboys laugh with Uncle John.

(CONTINUED)

UNCLE JOHN

(to cowboys)

Why don't you boys take a walk
while I have a heart-to-heart talk
with my nephew here...

The other cowboys take their beers and walk off, making jokes. Uncle John puts his arm around Joe.

UNCLE JOHN

Son, there's a little lesson you
need to learn here...

And he hauls off and punches Joe in the stomach as hard as he can. Joe doubles over. His uncle jerks him upright -- slams him against the side of the truck.

UNCLE JOHN

Lookie here, boy. You don't come
over here embarrassing me crying
and carrying on like a little girl.
You're useless and no good for
nothing, just like your dad.

(pause)

That little bastard destroyed our
family.

His uncle slams Joe into the truck again, lets go and Joe crumples to the ground.

UNCLE JOE

And it all would have been
different if you weren't born.

Uncle John kicks him in the side, cracking a rib.

UNCLE JOHN

Now go get ready to race, damnit.

Uncle John walks away, taking a swig of beer.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

Finny is silent.

JOE

I lost the race. He beat me some
more. I ran away in the middle of
the night.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. TRUCK -- NIGHT

It's dark. Joe turns the truck down the Azzure Hills driveway. Finny holds his hand. He's in autopilot mode -- a bit catatonic. Finny has obviously been crying as she's listened to the story.

CUT TO:

EXT. REGIONAL HORSE SHOW -- DAY

This is the small-time hunter/jumper world. Lots of teenage girls and their trainers and parents and dogs and pretty horse trailers. And pretty horses. All over the place.

IN THE ARENA -- a girl is going around a series of jumps -- the clock is ticking -- this is a timed event. You must make it around the jumps in as little time as possible -- without your horse's hooves pulling a rail down.

Vel and Joe stand next to Finny who is on Sky. Joe holds Sky's bridle -- just in case. But Sky looks relatively calm.

JOE

Remember, you're not going for the win. This is practice. Promise me you'll hold him back.

FINNY

I will.

Finny sticks her tongue out, her stomach aches.

FINNY

I'm totally going to throw up.

VEL

No you're not. You're just going to take him around easy. He's going to want to go fast. Don't let him. Just keep him under control.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next up is Josephine Miller... on "Sky's the Limit."

Joe gives Finny a pat on the thigh. Finny trots into the arena, circles and stops. A horn sounds... they cross the starting poles and the clock starts. Sky lopez easy on huge strides. Finny takes off easy and slow. After the first jump Sky perks up and starts going faster. He takes the next few jumps with ease.

(CONTINUED)

Finny is having way too good a time. Vel is smiling. This horse can jump... and his stride is so big, one step for him is like one and a half for a regular horse. That means he's getting around faster. Joe is smiling. Sky wants to pick up speed between two jumps about 100 feet apart. She lets him. Joe frowns.

JOE

No, Finny....

Finny looks at the clock. She leans a little forward and gives Sky some reins -- she's got this. Sky takes off and discharges the last three jumps so fast, clean and effortless it leaves the crowd cheering. Britney is watching from her horse. She is up next and she is not happy.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Clean round, twenty one point six.
Our current leader.

AT THE GATE -- Joe and Vel meet Finny as she comes out.

FINNY

Did you see him!?

JOE

Finny... you were supposed to take
it easy...

FINNY

I know but he felt sooo good!

Britney rides past them into the arena. She doesn't even look at Finny. Her jaw is fixed and set.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Up last, Britney Davenport on
Fredrick.

FINNY

(re: Britney)

This is a training class. Is she
even allowed?

VEL

It's an open class. Anyone can do
it.

JOE

She's just doing it to make sure
you don't win.

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Great. Her horse cost more than my house. I don't think I can stand to watch...

Vel shrugs. The horn goes off and Britney starts. She's flying around the arena. She's not losing. It looks frantic. Finny is incredulous.

VEL

She's going too fast.

FINNY

Isn't that the point?

JOE

Not if you want to win. Going that fast, you can't turn - she's being reckless.

They watch as Britney tears up the course -- turning too wide due to her speed -- she is kicking her horse like crazy. As she clears the second-to-last fence, her time is close to Sky's -- the clock says 15 seconds. Six seconds to go.

Britney speeds up more. Finny puts her hand to her mouth as Britney whips her horse to the last jump and sets him too far from the jump. The horse, in a panic, leaps forward, swimming to get over the jump -- crashes through it and somersaults in the air, tearing the hard lumber of the jump to pieces before hitting the ground in a bone-crushing crash. The whole crowd does a collective gasp then goes dead silent.

FINNY

Oh my God.

Vel runs over to them. Finny buries her face into Joe's chest. Within seconds hordes of people are running into the arena. Neither Britney, who was flung free, or her horse is moving. The crowd of people now in the ring obscures the view from Joe and Finny.

FINNY

(still hiding face)

Is she okay???

JOE

I can't see anything.

(CONTINUED)

The arena ambulance rolls in and EMT's swarm Britney. A small group of people and a vet are standing by Britney's horse who still hasn't moved. Joe watches as the vet stands up after checking the horse and wraps his stethoscope back around his neck. He shakes his head no.

JOE

Her horse didn't make it.

Finny begins to cry. They could see Britney has an oxygen mask on her face.

JOE

Britney's breathing...

FINNY

I should have held back like you said. None of this would have happened.

VEL

None of this would have happened if that little girl played nice. Now, let's get out of here.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- SUNSET

They get out of the truck, walk over to Sky's corral, holding hands. Joe suddenly drops Finny's hand. She looks up. Joe runs to Sky's pen -- the gate is open and it's empty.

JOE

Damn!

(points to ground)

Those hoof prints are not Sky's.
Someone else was here on horseback.

FINNY

(disbelief, shock)

Someone took Sky???

She starts to cry as Joe begins following the tracks to the back of the pasture. She follows him and they soon are both jogging... to the field leading into the hills. They get to the back gate -- which is usually locked with a chain. The chain's been cut with bolt cutters. Finny sobs in Joe's arms.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
We'll find him. We'll get Sky back.

CUT TO:

INT. VEL'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Vel is pacing the living room -- she just heard the story.
After a few seconds...

VEL
I'll call the police.

JOE
(shaking head no)
We can't.

VEL
You don't even have to be here when
they come. This is horse theft...

Joe takes Finny's hand to comfort her.

JOE
If what I think happened, did
happen, getting the police involved
will only make it worse.

VEL
How???

JOE
If they know police are snooping
around they'll panic...

FINNY
...And kill him?

Joe doesn't respond. Of course Finny is right. Finny sags
into Joe's arms. He holds her.

VEL
So who do you think took him???

JOE
Ramon and his buddies. I know he
used to cowboy and he would know
how to get rid of Sky fast. I have
a feeling he's doing this for...

He doesn't want to say, but their looks beg him...

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Jeff.

Vel rubs her forehead. Her pacing gets faster.

VEL

Damn. You're right. I've known Jeff for twenty years. He'd do anything to keep his reputation and his big payday clients intact. Sky beating his best rider on his best horse by a rouge horse he thought was trash...

Vel sighs and rubs her head

JOE

We haven't been able to get Sky into a trailer yet! I bet they don't know I rode him to the show. There's no way they'll be able to load him, especially if they get tough with him. Once Sky gets mad he'll be impossible to control. They'll have to ride or herd him out of the arena.

FINNY

(trying to control her tears)
Then what do we do???

JOE

I gotta go to Silver Spur, see if I can find out anything.

VEL

What about Carlos and Ramon?

JOE

That's who I'm going to talk to.

FINNY

Joe, don't. What if they get mad?

JOE

I intend to make them mad.

VEL

(crossing her arms in full
"mom" mode)
Joe, this is not a good idea.

As much as she has confidence in Joe, he is still a kid and she is the adult.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Come with me, then. But wait in the car. I need to talk to them alone.

Vel takes a deep breath. The clock is ticking. Vel heads toward the door.

Vel

(not happy about it)

Let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. SILVER STAR BARN -- NIGHT

Ramon comes around the corner, almost smashes into Joe.

RAMON

What are you doing here? You're not welcome here no more.

JOE

You took Sky?

Ramon's deep glare at Joe does not change at all, he looks away and walks off -- with a limp.

JOE

And Sky stomped on your foot. He tried to do that to me a lot. I was too quick. Guess you weren't.

Ramon stops.

RAMON

Get off this property.

JOE

You don't remember when we first met, do you...

Ramon doesn't.

JOE

It was right here. Skinny sick kid with a broken leg. You beat me up pretty good, stole my money. Remember?

Ramon is remembering.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Well, I'm not sick and my leg's fine.

Joe points to his leg -- as Ramon looks down at it he takes the opportunity to cold-cock Ramon on the side of the head. A nice roundhouse punch that takes Ramon to the ground. Ramon is dazed, gets halfway up and comes at Joe again -- and Joe hits him with another beautiful punch. Ramon drops like a rock, moans on the ground. Joe jogs back to the truck.

INT. TRUCK -- DAY

Joe gets in.

VEL

Okay, Rambo, find out anything?

Vel steers the truck out of the Silver Spur driveway.

JOE

I know they did it. I could see it in his face. And foot.

VEL

So what now?

JOE

Where's the nearest horse auction?

VEL

Far end of Coulton County.

JOE

Jumping horses are worth a lot of money, right?

VEL

They can be.

JOE

And Sky, do you think as well as he jumps they could get twenty or thirty grand for him?

VEL

If they show him to the right people... yeah.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

That's a year's pay for them. Even if they were supposed to get rid of him, I bet anything they'd try to sell him. All they'd need to do was get him out of the area and far enough away where no one knows him. There will be hundreds of horses there. And besides us, no one but Jeff... and Britney, has even seen Sky.

VEL

(not a good idea)

You want to drive there now?

JOE

No. There's no way they could load Sky into a trailer. That's how Ramon got stomped. They have to be riding him there.

VEL

That's an overnight ride, at least.

FINNY

What about that guy at the feed store? What if he's there?

JOE

I'll be careful. We need to get Sky back.

They pull into the Azzure Hills driveway.

VEL

Let's all get a little sleep. Or try too... I'll set the alarm for three a.m. We'll get to the auction grounds before sunrise.

JOE

Why can't we go now???

VEL

(firm)

First, you're a minor. And you're a runaway. And I've been giving you a place to live. None of that is very legal. And it's late. And Finny has parents that will wonder where she is.

(she softens a little)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VEL (cont'd)

Besides if they are on horseback,
they're not going to get there
until sunrise. We'll have plenty of
time to scout all the auction
horses...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRUCK - PRE-DAWN NIGHT

Vel is driving Finny and Joe to the auction grounds. Finny has called her mom and worked it out. Joe studies the surrounding landscape, now visible in the pre-dawn glow of morning.

JOE

(looking out window)

Are these flood control channels
always dry?

VEL

In the summer yes. But when it does
rain they become raging rivers. The
state builds them to keep the
neighborhoods from washing away.

FINNY

How much longer till we get
there???

VEL

Forty-five minutes give or take...

Joe continues studying the landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUCTION GROUNDS -- DAY

Cattle, pigs, horses, and sheep are everywhere as far as the eye can see and the place is packed. It's all Vel can do to maneuver her pick-up into the parking lot. Trucks and trailers haphazardly litter the place: from two-horse straight-load trailers to giant, two-floor stock trailers.

They park and hop out immediately; start walking toward the main building -- a huge tin roof building that is open on most sides. The roof is about 50 feet tall. Like an airplane hangar that only has a roof on it and lots of wooden pens underneath. The auction is about to begin and hundreds of

(CONTINUED)

people are moving horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs toward the auction pens.

FINNY
(shaking her head, fearful)
There must be a million horses
here...

Joe pulls a flyer off a telephone post.

JOE
More like twenty five hundred...

He crumples the flyer and throws it on the ground as they move into the building. He pulls a ball cap out of his back pocket, puts it on -- low. They walk slowly, carefully.

VEL
This auction is for western horses.
There's a good chance Sky will be
the tallest horse here...

Joe nods in agreement.

FINNY
Joe... what if someone here
recognizes you?

JOE
(confident)
My uncle never comes out this far
west. Plenty of horses in Texas and
Oklahoma.

VEL
Let's split up... ask if anyone has
seen a big horse in this sale...
(to Finny)
Call my cell if you see anything...

FINNY
I'll go this way.

JOE
I'm heading for the pens.

VEL
I'll go this way. Let's call each
other in an hour regardless.

Joe sees a well-dressed cowboy come out of an office...he goes up to him

RAUL
(Midwestern drawl)
What can I do you for?

JOE
I'm looking for a stolen horse --
he was taken last night. 17 hands.
A jumper... English. I'm thinking
he might have been brought here.
Raul stares at him, Looks behind
him.

RAUL
(to cowboys behind him)
Larry, Cray, come 'mere a sec.

They head over. Joe doesn't recognize their faces, but he's
getting uncomfortable. He speeds it up a bit.

RAUL
(to them)
This boy's looking for a stolen
horse. Big one... 17 plus...

LARRY
Horse that big can't cut worth a
damn. They'd never sell him here.

Cray, the other cowboy, nods his head in agreement.

CRAY
They'd take him over to Stockton.
All breeds get sold there.

JOE
It's too far, they can't trailer
this horse. He's wild and huge --
won't load...

LARRY
(rubbing his chin)
I know where your man's going...

This catches everyone's attention. Including Larry's friend,
Cray.

JOE
Where?

LARRY
Campground two hours ride north of
here. Someone wanted to rent my
double decker stock trailer

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LARRY (cont'd)
yesterday to go there. But I was
using it. If I had a big horse that
wouldn't load...that's what I'd
want. Makes sense, right Cray?

CRAY looks confused but agrees. Joe has a bad feeling --
he's being set up. But he plays along.

JOE
Where?

LARRY
Sun Valley.

Joe knows the man is lying. He can see it in his body
language and in how intently he staring at him. It makes no
sense to go north. The cowboy would go east to get to
Stockton. Joe felt sick. The man in front of him was setting
him up. Joe wondered what price his uncle had on his head.

JOE
Thanks for your help.

LARRY
We're heading that way, we'll give
you a lift.

Joe backs away as he speaks.

JOE
No, got a car, thanks.

Confident they weren't going to try to stop him, Joe turns
and walks to the door. As he's exiting, her turns to see
Larry flips open his cell phone -- one eye cocked towards
Joe. He doesn't let Larry notice he's noticing...

Joe casually takes slow, normal steps. As soon as he's
clear, he speeds up his steps, pulls out his cell phone. In
the distance he hears the sound of a TRAIN. He looks up,
listens. The TRAIN HORN is way off. He starts walking
quickly, pushes dial on the cell phone.

FINNY
(on phone)
Hey, where are you?

JOE
(slow, so she can understand,
but very firm)
Finny -- listen very carefully. I
think I know how to find Sky. Tell
Vel to take you home so you don't
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOE (cont'd)
 get in trouble. I got my phone and
 plenty of money on me. Tell Vel it
 will be okay. I know she won't
 believe me, but tell her. I'll call
 you the second I know something. I
 love you. I'm sorry.

Joe hangs up, puts the phone to his heart. His PHONE RINGS immediately. It's drowned out by the sound of the TRAIN HORN -- much louder this time. Joe takes off running in its direction. Seconds later he can see the cargo train moving slowly toward him.

CUT TO:

INT. AUCTION GROUNDS -- DAY

Finny hangs up the phone again, redials... hangs up again...

VEL
 (incredulous)
 He took off just like that???
 (huffs)
 Call him again!

FINNY
 He knows you wouldn't let him go.
 That's why he took off...

VEL
 Call him anyway.

FINNY
 Okay, but it won't do any good.
 He's gone.

111.

INT. FINNY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Finny comes in, harried. Her mom is in the kitchen. The twins are at the table, playing with their food.

TWINS
 Finny! Finny gives the twins a
 kiss, each, on the head.

BETH
 (to twins)
 Stop playing with your food!

(CONTINUED)

The twins giggle.

FINNY

Mom, can I stay at Vel's this weekend? She's not feeling well and can really use my help....

Beth thinks about it. One of the twins drops her plate on the floor. They both scream/laugh.

BETH

(re: Plate)

That's NOT funny.

Finny laughs at the twins laughing. Finny helps her mom pick it all up.

FINNY

I'll ride my bike. You won't even have to drive me.

BETH

Yeah, yeah. Fine.

FINNY

Thanks! Finny puts the big plastic plate in the sink, runs out.

INT. BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Finny runs in, starts stuffing clothes into her backpack. She opens a music box on her dresser, pulls out several 20-dollar bills, stuffs them into her pocket. She taps the spacebar of her laptop computer -- the screen lights up. She goes to Google and searches on "Central California horse sales". The first search result is Stockton, CA -- that week. She clicks on the map and clicks print.

As the printer churns out the map and address, Finny pulls out her phone -- we see her write the text: ***I love you; please tell me you're safe and where you are so I don't go crazy.***

CUT TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- LATE AFTERNOON

Finny rides her bike in front of and around the back of the barn, lays it against the wall, takes her backpack off and walks to an old, rusty green 1951 Ford pickup. (Joe's truck he's fixing up) There's a lot of grass grown up around it.

(CONTINUED)

She opens the door, throws her backpack on the seat and gets in. She turns the key -- the battery is weak and only turns it slowly. It really sounds like it's on its last legs and will never start. She tries again and again. The battery is getting weaker. If it doesn't start soon, it will be dead. The battery winds down and is done for -- just as the engine catches and starts. Finny gives it some gas, lets it warm up.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- SUNSET

The old truck pulls onto the road -- one headlight is out. Finny is behind the wheel.

INSIDE THE TRUCK -- CONTINUOUS

Finny sets her phone on the dash with the map on.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN -- SUNDOWN

Joe looks out the barely-open door of the empty rail car he's riding in. He sees the big drainage channels that make the perfect roadway for riding horses across wide ranges of land. Joe scans the landscape. Joe pulls out his cell phone, powers it on. He looks down as Finny's text message pops up. He stares at it. It hits him hard. He feels guilty about leaving like he did. He shakes it off. He'll make it up to her.

He texts Finny back: ***I'm on a train heading Northeast following the culverts. No luck so far, I love you and I'm sorry.*** Joe shuts the phone off completely to conserve its battery. He wishes clouds weren't covering the moon so he could see better.

He's getting sleepy. The rhythmic rocking of the rail car is lulling him into fatigue. He rubs his eyes -- jumps up and down, stretches to keep awake. Suddenly he spots something. He steps back from the door so as not to be seen looking out. It's a rider ponying a bigger horse. The horse looks giant in comparison.

As soon as they pass, Joe opens the door more and sits with his feet dangling, looking for a place to jump off. He's waiting until they are well ahead. After a few more seconds he spots an open patch with a big pile of dirt. He jumps for it. He rolls right over it and into some rocks and bushes --

(CONTINUED)

tearing his shirt and drawing a little blood. He gets to his feet. His knee is fine and that's really all that he was worried about. He moves quickly into the brushy countryside away from the track and crouches down to wait.

It's not long before the man passes right by him. Joe follows him and it's not far at all before the cowboy turns up a trail to some corrals on a hillside. Making his way as quietly as he can, Joe gets as close as possible without being spotted. He watches the cowboy lead Sky into the corral and take the saddle off his packhorse. He puts it in with Sky. The man immediately picks up his cell phone, makes a call. The phone lights his face enough to show Joe it's the man from the feed store. Joe knew he looked familiar. The man talks for a second, then hangs up -- puts his hands in his pockets, leans against the corral and waits. Joe rolls his eyes. The guy is big, he can't jump him. And he's not going to sleep. Joe pulls out his phone, changes his mind as it would give him away. He slides it back into his pocket.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME PLACE -- NEAR REMOTE CORRALS -- LATER, DARKER

The sound of a pickup truck coming down the road startles Joe. His pulse quickens as the truck pulls up and two men get out. So it looks like three men for four horses and no horse trailer. Doesn't make sense. Wait -- it makes sense if this is a trap. If that man at the auction house was calling Joe's uncle.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD PICKUP TRUCK -- NIGHT

Finny pulls her phone out again -- hits redial on speaker. Gets voice mail.

FINNY

Damnit, Joe! Turn your phone on!

She throws the phone on the seat. A highway sign says "STOCKTON 17." She is close. She looks at the gas gauge -- plenty. Finny comes to a railroad crossing with a narrow dirt road along side it. She goes down the road until it follows the tracks away from the main road.

She pulls off into some trees, shuts the lights off and locks the doors. She looks at the cell phone... sets it on the dash and pulls out a blanket and pillow she's brought. She makes herself comfortable and stares out the window at the night sky.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR REMOTE CORRALS -- LATER

Joe notices the men are moving -- something is happening. They start moving through the brush. Are they looking for him? He gets lower. One man moves toward the culvert. Another goes the opposite direction. Another goes to the pickup truck. Joe is in tall grass as much as bushes. The dark of night is his only real cover. One of the men walks within 20 feet of him. He stays low and quiet. He's sweating profusely -- his heart thumping in his chest. But the man walks past without seeing him.

Suddenly the night sky is lit up like daylight. It's from the deer lights on top of the pickup truck. There's a big searchlight in the middle -- it starts sweeping the grass. He starts crawling through the bushes toward the corral. The light is getting closer.

MAN NEAREST JOE

I hear something!

The spot light darts over toward Joe -- ten feet away and moving his direction. He scrambles to his feet and sprints for the corral. The light blinds him at the door as the men yell and run toward him. Sky whinnies sensing the tension. Joe throws the corral door open, darts in. He jumps on Sky and sprints out the door where two of the men try to block him. Sky hits them like a freight train and they fly out of the way.

Sky takes two big strides and it looks like he's in the clear when a lasso drops onto Joe and he's jerked from his mount like a rag doll. He hits the ground hard. Instantly there is a man on top of him, grinding his knee into Joe's back. They shine a flashlight on his head.

CORRAL MAN

Is it him?

A hand grabs Joe's hair and yanks his head up.

LARRY

(from earlier)

Sure is.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD TRUCK -- MORNING

A TRAIN WHISTLE kicks Finny from deep sleep to wide awake in a split second as she pops up and looks around -- scared, gasping. She realizes she's fine, safe. She immediately flips open her phone -- no messages. She hits Joe's number... Voice mail. Finny doesn't hesitate. She starts the truck, backs out and hits the road.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP TRUCK CAMPER -- DAY

Joe struggles against the ropes that tie his hands behind his back. His feet are bound, too. The truck he is in is not moving. It's just baking in the California sun. He looks around and realizes he's back in his old prison cell -- the camper.

CUT TO:

EXT. STOCK YARD -- DAY

Finny pulls up in the old Ford truck. She hops out and looks around as she walks toward the facility -- heading into the crowds.

INT. STOCK YARD BARNS -- DAY

More airplane hangar-like buildings. Large livestock trucks unload cattle, sheep, and pigs into pens nearby. Cowboys on horseback and foot dash back and forth, sending their herds in the intended directions -- up ramps, through arenas, across the parking lots... This is all prep work, set up. The rodeo and sales don't start until the next day. Trying her best not stand out, Finny studies the horses in the pens and stays out of the way. As she moves toward the cattle pens she holds her nose. The smell is overwhelming. She pulls her hand down from her nose, not wanting to stand out like city girl or something.

Finny begins her search and sees there are 500 different "barns" which are more like large pens in the huge building. She starts at barn 'A'; empty, as is 'B' and 'C'. Finny changes directions and starts jogging to cover more ground faster. Barn 'Y' is full of horses: young ones with white tags glued to their tails, ready for the auction. Finny starts dashing faster past the stalls. The tail tags on the horses turn green at some point. and the horses get prettier. These horses are different, riding horses, rodeo horses. Finny checks them all, too.

(CONTINUED)

She is slowing down when she sees something startling up ahead and darts into one of the aisles between the pens. She hides, low, peeks around the corner to see Joe, forty feet from her with THREE OTHER MEN. The tallest man is speaking to him in a hushed tone. Joe looks catatonic. The other two men stay right behind him. The tall man is Joe's Uncle John. They turn a corner.

Finny follows, watches out of sight as they slide open a large barn door and go inside. She casually walks toward the corner of the barn, as if to go around it, and she stops when she sees a truck parked next to it; a blue pickup with a camper shell. On the door, faded block letters say "McCoy Livestock." Finny notices a side door on that side of the building. There's a window next to it and she can see there is no one on the other side of the barn. She puts her face to the glass, covers her hands over her eyes and peers in. It's a large warehouse with large tractors and combines being stored. She opens the door and slips in.

INT. WAREHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Big, open floor. Big-wheeled farm implements of all sorts. Large poles hold up the metal roof 30 feet above. She walks around a combine to see a makeshift corral on the other side -- and it holds Sky. She fights to not gasp out loud. She crouches down and slides under the combine, crawls to the other side and hears voices. She turns to her right to see Joe's feet.

JOE

Let me race, please. I'll run the big horse. I'm not too heavy for him. I'll win you the money back I swear.

Uncle John leans against a large table.

UNCLE JOHN

Not gonna happen. Besides, it don't come close to what you owe me.

(gets in Joe's face)

I'm going to ask you one more time. Why is the big horse so important to you?

Joe crosses his arms and looks away. John lets out a disappointed sigh, then smashes Joe in the face with his fist, hurling him to the ground. Finny almost screams, holds her hands over her mouth and chokes back a sob.

(CONTINUED)

UNCLE JOHN

(nods his head toward a door)

Lock him in the closet, bring the truck around. He needs to disappear.

Uncle John grabs his hat off the table and walks to the large door of the barn. Finny watches as the men drag Joe into a closet and lock the door. The men all follow John out the front door of the barn. Finny gives it a second, crawls out from under the combine, goes to the door where Joe is.

INT. -- OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Finny sees Joe on the floor -- unconscious and bleeding from a cut on his eyebrow.

FINNY

Joe, wake up, please.

Finny kisses his forehead, unable to hold back a tear. He opens his eyes and wakes as she helps him sit up.

JOE

Finny? ! No! You can't be here!

FINNY

It's okay Joe, everything's going to be okay.

JOE

No! He'll hurt you.

Finny kisses him again and puts Joe's arm over her shoulders to help him up.

FINNY

We're gonna get Sky and go.

JOE

He'll come back, he'll find us. He always gets his way.

They walk out the door into

WAREHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS FINNY

That's going to change. We're getting out of here.

JOE

(looking around)

If you see him, run.

(CONTINUED)

(she nods, he stops)
No, I mean it. Finny, swear to me,
you run no matter what.

FINNY
You mean no matter what happens to
you?

JOE
Yes, promise me.

FINNY
Come on Joe, hurry.

JOE
(stopping)
Promise me!

FINNY
Yes, I promise. Let's go.

Sky sees Finny -- he knickers loudly then paws the ground.
Finny makes a makeshift bridle out of a halter and a short
rope, slips it over his head, leads him out toward the large
barn door.

FINNY
We'll ride to the parking lot, then
you take the truck and split. I'll
ride out and meet up with you in
the next town.

JOE
(nervous)
This is too easy, Finny.

They stand there at the large door, peering out. Joe does
not want to go yet.

FINNY
We're outta here. It's going to be
okay.

JOE
(scanning, nervous)
I seriously doubt that...

FINNY
Don't say that! We are getting out
of here!

JOE

Don't go for the truck. I don't want him to find out what it looks like or that it even exists.

FINNY

Okay, where?

JOE

We need to hide.

FINNY

Let's call the police, Joe. They'll help us.

JOE

I'll go to Juvie 'til I'm eighteen. My uncle promised that if I ever ran, he'd make sure I rotted in there. He'll tell them I'm a chronic runaway, and a thief or anything else he can think of. He's a master con artist. They'll believe him. If they don't, he'll have ten people in an instant backing him up.

FINNY

Okay, okay, no police...What about hiding in one of the barns?

JOE

First place he'd look.

FINNY

Joe, he's not a mind reader.

JOE

Go west, that way, toward the ocean. He won't expect that.

Joe helps Finny get on Sky then jumps on behind her. They walk Sky out the door, into

EXT. STOCK YARD -- CONTINUOUS

Both on Sky, they round the corner of the barn and head toward the parking lot. They move quickly and soon on the other side of parked cars and small buildings -- hidden from the main area.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
Promise me, Finny. You'll run.

FINNY
Don't talk like that.

JOE
Promise me!

FINNY
I promise! Okay?!

Finny picks up a canter. The crowd is getting thicker around them and people are beginning to yell in protest -- a horse is not supposed to be in this area. They need to change directions.

JOE
Head toward the barns. I need your phone. They took mine. I'm calling the police.

FINNY
What about no police???

Joe has no time to answer. Up ahead TWO BIG HENCHMEN block the aisle, waiting for them.

Finny turns down another aisle only to see two more men waiting for them. Joe spots another MAN approaching with a lasso. Joe jumps off the horse.

JOE
When I run at them you get out of here!

FINNY
Get on, I'll run them down!

JOE
Won't work, they'll put a rope around Sky's legs in an instant. They're after me, you run!! Call the police as soon as you're clear. Juvie's better than Uncle John.

Finny breaks her promise. She digs her heels into Sky's ribs and he goes bolting toward the man with the lasso. Caught off guard, he staggers back and jumps backwards to avoid being crushed by Sky.

JOE

No! Finny, run!

Finny heads Sky toward the man running toward Joe. She slides in front of him, blocking his approach to Joe. Joe takes off and Finny follows him. He disappears around the corner of a barn and Finny turns that corner to see Joe with his uncle's beefy arm wrapped around his neck.

Behind her, Finny sees the other cowboys running over. She hesitates...

JOE

Get outta here!!!

Finny starts to but can't. She can't leave Joe. The other cowboys arrive. Uncle John lets go of the headlock, but keeps his arm draped over Joe's shoulder.

UNCLE JOHN

So you are the reason Joe wanted that big horse back so bad.

FINNY

(to Uncle John)

You need to let him go.

JOE

(amused)

Do I?

FINNY

I'll call the police if you don't.

UNCLE JOE

Already did, told them they could stop looking for my wayward nephew. He'd come home.

John gives Joe a painfully tight squeeze.

JOE

That's right Finny, so now you go home.

Joe drills his eyes into hers -- telling her to keep her promise.

UNCLE JOHN

Joe, I don't think your little girlfriend here wants to leave.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
She's not my girlfriend.

UNCLE JOE
(to cowboys)
Don't you think that's sweet,
gentlemen? Young love...

The cowboys remain silent. Joe twists hard to break his
uncle's grasp, but it was no use. His uncle is too strong.

FINNY
I hear you love to race. Uncle
John's eyebrows go up. She glares
at him as she speaks.

UNCLE JOHN
Did you, now.

JOE
Uncle John, she's crazy. Don't
listen to her.

UNCLE JOHN
Joe, shame on you to speak so
rudely about this nice young lady.
(to Finny)
And yes, I do enjoy the races. My
nephew here used to do a pretty
good job.

FINNY
You say he owes you money, right?

UNCLE JOHN
She sure seems to know a lot there,
Joe, not being your girlfriend an
all.

FINNY
My horse is real fast, let Joe race
him. He'll win your money back.
That's what you want, right? Money?

UNCLE JOHN
That does sound like fun, but...
(feigns sadness)
It's too bad Joe's permanently
retired from racing.

FINNY
I'll race then.

The cowboys' chuckle.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Make her leave, Uncle John, please.

FINNY

I'll run him. If I win, you get all the money and Joe goes free.

UNCLE JOHN

What do I get if you lose?

FINNY

What do you mean?

UNCLE JOHN

You heard me, what do I get when you lose? If you're gonna bet me little girl, it's got to be worth it to me.

JOE

Finny, get out of here now!

FINNY

If I win, you get the money and Joe gets to leave. If I lose, I'll sign my horse over to you. You'll have his papers, you could get double what you could without them.

UNCLE JOHN

Now, it's starting to get interestin'.

JOE

Finny, don't trust him. He's a lying sack of...

Uncle John elbows Joe in the stomach.

UNLCE JOHN

(to Joe)

You better get some manners right quick before I lose my temper.

FINNY

(her voice still confident)

So is it a deal? I win, Joe gets to go and you get the money. If I lose, you get my horse.

Uncle John looks at her a second.

(CONTINUED)

UNCLE JOHN

Little lady, you got yourself a deal.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WIDE OPEN FIELDS NEXT TO RODEO GROUNDS -- DAY

It's late afternoon. The race will start just after sunset -- in the fall darkness. Finny is sitting on Sky -- and surrounded by three cowboys... all on horses also.

Uncle John and Joe stand next to John's camper truck.

UNCLE JOE

(to cowboys)

Ya'll make sure she gets a good look at the whole course -- take your time.

JOE

(to Finny)

He's not going to let you win.

Uncle John laughs hard (and wicked) and slaps Joe on the back hard. Joe has to take a step to keep from falling over. Finny heads off. Joe just looks at her.

CUT TO:

THE FIELDS... as Finny walks with the riders. It's basically a wide trail/fire road.

ON FINNY'S FACE -- as she survey's the land in front of her. She knows it all comes down to this ride, this horse and this moment. She is determined, but has a hard time not looking worried.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STOCK YARD PEN -- NIGHT

Finny sets a saddle pad on his back, adjusts it. She places an English riding saddle on the pad, puts the girth on. Finny brought the saddle with her thinking she might have to ride Sky out of somewhere. The peaceful moment is shattered by a horrible voice:

UNCLE JOHN

You ready?

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Where's Joe?

UNCLE JOHN

He's at the finish line. He'll be
in charge of taking care of our new
horse once you lose.

Poker faced, Finny doesn't acknowledge the dig. Finny notices Sky glaring at Uncle John. Sky doesn't like him either.

UNCLE JOHN

We tried to see what your horse
could do. Figured there had to be
something special about him. Too
big to work cattle, too old to
bronc, but he bucked my rider right
off -- a man who broncs for a
living.

Uncle Joe laughs, Finny ignores him.

UNCLE JOHN.

Time to go.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIELDS -- THE STARTING LINE -- NIGHT

Finny is milling about with 23 horses and 22 riders. White, black, Mexican... some with skinny racing saddles, some with western saddles; all kinds of horses and all kinds of riders. Most just wear cowboy hats and backwards baseball caps.

All the other horses are fidgety -- taking a step here, a step there. They can't stand in one place. Eventually the camera comes back to find Sky standing still -- oddly quiet -- calm and not fidgety.

Finny looks up at the night sky. It's mostly clear. There are stars. The moon is half full. Clouds pass by occasionally.

Finny spots Joe sitting on the tailgate of the camper truck. She moves toward him only to be cut off by another rider.

COWBOY

Ain't gonna happen girl, get in
line.

(CONTINUED)

Finny looks away from the menacing stranger, turns back toward the line. She turns back to Joe, mouths the words "I love you..." He just gives her a sad smile. He is defeated. She is not. She smiles firm.

BLACK COWBOY

What'd ya say we give the little
lady a head start just to be
gentlemen?

The crowd murmurs in agreement. Finny doesn't take her eyes off Joe.

FINNY

(loud, firm)
I don't need one.

The crowd laughs at Finny's declaration and the mood becomes more animated, excited for the race.

RACE STARTER

Okay, you heard her. Can't say we
didn't give her a chance.
(then)
Line 'em up!

Within seconds the horses are in what constitutes a line in an illegal back alley race.

Finny moves to the middle of the pack, takes one more look at Joe. She checks her stirrups, tightens her gloves and gives Sky a pat on the neck. Sky is ready. His ears are perked, his body tense. He knows the show is on and he is the star. A whistle blows and twenty-four horses blast off into the night.

Sky bursts forward underneath her. He was bred to run and his instincts kick in. It is all Finny can do to control him. Sky wants the front. Finny needs the middle -- not too fast, not too slow. She watches the riders around her. Some dash off to the front and some are purposely hanging back. The first leg of the race is to set pace to get the horses' rhythm. The all-out run would come later.

The further they get the more the pack thins. Finny sees she is surrounded, just short of being boxed in by four other riders. She tests her theory by trying to pull out only to be cut off. She gets a knowing look on her face. She knows Sky is a bully. Most horses hate to touch each other. They're very sensitive. Sky is a hulk and he doesn't mind bumping and pushing his way to the feed trough or wherever he wants to get to. He is not a polite horse.

(CONTINUED)

Finny pulls left, deliberately going wide. The other riders around her yell -- signal each other to keep her boxed in. She smiles. Going wide is a sure way to lose, but Finny is so close to changing course anyway, it doesn't matter. With a quarter mile to go, it's time to get out of the box. There's a slight gap in front of her. She kicks Sky to speed him up toward the gap. The cowboy in front -- who has been constantly glancing over his shoulder to keep an eye on her -- sees her coming. His 900-pound, 15.2 hand horse doesn't know what hit him. Sky, almost twice the size of his little ranch horse, bashes into his horse's hindquarters and shoves him out of the way like it's nothing.

Now clear of being boxed in, Sky's rhythm is steady. They hit the dirt parking lot. This is a race of opportunity; your path is your own. Horses are wildly zigzagging around parked cars and concrete barriers. Finny hears men whistling and shouting -- signaling each other to get her contained again. There's a fence coming up at the end of the parking lot. All the other horses are heading for the big gate in the corner.

Finny "opens" Sky's giant stride a little and heads right for the fence. It's barely four feet. He sails over it. This puts her ahead of several of the riders -- which brings more shouts and calls for maneuvering from her escorts -- most of whom are now all behind her.

A few riders are still following her -- and they shouldn't be. This means they are deliberately off course and they are only there to make sure she doesn't win. One of the riders behind her is pulling out a lasso. He's actually going to try and take her out. She wasn't planning on using Sky's incredible speed, but now she has no choice. She lifts the reins up and toward his mouth -- freeing his head and neck -- at the same time she gives him a few kicks. Sky loves this and knows it's his cue to take off. She leaves the lasso rider -- as well as all the others -- in her dust. She glances back to see them disappearing into the dark, dusty cloud behind her.

Finny begins to curve left and soon she is on her own and well off course. Up ahead is a huge, concrete-lined ravine. At the bottom are train tracks. It's a cut-through for the railroad. It's narrow -- but wide enough for a train. Finny heads toward it at full speed but slows just as she approaches it and brings Sky to a walk. We can see it's a pretty big drop to the bottom. Sky looks down, snorting. It's then she can make out two riders down in the ravine; put there to sabotage her. More of Uncle John's henchmen.

Finny nudges Sky to the very edge of the ravine. He stops hard. He sticks his head down and rakes the ground with his

hoof several times. Finny used to think this was a sign that he was irritated, but she knows now it is Sky thinking, figuring it out. Finny looks across the divide. It's shockingly wide. If they miss, the fall is probably thirty feet to the tracks below. She shakes her head, amazed that she knows Sky will not fail.

Behind her Finny hears riders approaching, galloping down the hill back behind her. She wheels Sky around and canters him toward them -- until they about 200 feet from the edge. She turns him back around, gives him plenty of slack in the reins and kicks him. Sky knows what to do and runs like he knows his life depends on it.

The men are in plain sight now and coming fast. Finny slams her heels into Sky's sides and he gladly takes his speed up to 100 percent -- then 120 percent. He is pouring his entire heart and soul into this run. He knows Finny needs it. He knows he needs it. In the distance, a train's whistle blows. Finny looks to her left, and to her horror she sees

A FREIGHT TRAIN COMING -- smoking, chugging, fast and loud. It's headed right for them. Sky's ear twists left. He hears it. He's distracted. He needs all his focus and speed. Finny feels him tense. Damnit.

She's tensing too. This will slow him down. If they don't hurry, it's obvious the train is going to be thundering beneath them when they get to the jump. That could totally freak Sky out and make him stop -- or worse -- take it at half speed and come up short. They would both die instantly.

FINNY

Come on, boy...

The train BLOWS ITS WHISTLE again and Finny feels Sky hesitate. The train is going down into the man-made gorge directly in front of them. Finny kicks Sky again -- he continues to slow his pace. This is not good.

FINNY

Come on, boy! Come on.

(beat)

I love you, Sky. I love you, boy.

You can do this. We can do this.

They need full speed to make it before the train gets there. Tears are streaming from Finny's eyes -- from the wind and the cold and the fear. She kicks him again just as the train whistle blows -- Sky speeds up. The whistle blows again -- and Sky speeds up again. He wants to beat the train. Finny feels him burst ahead, racing the train. They get to the edge just as the train meets them. The horn is deafening.

(CONTINUED)

The thundering of the train drowns the pounding of hooves. The ground disappears and time slows down. Finny experiences it all at once.

IN SLOW MOTION

It's a magical moment of fluid motion. Time has slowed to a crawl and it's like they are weightless, flying through the air. Even though the train is right under them, the noise is merely a faint echo somewhere in the back of Finny's mind. It is all very peaceful and serene.

Finny can see the brilliant sea of stars above. She feels the wind as it pushes the hair back off her face. She hears the frustrated and angry yells and hollers of the cowboys somewhere behind her. Faint too is the train's horn. Finny feels the stretching arch of Sky's body as he reaches -- straining for the other side. It all ends instantly in the explosion of horse, girl and ground.

BACK TO NORMAL MOTION

Finny slams into Sky's neck then smashes to the ground as Sky's legs collapse under him. The big horse flips on his side and they both skid in the dirt. Finny rolls several times before landing in scrub brush. They made it. Finny lies there for moment. Her entire body is a spasm of pain. She sees stars -- sure it is delirium. Then she realizes they are real stars and she's on her back looking at the night sky.

Finny is desperate for air, desperate for the ability to breathe. She isn't sure how long she has been laying there trying--a second, an hour, forever? She rolls over and pushes herself up, staggers to her feet. She falls back to her knees. She tries again and barely manages to stand.

She looks at the divide -- see the cowboys on the other side -- amazed to see her alive. Only then does she realize she has made it. The cowboys take off full speed. The train noise is fading into the background. Finny stumbles a few steps forward and spots Sky -- standing -- shaking his head at her.

Finny stumbles over to Sky -- still barely able to walk. She grabs a stirrup leather to hold herself up. She steadies herself, picks up the reins... climbs back on. It hurts. Finny walks... then kicks for a trot. So far so good. She asks for the canter. He is slow to respond but his stride is smooth and fluid. Sky is mentally shaken but not physically hurt. Finny picks up the pace, no one is anywhere near her but she doesn't care. Finny runs full speed to the finish line.

EXT. FINISH LINE -- CONTINUOUS

Thunderous cheers erupt as Finny approaches the line and crosses. People appear by the dozens, wildly applauding, coming to her and patting Sky. People are shaking her hand, asking her name. Person after person comes up to congratulate her. She is overwhelmed. These people so against her just minutes ago start chanting her name. Mesmerized, she scans the crowd for Joe.

ON THE FOUR RIDERS -- WHO WERE BLOCKING HER

They ride up -- see Finny being swarmed by people.

RIDER 1

Man, that girl can ride.

BLACK COWBOY

John ain't gonna like this.

BLOCKING COWBOY

I don't know if I care.

They all look at each other -- subtle nods of agreement.

BLACK COWBOY

I'm thinkin' the same thing.
Beatin' on kids is takin' it too
far.

BLOCKING COWBOY

John McCoy's been takin' it too far
for a long time.

(looks at others)

Who's with me?

They all nod subtle agreement again. Blocking Cowboy WHISTLES, and cuts his horse quickly. The others follow.

ON FINNY -- in the crowd of riders and fans.

FINNY

Has anyone seen Joe or John McCoy?!

The Blocking Cowboy rides up. She recognizes him and recoils. He takes his hat off and offers his hand to shake as the other three ride up.

BLOCKING COWBOY

Young lady, if I live to be a
hundred I don't think I'll ever see
riding like that again. It was an
honor to be beat by you.

(CONTINUED)

Dumbfounded, Finny shakes his hand.

BLOCKING COWBOY
I apologize for bein' a party to
blockin' you out.

FINNY
(exhausted)
Thank you...

Each of the other three cowboys shakes her hand as well,
tips their hats.

FINNY
(to blocking cowboy)
Do you have any idea where Joe or
John went?

He stands in his stirrups to get higher... surveys the
crowd, steels his eyes and lets loose an EAR-SPLITTING
WHISTLE. The other three blocking riders pull up. He
addresses not just the other riders but the entire crowd.

BLOCKING COWBOY
Anybody see John McCoy?

CROWD COWBOY
I saw him headin' to his truck with
that boy!

BLOCKING COWBOY
(to Finny)
Let's go find him. I think he needs
a reminder on cowboy honor.

The men ride off. Not knowing what else to do, Finny follows
them. They all head toward the big barn where Joe had been
earlier.

CUT TO:

EXT. STOCK BARN -- DAY

The men are gathered on their horses with Blocking Cowboy.
The other three are on their cell phones.

BLOCKING COWBOY
Don't worry yourself, young lady.
We'll find them.

The BLACK COWBOY puts down his phone.

(CONTINUED)

BLACK COWBOY

They're trying to leave out of the north exit!

Finny nudges Sky forward only to be stopped by one of the cowboys.

BLOCKING COWBOY

Young lady, give us five minutes, then meet us at the main gate, okay?

Finny nods. She doesn't know why, but she trusts them completely now. She and Sky watch the men canter off. She looks down at Sky and pats him on the neck.

FINNY

Good boy, Sky. Good boy.

She looks up and sees the STARS in the night sky. The half moon is setting. There is a peace that comes with it. She looks at her watch. It's been five minutes. Finny clucks, which gets Sky walking forward.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN RODEO GATE -- NIGHT

As she gets there she sees no one, nothing, but an empty gateway, half open. Tall telephone poles hold it up. Something's wrong. Is this the wrong gate? She approaches slowly and a movement catches her eye. It's...

Joe -- Lying against the backside of a telephone pole. She slides off Sky and runs to him. They embrace for a long, long time. She's sobbing. She holds his head -- kisses it -- kisses his cheeks -- kisses his lips. Finny feels warm, loved and right where she belongs.

JOE

You broke your promise.

He tightens his grip on her.

FINNY

I know.

JOE

You know you are completely out of your head crazy, right?

(CONTINUED)

FINNY

Yes, I know that too.

He takes a deep breath.

JOE

You know I love you more than anything, right?

FINNY

Yes. I do.

She hugs him tighter.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AZZURE HILLS -- LATER AFTERNOON

Finny is leading Sky in from the pasture. Someone is on his back. We can't see who it is as Vel walks up.

VEL

Looking good, Chester!

We PAN UP to see a grinning Chester -- Sky's original owner -- on his back, as Finny brings them to a halt. Chester pats Sky's neck.

CHESTER

I knew he was champion. She brung it out in 'im!

(then)

Didn't think it would take me this long to get on his back, though!

They all laugh. He dismounts slowly, carefully, but on his own. He is strong now, fed, clean -- healthy -- like Sky. Chester gives him another pat, turns to Vel.

CHESTER

I should probably be gettin' back...

VEL

You take your time. No body's rushin' you off your horse. Plus, you're staying for dinner, right?

CHESTER

(grinning)

Well I guess so.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

121.

Vel winks at Finny. She smiles knowingly. Joe pats Sky and we...

FADE OUT