

# FAST FOOT PHOEBE FROM PHOENIX

by

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(Based on, The Tall Tales of John Henry,  
American Folklore)

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EXT. ARIZONA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Shooting stars sprint across the black sky as a full moon casts lunar light on the desert landscape below.

Flames of a lone campfire flicker near the edge of a cliff.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Old rugged boots near the fire, lead upwards to the old rugged man who owns them.

SAMMY 'HAMBONE' HAYES (70, black, rugged), a geezer in every sense of the word, leans back against a rock, gazing at the night sky. His grey Afro finds a home on a small pillow.

A sound of FOOTSTEPS wipes the smiles from his face. As the steps come closer, he sits up and brings his shotgun nearer.

HAMBONE

Hey, who goes there?

Silence. The footsteps march on. The moonlight shows the shadow of a man who walks toward him.

Hambone puts his shotgun to his shoulder, ready for business.

HAMBONE (CONT'D)

I reckon if you don't wanna be  
picking your innards outta these  
trees, you best show yourself and  
let me know, if friend or foe.

A man in a Park Ranger uniform steps out of the shadows.  
RANGER BERNIE MABINI (20s - Filipino), waves to him.

BERNIE

Hey old dude. It's Bernie from the  
Rangers. I'm the new guy you met  
last week. Remember?

Hambone lowers his weapon.

HAMBONE

Well I'll be dipped in gravy and  
served with a rusty spoon. If it  
ain't that ole boy from Manila,  
stumbling around my woods.

BERNIE

How you doing, Mr. Hambone, sir?

HAMBONE

Fine as wine. What brings you out here, my Filipino brother?

BERNIE

I have lots of teen campers from the City now. They don't want to hear about Paul Bunyan. These kids want someone they can relate to.

Hambone takes a swig of water.

HAMBONE

You know about John Henry, right?

BERNIE

Uh, no. Not really.

HAMBONE

Boy, what's wrong with you? He was a super hero in America, before Batman or Superman knew which color pantyhose to wear with their capes.

Bernie laughs heartily, then has a seat on the ground.

HAMBONE (CONT'D)

You ready to suck up the story and see it in your head?

BERNIE

Ready when you are, grandpa.

Hambone grabs his pipe and starts puffing on it.

HAMBONE

Back in the days of the Old West, there were plenty tall tales. Most people know about the legend of John Henry.

(beat)

Except you - but only few know about his daughter Phoebe.

BERNIE

I'm all ears.

HAMBONE

Heck, she's the reason the lake in Utah got its name.

BERNIE

Salt Lake? But how?

He puffs his corncob pipe with gusto.

HAMBONE

I'll school you up on them both.  
Ole John first. To know a tree, ya  
gotta be familiar with its roots.

The smoke gets thicker and rises up to the stars.

FLASHBACK     SUPER - 1870

EXT. RURAL AREA - DAY

A railroad, in the process of being built across rugged terrain and through mountains passes.

In the distance...groups of Asians, Blacks and Whites - work hard on the tracks, under the blazing sun.

EXT.     RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Men line up on both sides of the railroad track. They swing down their hammers and wipe sweat from their brow.

The foreman, ISAAC SAMUELS (40s - British), cones out of a tent, puts on his horn-rimmed glasses and looks around at the workers.

He goes by them in his suit, clipboard in hand, taking a head count. He looks puzzled.

Isaac goes over to a group of black workers who hum a spiritual, as they pound the tracks. Isaac's gruff British voice makes them cut the tune short.

ISAAC

Fellas! Have you seen John Henry?  
He was supposed to be here a bloody  
hour ago.

PETEY (20s - black), a skinny guy with a Buckwheat-style Afro walks over to Isaac. He points down the road.

PETEY

I think that's him, a coming down  
yonder.

Isaac looks behind him and sees a figure strolling down the road with a huge hammer in his hand.

A muscle-bound red-head, SHAUN MCCULLOUGH (30s - white), slinks over to Isaac. His accent is thick and Irish.

MCCULLOUGH

Hey boss, let me speak to you a minute.

Isaac rolls his eyes and steps to the side so they can talk in private.

ISAAC

I know he's your friend, what kind of cock-a-mamey excuse are you going to give me?

MCCULLOUGH

No excuse, his wife is with-child and she is having a hard time. Give him a break, Isaac, heh?

ISAAC

Listen , I don't...

MCCULLOUGH

She got real sickly last night. He had to get medicine from Emperor Ming in the wee hours. Hey Ming, ain't that right?

EMPEROR MING (40s - Asian) looks up from his work. His Fu-Manchu mustache wiggles around his chin as he talks.

EMPEROR MING

Yeah. Woke me up. If anybody but John Henry, I kill him dead. I give wife good Chinese herbs. She better now.

MCCULLOUGH

See? Why don't you look down into your little Limey heart and find some compassion?

ISAAC

That's enough, Mister McCullough. I'll handle this as I always have done. The English way. You all, go back to work.

Isaac marches down the road towards the man who approaches. The workers look on, with worried faces.

As he gets closer, the muscular body of JOHN HENRY (30s - black) comes into view. His half-buttoned shirt shows a lean, mean body. Yet, kindness radiates from his eyes.

He sees Isaac coming towards him and smiles. Isaac looks totally flustered, and in a muffled tone, sets the stage.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Don't smile, man. I'm supposed to be badgering you to tears.

(beat)

Play along with me. I don't want them to think I'm a softy for you.

Isaac shakes his finger at John Henry. The big guy drops his head like he is being scolded.

JOHN HENRY

You got it, boss. Sure am sorry I'm late, but...

Isaac jumps around like he is about to blow his top. The guys back at camp watch Isaac's pseudo-tantrum with great concern.

ISAAC

No problem. The guys told me about it. Is the Missus okay now?

JOHN HENRY

Much better, thank you.

Isaac gets in his face. Grabs him aggressively by the shirt.

ISAAC

That new railroad owner, Mr. Dabney is a real pain in the keister. Says if we don't work faster, he'll replace us with machines.

JOHN HENRY

Machines? Ain't a machine out there that can out-work me and my brothers when we get rolling. Dabneys' nuts. Must-a snuck into McCullough's whiskey collection.

ISAAC

Snuck in and half-drowned there if you ask me. Regardless, I need you to rev it up, old man. We've got jobs to save. You with me?

JOHN HENRY  
God save the queen. John Henry  
saves the rail workers. I gotcha.

Isaac points to the worksite and shoves John Henry in the back, as part of his theatrics.

ISAAC  
Go get 'em, tiger.

JOHN HENRY  
Take it easy, King Arthur. I think  
they get the message.

ISAAC  
Sorry. I didn't hurt you did I?

JOHN HENRY  
Don't make me laugh boss. It will  
ruin all that hard work you just  
did.

ISAAC  
Hardee har har. Aren't we quite the  
jester today. Get to work if you  
please, sire.

Isaac stands in the road and tries to look authoritarian as he watches John Henry stride towards the rail workers.

When he gets there, McCullough, Petey an Emperor Ming greet him warmly. All at the site respects and welcomes him.

HOURS LATER

A STEAM WHISTLE BLOWS. The workers start to leave the work site. John Henry and friends, bathed in sweat, finally put down their hammers. Mr. Isaac rushes over to them.

ISAAC  
John, just got word your wife is  
having the baby. Right now!

JOHN HENRY  
Petey, put my stuff away.

ISAAC  
God speed, old chap.

John Henry dashes down the road and out of sight.

INT. JOHN HENRY'S CABIN - DAY

POLLIE ANN (20's - black), is flat on her back, sweating, her baby-bump stands tall under the sheets.

She tries to smile through the pain. MOLLY (20's - black), who seems to quite the joker, is the midwife.

POLLIE ANN

Oh John, thank god you made it.  
This kid in here is kicking at my  
insides harder than a full grown  
Texas mule.

JOHN HENRY

I'm here, baby. That's gonna be one  
strong boy. Come on out here  
young'un. Get yourself some good  
country air and hug-up your Pappy.

MOLLY

You ready, girl? Push!

A shocked John Henry looks on with eyes, as big as melons.  
Tears of joy fall, as the cries of a newborn fills the air.  
The smile of the proud papa lights up the room.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

That was a baby girl beating up  
your innards? I'll be. This child's  
gonna be something special.

SUPER - SEVERAL YEARS LATER

EXT. ALONGSIDE RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

People from nearby towns gather near the construction site.  
They bring picnic gear and sit on bleachers set up near the  
tracks. There is barely enough room for everyone.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

John Henry was now known as the  
world's greatest steel-driving man  
and his family lived very well.  
People came from all over country  
to see his show.

Isaac looks over at the large crowd, goes to John Henry and  
taps his shoulder.



ISAAC

Alright mate, looks like we got quite a crowd. You're getting to be pretty famous. Ready to dazzle them out of their bloody socks?

John Henry looks out to the crowd. He waves to Pollie Ann and YOUNG PHOEBE (6 - black).

Behind them, shadowed by a tree, sits an old Indian woman.

JOHN HENRY

The hammer man is ready.

He turns to his assistants behind him.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

My boys. Are you ready?

Petey, McCullough, Emperor Ming and COHEN (15 - white), anxious but awkward, chime in together.

JOHN HENRY'S FRIENDS

Yeah!

Isaac climbs a makeshift stage and addresses the crowd. A huge American flag made of paper is behind him.

DABNEY (30s - white, scruffy hair), the egotistical railroad owner, scowls with his already sour face, as he looks on. Greed, his bottom line.

ISAAC

Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the John Henry Steel Driving Thrill Show. My name is Mr. Isaac, the supervisor here. I'm proud to say that my crew has laid more track in a shorter time than any other crews, worldwide.

The audience applauds.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Here is the star of the railroad, and of our show tonight, Mr. Jooooohn Henry!

A hammer rips through the paper flag - shredding it.

Behind it, John Henry stands bare chested and proud, amid thunderous applause. His muscles, oiled up, looks imposing, but kind.

JOHN HENRY

Howdy folks. Golly. What a big crowd. We plan to honor my brothers who work them railroads. I'm proud to be part of these hard working Americans. Uh, enjoy the show.

McCullough and Cohen grab fiddles as Petey thumps a drum to provide background music. Isaac gets the crowd to clap along to the music. Pollie Ann and Phoebe 'dosy-doe'.

John grabs his hammer, kisses it, smiles to the audience, then... 'goes-off'.

He marches to the music like a military honor-guard with a rifle. He then spins the heavy wood in his hands to the beat, from left to right.

John Henry twirls it around his shoulders, above his head, across his back and through his legs. He flings it into the air and catches it to the beat.

Each time, he tosses it higher and higher. Phoebe squeals with excitement.

On the last toss, it goes way, way up. A 'squawk' sound is heard. He catches it as the song ends.

A Mallard, somehow hit by the hammer, also falls into John's arms. The crowd roars.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

Emperor Ming. Peking Duck for everybody. Can you rassle it up?

He throws his friend the dead bird.

EMPEROR MING

No problem, John. You already tenderize the meat good.

The audience laughs as Ming heads off with it. Cohen sets up spikes up and down the train tracks.

JOHN HENRY

Y'all heard of the leap frog game right? Well, we calls this the 'Weep Frog'. For if-fin them spikes was real frogs, they'd be in a world of hurt and tears.

McCullough joins him by the tracks and grabs a hammer. He squats down a little behind the first spike.

John Henry leaps over his back and slams the hammer on the spike. It goes in. McCullough then jumps over John Henry and does the same, over and over. The crowd loves it.

MCCULLOUGH

If you liked that one. You'll love  
this. Go get 'em, Johnny.

Cohen has set up more spikes. John Henry, hammer in hand, does a forward flip as he drives down the spike. Then flings his body over and lands on his feet.

It looks like handsprings as he moves down the line. Loud applause.

JOHN HENRY

Next, we will do a little trick  
that we call, 'the gitty-up and the  
gitty-down', hopes you like it.

Cohen puts down more spikes as Petey trots over to John Henry atop a horse. John mounts the horse and sits behind Petey. Cohen hands him two hammers with long handles.

Petey prances the horse to where the spikes start on the tracks and positions the horse in the middle of the two rows. Petey talks to the horse.

PETEY

Gitty-up.

The horse takes off. John Henry, hammers in both hands, drives the stakes down while riding horseback.

CROWD

Yeah...You see that?...Wow!

In the crowd, Dabney rolls his eyes and takes another swig of beer as he stumbles over to Molly who cheerfully sells food from a small stand.

DABNEY

Big deal.

Dabney reaches over the counter, grabs a chicken drumstick and starts to walk off.

MOLLY

Hey Mister, you ain't paid for  
that. Where you going?

DABNEY

It's Mister Dabney, to you, woman.  
I own this here railroad and I do  
what I please around these parts.  
Mind your mouth and sell that grub.  
I'll be back for my cut later.

Molly fumes but holds her tongue, but not her eyes. They burn hot. Dabney strolls away.

John Henry stands at the base of a mountain. Next to him is a giant boulder. Cohen climbs to the top of it and taps down a very large spike halfway into the apex of the rock,

JOHN HENRY

Thank you. I hope you are enjoying  
the show. This next stunt is  
called the 'The Oriental Flying  
Spikes and the Sky Hammer'. We hope  
you like it.

Emperor Ming comes from behind the boulder looking like, well ...the REAL Emperor Ming. Very regal. A friend of his plays an Asian song on a flute as he strides near John Henry.

He reaches up his long bell-like sleeves, pulls out a shiny metal spike and shows it to the audience. He suddenly flings it towards John Henry.

John swings his mighty hammer and deflects it into the boulder. It goes all the way in.

Ming pulls more spikes from his sleeve and uses martial arts moves to dazzle the crowd. John Henry crushes each one into the huge stone.

The metal daggers, form a vertical line down the front of the boulder. When Ming is out of spikes, the flutist stops and he bows to the appreciative crowd.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

That's Emperor Ming, all the way  
from Shanghai, China, y'all. Give  
him some. Yes. And now for the Sky  
Hammer.

Cohen struggles to bring the massive hammer over to John Henry. The crowd gasps because they never saw a hammerhead that big. Petey must go to help him carry it.

Big John takes it from them with one hand and holds it high. John Henry leans his back against the boulder and counts off ten steps.

With his back to the big rock, he takes the huge hammer, swings it between his legs a few times to gain momentum, then flings it in the air with all his might.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

Yaaaaa!

The hammer spins end over end, as it goes higher and higher into the sky. Soon, it is gone from the audience's sight.

Onward it travels, into outer space, it passes the Moon, stars and Jupiter.

EXT. HEAVEN - DAY

A choir of angels, warms up their voices. As the conductor counts off to start a song, John Henry's hammer breaks through a nearby cloud and startles some angels. The arch of the hammer's journey reaches it's zenith...now it descends.

EXT. ALONGSIDE RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

Everyone looks to the skies, amazed, they wonder out loud if the hammer will ever return.

John Henry motions for Phoebe to come to him. She sprints to him with blinding speed and jumps in his arms. John Henry points to a dot above them.

JOHN HENRY

Here she come, Phoebe. You ready?

PHOEBE

Yes, daddy. I'm ready.

As the hammer comes back into view, bright colored flames trail behind it.

CROWD

Wow...Look at that...Whoa.

The hammerhead hits the large spike atop the rock, dead-on. The force drives the huge iron nail deep into the crown of the humongous stone.

Still ablaze, the hammer falls to the side. The crowd is in awe, then begins clapping.

PHOEBE

Hold on, everybody. We ain't done.

Phoebe runs over to the boulder, flicks it with her finger. Suddenly the gigantic rock crumbles into a million pebbles.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
Okay. Now we are done.

The crowd, in disbelief, applaud like mad. John Henry goes to Phoebe, lifts her up, spins her around in the air and gives her a loving hug.

They both wave to the audience. Mr. Isaac again goes to the makeshift stage.

ISAAC  
Was that bloody amazing our what?  
I'm British and I've been  
everywhere from Bombay, to  
Kingston. I have never seen  
anything like that man. Be proud  
America.

The crowd applauds John Henry and their country.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Just in case there are people who  
feel they are getting bamboozled,  
Mr. Henry has agreed to place a  
wager against his skills. The bet  
is that he can drive down one  
hundred spikes, before a man can  
finish a ham sandwich.

The spectators speak amongst themselves. Dabney steps up.

DABNEY  
I'll bet you a thousand dollars  
that he can't.

All eyes turn to the mean-looking businessman.

ISAAC  
With all due respect, Mr. Dabney,  
our bets are usually much smaller.

DABNEY  
You chicken, boy? Maybe all this is  
some kind of snake-oil, scam show.  
A voodoo trick or something. This  
bet will show the truth.

ISAAC  
For one thing, we don't have the  
money to pay you, in the off chance  
we lose.

DABNEY

Fine, I'll take all the money you  
have saved, plus fire you all.

Isaac begins to protest, but Big John stops him

JOHN HENRY

Take the bet.

ISAAC

But John --

JOHN HENRY

Do it, Isaac. I ain't fettered by  
the likes of you, Mr. Dabney. And  
fellas, I'd rather die with a  
hammer in my hand, than let you  
down, even one time.

DABNEY

Good. Then it's a deal.

ISAAC

Fine, sir. Have a squat over here.

DABNEY

No, no. I'm not eating the  
sandwich. He is.

Dabney points to a man so massively huge, that next to him, a  
water buffalo looks likes a cockroach.

ISAAC

Good lord, man.

DABNEY

Allow me to introduce my colleague.  
Willie The Whale, from West Texas.

WILLIE THE WHALE (30's - white)waddles through the crowd,  
pushing fans to the side and stands up next to Dabney.

At her food stand, the Molly prepares the sandwich.

MOLLY

I'm gonna need more ham.

DABNEY

Tip your hats to Willie the Whale.  
The eating champion of the entire  
West Coast. Get ready to pack your  
bags boys.

Willie goes to climb the steps that lead to the stage. The bottom stairs split in half as tries to ascend.

WILLIE THE WHALE

Them stairs don't work.

DABNEY

Don't you fret, Willie. You can eat your sandwich right here.

WILLIE THE WHALE

Yumm. Sandwich. Willie hungry.

DABNEY

Good. Are your good-for-nothing workers done setting up the spikes?

Isaac looks over. Cohen sets up the last one, then nods back to him. He looks to John Henry. He confidently smiles

Molly walks over with a ham sandwich on her plate that is so tall, condors try to build a nest on it. Willie the Whale watches her carry the colossal sandwich.

WILLIE THE WHALE

I love you.

She rolls her eyes and puts the plate in his hands.

MIDWIFE

I reckon, by the looks of it, you love dern-near anybody that got some vittles in their hands.

Dabney eyeballs her, then puts a big clock on the stage.

DABNEY

When the second hand hits twelve, the competition begins.

Tenseness is on both faces. The second hand hits twelve, both men get to work. John Henry goes down the track, blasting down spikes, hammer in each hand.

Willie the Whale tips his head back and takes a monster bite out of the sandwich. His double-chin jiggles as he grinds it up in his mouth. Gulp...chomp! More sandwich disappears.

John Henry wears out one pair of hammers and Cohen gives him two fresh ones. McCullough looks over at how far the eating machine is and looks back at John Henry with concern.



MCCULLOUGH

Big John, aye, you have to push a  
bit harder, mate. Hey boys. Lets  
help him out, yea?

His friends sing for him.

JOHN HENRY'S FRIENDS

*Swing that hammer on down, John.  
Swing that hammer on down. Knock  
that steel on down, John. Knock  
that steel on down.*

John hammers to the cadence of the song. Sparks fly each time  
them big hammers come down. John Henry is almost finished,  
but so is Willie the Whale.

DABNEY

Hurry up you fat imbecile.

The last spike is driven into the ground. John Henry turns to  
see Willie the Whale put the last bite into his mouth.

ISAAC

And the winner is Mr. John Henry.  
Yes! I believe you have a little  
something for us, hey governor?

The crowd applauds. Dabney angrily pulls a wad of cash out of  
his pocket. He counts off the bills to Isaac silently.

When finished, he has only one bill for himself. He slaps  
Willie the Whale on the back of the head.

DABNEY

You worthless glob of blubber.  
It's your fault, you loser.

Isaac waves the money over his head in victory. Dabney gives  
him an evil look and marches off as the crowd cheers for John  
Henry. The big man takes a bow.

EXT. ALONGSIDE RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

Darkness closes in fast on the gathering. Petey begins to  
light torches placed around the event area.

Ming goes over to several medium sized boulders and puts  
spikes into them. He pulls a small bag from his emperor  
outfit. Atop each spike he places a mysterious packet.

ISAAC

And now ladies and gentlemen, the grand finale. John Henry wants you to know he appreciates your business and wants you to invite more friends next time.

John Henry waves to the crowd and strolls over to a hammer with an extra long handle. The wooden handle is the length of two horses, end to end.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

In parting, Big John wants you to remember, that no matter your skin color or where you are from, in this new America, we are all brothers and we have to all act like that. A little more, everyday. God bless America.

CROWD

God bless America!

McCullough and Cohen come to the stage, fiddles in hand. They begin to play, "THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER".

Standing far away from the charge-laden spikes, John Henry raises the specially extended hammer high over his head.

The hammerhead comes down on the loaded spike. Not only does the rock bust open, but bright fireworks burst into the air.

Boom! Boom! He goes down the line of boulders. Each crushing blow, a different color flashes as the big stones explode, against a dark backdrop.

After the last firework display is blown off, the crowd erupts with applause.

Petey hands John Henry a jar of kerosene. He lays the hammer down and douses it with the fluid. Then Petey hands him a small torch.

John Henry gets on his knees beside the hammer and then ignites it with the torch. Smiling, John Henry eggs on the flames with his hand gestures. The flames dance on the wood.

When fully engulfed, John Henry picks up the hammer by the butt and holds the long, burning mallet up high.

Suddenly he slams it against the side of a nearby mountain. He smashes the hammer over and over until it splinters off into a dozen pieces.

The crowd really goes wild now. They chant in unison.

CROWD (CONT'D)  
John Hen-ry...John Hen-ry...John  
Hen-ry...John Hen-ry...

John Henry waves to the people from a distance as they begin to go home after the show. After most are gone, he walks over towards the stage.

As he gets close, he suddenly goes down to one knee and struggles to breathe.

Friends and family rush over to him. Petey gets there first.

PETEY  
Big John, you okay, brother?

JOHN HENRY  
Can't - can't catch my breath.

POLLIE ANN  
Oh my lord. Is there a doctor here?  
Where's Ming?

Ming pushes forward through the crowd.

EMPEROR MING  
I'm right here, Missus.

POLLIE ANN  
You still got them needles that you  
used last time?

EMPEROR MING  
Yes, yes. I brought them again,  
just in case.

Phoebe runs over and hugs her mom hard as Ming bends over John and removes a small box from his pocket. He opens the box to reveal various shaped acupuncture needles.

In the dark, the old Indian woman quietly chants over beads.

They lay John Henry on his back and Ming applies the 'medicine spikes' to various parts of his body. Ming moves quickly as sweat pours from his forehead.

Soon, John's body relaxes and he is able to breathe normally.

Everyone in the small crowd is relieved and applaud 'Doc' Ming's efforts. Even the mysterious, old, Indian woman.

Phoebe gives a surprise hug to Ming who chuckles. She then hugs her dad who smiles back at her.

PHOEBE  
Daddy, you had me scared.

JOHN HENRY  
I'm sorry, baby.

POLLIE ANN  
John Henry! You just working  
yourself too hard. You need to give  
up these shows for a while.

JOHN HENRY  
I reckon I might be doing that.

Mr. Isaac walks over with a big smile on his face.

ISAAC  
Napping are we? Just kidding, mate.  
Here's your cut from the tickets,  
and here is the thousand you got  
from Dabney. You take it and stay  
home a few days from work.

JOHN HENRY  
Whew doggie! That's a lot of money.  
Let me see that.

Mr. Isaac passes him a pouch. He sits up, looks in it and makes a funny face.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)  
Yessir. That's the real deal.

He counts out a few bills and gives some to Emperor Ming.

EMPEROR MING  
John, no need it. I have my own  
cut...you keep.

John smiles back at him. He offers it to McCullough, Petey, Cohen and Isaacs. They all decline.

MOLLY  
Shoot, give it here then. Ole  
Willie the Whale dern near cleaned  
me out. Boy eats like he got a  
tapeworm the size of a Billy-goat  
inside him.

The small crowd laughs as he hand the bills over to the  
'bashful' woman.

JOHN HENRY

I give it to you gladly. And to  
anyone else having hard times,  
please, I want to help.

Two old widows walk towards him humbly, but are pushed to the  
side by Dabney.

DABNEY

If anybody around here gets money  
from tonight, it's gonna be me.  
Not some of it. Alllll of it!

ISAAC

We earned this money, fair and  
square.

DABNEY

My train tracks, my spikes, my  
hammers, my railroad!

ISAAC

We don't owe you one bloody cent.  
Look at all the labor you got for  
free tonight.

Dabney looks at the torch-illuminated train tracks.

DABNEY

Fine. Keep the money. The next part  
of this project is blasting a  
tunnel through that mountain. I'm  
gonna fire you all anyway.

JOHN HENRY'S FRIENDS

What?...Why?...

Dabney smirks at them as they squirm in fear.

DABNEY

Done bought myself a steam drill.  
It can do the work of ten men. I  
won't need you no more. After next  
week, you lazy rascals are fired!

Silence. Dabney grins, then turns to walk away.

JOHN HENRY

Mister Dabney. Ain't no machine on  
this Earth can out drill me. I  
betcha I can whoop it. Got me a  
thousand dollars that says I can.

Dabney stares John Henry in the eye.

DABNEY

Maybe. Sure would like to get my money back. What do you get if you win? Which you won't.

JOHN HENRY

Guaranteed jobs for my friends, until the entire railroad is done. They got families to raise.

DABNEY

Ha. This will be the easiest money I ever made in my life. Be at the base of the mountain at seven in the morning, sharp.

POLLIE ANN

John is sick. He needs a few days rest, at least.

DABNEY

It's either early in the morning, or start packing your bags now. What's it gonna be big fella?

JOHN HENRY

I'll be there. My people need me.

DABNEY

You are so foolish, John Henry. It will be a pleasure to see the look on your face and the faces of these other good-for-nothings, when you lose to me. Good day.

Dabney walks away, then feels a foot kick him in the hind-parts. He looks around but the lightning quick Phoebe has already sat back down. The crowd laughs.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Ha ha ha. We will see who is laughing this time tomorrow.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

John Henry leads the way through the woods on the way home. Bright moonlight and his lantern, light his steps. Phoebe, Pollie Ann and Molly follow.

Far behind them, the old, Indian woman trails them unnoticed.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

So the contest was set. Old John Henry knew his body was weak, but his heart, so full of love for his brothers, was stronger than anything on this earth. He proved it in his life, time and time again. Tonight wasn't no exception.

Phoebe runs up to John and gives him some water.

JOHN HENRY

Thank you, baby.

POLLIE ANN

Soon as you hit that door, you best get to sleep, mister. You need to get all the rest you can.

MOLLY

I'll be over early to help fix up some vittles. You'll need some gumption if you gonna win this one.

JOHN HENRY

Sounds good to me.

Up ahead, they hear gunshots. John Henry motions them to get low and stay down. He peers through some bushes.

A stagecoach is in the road, surrounded by several BANDITS. The STAGECOACH DRIVER (40's - white) and his crew have their hands up.

STAGECOACH DRIVER

Boys, this here is an Army payroll stagecoach. You mess with us, you'll have soldiers hunting you down. Please, don't do it.

BANDIT 1

I ain't scared of no soldier boys. Now give us that loot and we might not have to put holes in you, that the good lord didn't intend.

John Henry grabs his hammer and starts walking towards the coach-jackers.

JOHN HENRY

You ain't afraid of soldier boys? Private John Henry here. Fifty-fourth infantry, Union Army. Fellas, it's time to get scared.

BANDIT 1

Looky here buddy. Just mind your own, 'fore you get beat down and strung up.

JOHN HENRY

This here is my business. Once a soldier, always a soldier.

BANDIT 1

Union Army? Well, I was a Reb and proud of it. Shooting another of Lincoln's boys would be a pleasure. Let's get him, Dixie.

The bandits open fire on John Henry. He swings his hammer and deflects every bullet shot towards him.

The bandits look on in disbelief. The leader pulls out another gun as the others reload.

John Henry waits for the gunshot and whacks it back to the bandits. The bullet knocks one of their hats off.

More gunfire. This time John knocks the bullet into a gun one bandit is loading. It bends the barrel.

BANDIT 1 (CONT'D)

What in blue-blazes are you doing, boy? Ain't no sledgehammer no match for no six-shooter.

JOHN HENRY

That's why you Southerners lost. Always underestimating the power of a brotha.

BANDIT 1

Brother? Now I gots to shoot you.

He fires again. John Henry winds up, swings and connects with the hot lead. He sends it back to its owner.

The bullet hits his gun-belt and ignites several other bullets around his backside.

BANDIT 1 (CONT'D)

Yaaa! My butt! Yeow!

The horse bucks and sprints the other way. Boss of the bandits, holds on for dear life. His crew, now scared, high-tail it out of there and follow their boss.

The woman-folk cheer for him from the bushes.



STAGECOACH DRIVER

Thank you, John Henry. You saved our lives and the payroll for our troops. You got a mighty fine reward coming.

JOHN HENRY

I didn't do that for a reward.

The stagecoach driver reaches under his seat and pulls out a small bag of coins. He tosses it to John Henry. The hammer man snatches it with one hand.

STAGECOACH DRIVER

Just a few gold pieces to show our appreciation. You must have been one heck of a soldier...brother.

JOHN HENRY

Thank you. Y'all stay safe now.

The stagecoach pulls off as they wave to him. His family comes out of hiding and congratulates him.

PHOEBE

Wow, daddy. You're my hero.

POLLIE ANN

Your hero needs to get his head checked. You could have got killed out here.

JOHN HENRY

Long as I die with my hammer in my hand, my soul will rest easy.

POLLIE ANN

Speaking of rest, you gotta big day tomorrow. We best be scooting.

They walk down the winding road towards the cabins in the distance. The old, Indian woman watches from the bushes. She wipes her face. A tear runs down her finger.

EXT. BASE OF MOUNTAIN - DAY

A large crowd has gathered. John Henry's friends approach Pollie Ann and Phoebe.

PETTY

Hey Sista, where's big boy at? He feel okay?

POLLIE ANN

Said he wanted some time alone with  
God and his hammer. He's down  
yonder in them woods.

EMPEROR MING

Here he come now.

John Henry walks slowly out of the woods towards the  
mountain. He looks calm but worried, deep down.

His hammer is slung over his shoulder. As he gets closer, the  
crowd claps for him. He smiles back.

At the base of the mountain, a huge 'thing' sits waiting.  
Cloaked by a large burlap sheet, it looks enormous.

John shakes hands with his supporters then climbs atop a  
boulder. He motions for them to be quiet.

JOHN HENRY

Brothers and sisters. It is a  
honor, a big honor, to be able to  
fight for you today. We have come  
from all over the world to build  
America's railroad.

(beat)

In my years on Earth, I've seen the  
best of folks, and the worst of  
folks. All y'all are the best bunch  
a man could ask for. Today, I will  
try to return the love you done  
gave me and my family.

(beat)

If I somehow fall short, forgive  
me, but it ain't from lack of  
trying. I'm ready, Dabney. Let's  
drive some steel for real.

John Henry holds his hammer over his head. The audience  
cheers him vigorously.

John Henry jumps down from the rock and meets Dabney at the  
machine. Dabney rips back the sheet. A shiny new metal  
monster stares back at John.

DABNEY

Down right pretty, ain't she?

JOHN HENRY

If she plans on taking my job,  
she's as ugly as sin.

DABNEY

Enough jibber-jabber, big man. I  
got some money to win and some  
people to fire. Gone and take your  
position over there.

John Henry stands next to the steam-drill facing the  
mountain. He takes a deep breath.

MCCULLOUGH

Johnny. You sure you up to this?  
Last night, you gave us quite a  
scare, laddie. You okay?

JOHN HENRY

I guess we'll find out, buddy.

ISAAC

When this is over, remind me to  
tell you about another hammersmith  
named Thor, the God of thunder.

JOHN HENRY

God of thunder with a hammer in his  
hand? I like that. Say a prayer to  
him and tell him to stand by. One  
of his boys might need him.

Pollie Ann comes over and hugs him tight. She pecks him on  
the cheek.

POLLIE ANN

Be careful, John. You ain't no God.  
You a natural born man.

PHOEBE

And my daddy.

He picks Phoebe up and hugs her.

JOHN HENRY

I'll forget my own name before I  
can forget what a great baby girl  
that the lord has gave me. Now git.  
Daddy gots work to do.

John Henry gently puts her down and picks up his hammer.  
Dabney addresses the crowd.

DABNEY

Listen up. Here's the rules. Man  
and machine will work a normal nine  
hour day. Whoever drills the  
furthest in that time, wins.

Dabney cranks up the steam-drill. It is loud and puffs of hot steam spew from it.

ISAAC

Ready?

John Henry and Dabney look to him and nod. Mr. Isaac blows the big steam whistle they use to start their day. John Henry starts blasting rock.

Dabney flicks a switch and steps back. The people cheer for John Henry.

The sharp spike on the arm of the machine, stabs into the mountain. Debris is dislodged with each thrust.

John Henry easily knocks off the jagged pieces of rock, but as the wall gets smooth, penetration is hard.

PETHEY

I got ya, Big John.

Petey grabs a drilling spike and holds it up to the rock wall. Boom! It starts to chip away.

SUPER - 'FIVE HOURS LATER'

The steam whistle blows for lunch.

DABNEY

Who's hungry? How about you John Henry? My cook fixed up some fried chicken and fresh biscuits. You smell that? Hmm-mm. Take a break.

JOHN HENRY

Your machine taking a break?

DABNEY

Nope. That's why I bought her. No lunch breaks, no sick days, no vacations.

JOHN HENRY

Then, no break for me either.

DABNEY

As you wish.

Dabney chomps into a drumstick right in front of John Henry.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh, now that is good! I hear  
tell that you once ate three  
yardbirds in one meal. That true?

John Henry's stomach growls loudly. He gives Dabney a dirty  
look, but keeps pounding away.

PETHEY

John, grab something quick or this  
'gentleman' here will be teasing  
you all day with that dead bird.

Pollie Ann runs to him with a sandwich.

POLLIE ANN

Eat, John. Please. You been working  
for five hours straight.

He drops his hammer and goes to his wife.

JOHN HENRY

While I'm eating. Measure both  
holes so I can see how I'm doing.

Petey nods and is handed a measurement string from Cohen.  
John wolfs down his sandwich as quick as he can.

PETHEY

Your hole is four feet.

Petey measures the steam-drill's hole as it keeps pounding  
into the mountain.

MCCULLOUGH

How's the machine, laddie?

PETHEY

Dabney has more than five feet.

DABNEY

Oh oh, you better make Mister Big  
Muscles, another sandwich.

John puts his food down and grabs a hammer in each hand.

JOHN HENRY

I don't need no sandwich. I'm gonna  
eat this mountain.

POLLIE ANN

Here John, wear this.

Pollie Ann puts a necklace on him. The amulet is a chain from a shackle.

JOHN HENRY

I remember these. Around my legs,  
around my wrists. Even inside my  
head. No more. Dagummit, no more!

As he marches to the mountain, hammer in each hand...anger, determination, duty and rage is seen in his face.

He beats on the mountain viciously. If the mountain was alive, it would cry and bleed.

SUPER - 'THREE HOURS AND FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER'

John Henry has carved out a dark, cave-like hole in the mountain. Sparks fly off of the rock-wall with every downstroke, creating a strobe light effect.

The hammerheads are engulfed in flames and worn down. John throws them to the side, atop a pile of six others. Ming hands him a fresh pair.

He stands in puddles of his own sweat. Phoebe brings him water. He drinks some, pours the rest over his head, gets back to work. Shear exhaustion on his face.

POLLIE ANN

John. Some of our friends from the  
Jordan River Baptist Church came  
down here. They got something for  
you to hear.

John Henry turns around and wipes the sweat from his eyes. The church choir, in Sunday robes and all, wave to him. His sore arms can barely wave back. They start to sing.

CHOIR

*Swing that hammer on down, John.  
Swing that hammer on down. Knock  
that mountain on down, John. Knock  
that mountain on down.*

The talented singers flirt with the harmonies and make it very soulful. He looks around. A few people in the crowd start to sing with the choir. Soon, all do.

A surge of energy sweeps him. It is seen in his smile. John Henry turns back to the rock-wall.

JOHN HENRY

Mountain. You're going down!

John crushes his hammer into the rock. The ground shakes. Ridiculous amounts of rubble are freed with each swing. The mountain seems to moan. The hammerheads are aflame again.

PHOEBE

That's right daddy. Make that mean,  
ole mountain sing too.

Dabney rolls his eyes at the comment, emotionless. He walks over to his machine confidently. He pulls out his time-piece and smiles.

Just as he looks over to the steam-whistle, it blows, signaling the end of the contest.

DABNEY

Good, this circus is finally over.

He clicks off the steam-drill at the same time John Henry drops his fiery hammers. The crowd stops singing and begin to applaud the hammersmith.

Pollie Ann towels him off as Phoebe brings him more water. They help the big man over to a rock so he can sit down.

He is breathing heavy. Mr. Isaac comes over with a tape measure. Dabney snatches it.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Gimme that. I'll do it myself.

Dabney moves his machine out of the way and measures. He comes out of the hole.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Nine feet. Ha. You lazy, sod-busters would be lucky to do six.

Looking smug, Dabney strolls over to John Henry's hole. He takes the tape measure and goes in. Moments pass, he has not emerged. Mr. Isaac goes near the opening, peers in.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Isaac! Get in here. Look at this!

Isaac steps in. They both emerge with astonished looks on their faces.

JOHN HENRY

Well?

Mr. Isaac finally grins, excitement builds in him.

ISAAC

Fourteen feet! Fourteen feet! John,  
you bloody did it, mate. You saved  
us!

MCCULLOUGH

Let's hear it for John Henry!

The crowd erupts with cheers and jumps of joy.

CROWD

John Hen-ry...John Hen-ry...John  
Hen-ry...John Hen-ry...

John Henry waves back to the crowd, exhausted but happy.

ISAAC

Well done ole chap. Come say a few  
words to your loyal subjects.

JOHN HENRY

I'm just so tired. I can't.

CROWD

John Hen-ry...John Hen-ry...

JOHN HENRY

So weak. I can hardly breathe.

EMPEROR MING

I go get needles. Very good. Work  
every time.

As Emperor Ming scurries away, John's Friends help him to his  
feet. The crowd roar out their love for him.

McCullough picks up his fiddle and plays the, "BATTLE HYMN OF  
THE REPUBLIC". John smiles at him

Phoebe gives her dad some more water. John Henry drinks some  
and pours some over his head. He shouts in victory.

JOHN HENRY

Yeeeeee-hooo! Yeah, baby.

He struggles his way atop a small hill of gravel, hewn from  
the mountain, by John Henry's efforts.

As the sun goes down behind him, he seems to glow. He towers  
above the crowd as he gestures that he loves them in return.

Emperor Ming returns with the acupuncture kit and sets it  
next to the hill John stands on. The big man motions for his  
hammer.



Phoebe tries to pick it up but cannot. Pollie Ann takes it and gives it to John as the song ends.

Heartfelt applause rings out as John Henry holds the battered hammer above his head. Breathing hard, John jams his hammer to the heavens with each word.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)  
 I want you to know. I did it for  
 all y'all. As I loved you, y'all  
 gotta love each other the same way.  
 Reckon you can do that?

Everyone in the crowd looks at each other with new eyes.

Men, women, cowboys, Indians, Chinese, Black, British, Jewish, Buddhist, Irish, rich and poor; smile at each other in friendship. Some shake hands.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)  
 Well...Can ya?

In unison the crowd responds.

CROWD  
 Yee-ha!

McCullough fiddles out a high-spirited jig as Petey drums along. People who seem opposites dance with each other, laugh and have a good time.

John Henry smiles as a tear comes to his eye. He brings the hammer to his lips to kiss it, then lifts it skyward.

Suddenly, John clutches his chest. He can't catch his breath. The hammer falls from his hand.

He goes down to one knee. The music and dancing stop. Silence. Except for the wheezing.

EMPEROR MING  
 No problem. Over here is...

The hammer landed on the acupuncture kit. It is smashed to bits. Ming looks at John, panic in his eyes. John Henry looks back with sadness. Pollie Ann looks at them both.

POLLIE ANN  
 Nooooooooo!

The screams echoes off of the mountain John Henry just beat up. It crosses over the stream and into the dark woods.

SUPER - SEVERAL YEARS LATER

EXT. COTTON FIELDS - DAY

Heatwaves rise from the ground as a large group of African-Americans pick crops as BLUES MUSIC plays in the background.

PHOEBE (early teens), mops sweat as she harvests the cotton. Barefoot and in a raggedy dress, strength is in her eyes, with a hint of anger.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

After John Henry died, his family  
fell on hard times. Phoebe and her  
clan moved to Phoenix, Arizona and  
picked cotton to survive.

A man on horseback rings a bell. The workers gather their bags of cotton and load it onto a horse-drawn wagon.

Phoebe helps her mom, POLLIE ANN (late 30's). She looks down to see that her hands are bleeding and looks sad.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Her family was now very poor.  
Sometimes they all went to bed  
hungry. They couldn't even afford a  
gun to go hunting for food.

EXT. PHOEBE'S SHACK - DAY

Pollie Ann spoons out porridge on the plates of the kids as they sit on the porch. It is a very small portion. Suffering is in Phoebe's eyes.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

That day Phoebe and her mother saw  
a giant jackrabbit in the backyard.

A big bunny hops across the back of their plot.

POLLIE ANN

We're so hungry, Lawd, if only we  
had a gun, we could have that  
cottontail for dinner. My poor  
babies are half starving.

PHOEBE

Gun? You don't need no gun mama.  
If getting that bunny means food on  
our plates tonight, I'll fetch him  
faster that you can say, 'Rabbit  
Stew'. Watch me .

Phoebe sprints after it.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Phoebe took off after that  
jackrabbit, like lightning jumping  
outta storm-clouds. People from  
everywhere came out of their houses  
to watch.

Neighbors peek outside to see what the commotion is about.  
They see Phoebe in hot pursuit, over many obstacles.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

She chased that big bunny across  
fields...over bushes...through  
streams...up hills...and around  
trees. That rabbit had her  
sprinting...jumping...stumbling and  
spinning around. Finally, under the  
shade of an old palm tree, she  
nabbed him.

Everyone in the small community cheers for her.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

From then on, people called John  
Henry's daughter, FAST FOOT PHOEBE.

She puts the rabbit in a satchel and sprints back to her  
mother, big smile - beaming.

PHOEBE

Mama, I just had me an idea. We  
never have to be poor again. Leave  
it up to me.

#### SERIES OF SHOTS - EARLY RACES

1. Phoebe races kids her age - leaves them in the dust. A  
small crowd cheers for her. Pollie Ann collects small bets.

2. Phoebe races older teens - not even close. A much larger  
crowd cheers for her and a small banner with, FAST FOOT  
PHOEBE, on it is in the background. Pollie Ann and Molly  
count out twice as much money.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

When the money started to roll in,  
Phoebe pushed herself harder and  
harder. She hated being poor. Now,  
it was all about the greenbacks and  
she wasn't playing around.

3. Now racing adults, the track looks more manicured and several huge, brightly colored banners flutter. Bleachers have been set up and Molly has a food stand near the huge audience. Phoebe comes to the track in a new outfit. She revels in the applause and smiles at the other runners. Then she smokes them.

4. Eyes wide, Phoebe sits in front of huge stacks of her winnings. She laughs and hugs the pile with glee as Pollie Ann and Molly look on, concerned.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Pollie Ann and Molly hold dresses for Phoebe as tries on a red one in the glow of her new-found income level.

PHOEBE

Oh yes, this one too. I just love  
this. Living the GOOD LIFE. Don't  
you love it momma? Y'all get  
yourself something too.

Giddy, she spins around in her new duds. The adults share eye contact that shows disapproval.

INT. PHOEBE'S SHACK - DAY

In the newly upgraded shack, Phoebe lies on her bed as she counts money with a big grin.

Pollie Ann comes in from another room and watches her silently for a moment. Sadness in her eyes. She then strolls towards her daughter.

POLLIE ANN

Baby, you was little when it all  
happened, but do you remember your  
father?

Puzzled, she studies her mom.

PHOEBE

Yes. Of course I do.

POLLIE ANN  
Not just his muscles and his  
legend. Do you remember his heart?  
What gave him the inner strength?

PHOEBE  
Uh, yeah, I guess so.

Pollie Ann sits next to her on the bed.

POLLIE ANN  
It was love. Love for life, for  
people and even the critters.

PHOEBE  
He was quite a man. Yeah.

A smile, followed by sadness follows. Pollie Ann puts an arm  
around her.

POLLIE ANN  
It's okay, baby. I miss him too.  
My fondest wish would be for you to  
be more like him. Y'all both were  
blessed with special powers.

PHOEBE  
And I'll use my powers so we can  
get rich. Big house, horses and--

POLLIE ANN  
John Henry didn't give a hill of  
beans about money. Iff'n he got a  
stack of it, he was happier to give  
it away. You remember?

A deep exhale comes from the youngster.

FLASHBACK

EXT. RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

He counts out a few bills and gives some to Emperor Ming.

EMPEROR MING  
John, no need it. I have my own  
cut. You keep.

John smiles back at him. He offers it to McCullough, Petey,  
Cohen and Isaacs. They all decline.

JOHN HENRY

I give it to you gladly. And to  
anyone else having hard times,  
please, I want to help.

Two old widows walk towards him humbly.

END OF FLASHBACK

Phoebe hangs her head. Then she turns to her mom. A tear  
trickles over her cheek.

PHOEBE

Guess I been getting a little money  
crazy. How could I forget that  
about him? You're right. His power  
wasn't just in his muscles.

POLLIE ANN

Sure wasn't. That's why people  
still remember him to this day.  
When a person sacrifices to save  
others, well, that's a holy thing.

PHOEBE

I understand. Thanks momma.

They hug through tears.

EXT. PHOEBE'S RACE TRACK - DAY

A queue of people line up in near Phoebe's upgraded shack.  
Pollie Ann stands on a soapbox, up front.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

People started to come from miles  
around, making bets to see if they  
could beat her in a foot race.

A banner reading, the 'FAST FOOT PHOEBE THRILL SHOW'...hangs  
overhead.

POLLIE ANN

Come one, come all to the fastest  
show on Earth. Little Miss Fast  
Foot Phoebe will amaze you. She  
will make you think you are fixing  
to lose your natural mind.

Spectators are ushered into the backyard where they see  
Phoebe limbering up. She waves to her fans.

When she is done she gets some lemonade and retires into a makeshift tent on a hill, above to the track.

Phoebe's backyard and adjoining cotton field has been transformed into a very long race track. Benches are set up along the sides of the track.

Several American flags wave in the desert breeze near a platform that Phoebe's mother stands on. She looks over the capacity crowd and smiles.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)  
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to  
the Fast Foot Phoebe Thrill Show.  
We got food, we got drinks and even  
a place to lay down a bet or two.

After the last man makes his bet with Molly, she locks up the money and shuts down the table.

She hands hand-written cards to Pollie Ann. She reads through them quickly. Pollie Ann addresses the crowd.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)  
Let me introduce you to, the soon-  
to-be, broken hearted.

The opposing runners line up and show extreme diversity.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)  
From Korea, by way of California,  
Mr. Ilchi Sook. I bet they be  
calling him Mr. Suck after this  
here race is over.

The crowd laughs.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)  
Next we have a contestant from the  
Hopi Nation. Little Puma. Cute.

A fiery young man in traditional Hopi garb steps forward,  
LITTLE PUMA (teen - Indigenous).

He smiles to the same old Indian woman who was at the John Henry Thrill Show. She nods back. His face looks like he has something to prove.

LITTLE PUMA  
Many moons ago, I had a dream of  
magic moccasins, that would make  
whoever wore them, faster than an  
eagle. I told my dream to the  
shaman of my tribe.

(MORE)

## LITTLE PUMA (CONT'D)

(beat)

She helped me make the moccasins of  
my dreams and I am here to have you  
bare witness to the mighty powers  
of the Hopi people.

Phoebe peeks through the tent and sees the strange looking  
material on the handsome young man's feet. She is intrigued.

## POLLIE ANN

Those sure are some fine looking  
stompers, young man. Yes, indeed.  
And magic too? You hear that  
girlfriend?

## MOLLY

Yep. That boy got him some little  
magic booties. Have mercy. Let's  
just call off the race and give him  
the money right now.

Pollie Ann tosses the card, snickers -- reads the next intro.

## POLLIE ANN

Representing the one of the last  
survivors of the great Aztec  
Empire, we have, uh, I don't know  
how to say this here name. I'll  
just call you The Prince?

A young man (Mexican - 20s) strides shirtless to the starting  
line. His brown skin is decorated by colorful markings and  
feathers. He nods to her that 'PRINCE' is okay and takes his  
place.

## POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)

Says here he wants to prove that  
the Aztec runners are the best in  
the world and blah, blah, blah.  
Son, unless them feathers help turn  
you into a bird, it's gonna be a  
lonely run back to 'May-he-co,

A deep voice shouts from the crowd. It is QUICK VIC (20s -  
white, military).

## QUICK VIC

Enough of these girlish men with  
paint on there faces. I'm a real  
man. A soldier in the U.S.  
Infantry. Introduce me next.

The man with mean eyes and bulging muscles steps forward.  
Rather put off by his rudeness, she asks a question.



POLLIE ANN

Is that how they teach soldiers to talk to women now? My husband was a soldier and he had enough respect to not make a fool outta himself in public.

(beat)

What's your name, Mr. Soldier boy? If it ain't George Washington, then you owe me an apology.

QUICK VIC

Sorry to offend you madam, but these here fools are just wasting my time. I'm the fastest man in the military, from coast to coast.

He points to himself arrogantly.

QUICK VIC (CONT'D)

You ask anybody around about, 'Quick Vic' McGill, they will tell you that all they seen of me, is a blue blur. I'm gonna take that prize money, go to Reno with my buddies and have a grand old time.

His friends cheer for him and the wild times in Nevada that they hope to share.

POLLIE ANN

Is that right? You ever think how long that ride to Reno will be with your buddies, after they watch you lose to a little girl? Get outta my face boy and line up.

The crowd laughs him all the way over to his place at the starting line. He gives the other runners dirty looks.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)

Thank goodness. Just what this competition needed, another female. Miss Zoe, step forward and put these boys on notice.

As the crowd parts for her, cat-calls follow. When ZOE (20s - Greek) finally comes into full view, the reason for the whistles and attention is obvious.

Her jet-black, curly hair hangs down past her shoulders. Over a flimsy white blouse, she wears a gold covered breast-plate that covers her from her navel, to just below the neck.

If that wasn't strange enough for these parts, she also wears a white, tunic type skirt that ends just above her knees to show her muscular legs.

On her feet are leather sandals whose straps lace all the up to her knee-caps.

The audience is speechless. Women in these parts are covered from neck to toenail. Several parents cover the eyes of their children.

Pollie Ann surveys the response then motions for the girl to come close so that she doesn't have to talk loud.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)

Zoe, baby girl, you done forgot your clothes, child. You just slip around backstage and the Molly here will rustle up something proper. I ain't seen that much meat on display since the last time I went to the butcher shop.

ZOE

Thank you, Sister-Goddess for your concern. Worry not. I will tell them who I am and what I stand for. If they cannot accept that, it is their problem. Not mine.

She turns to face the frontiersmen and stares down their bulging eyes.

ZOE (CONT'D)

My name is Zoe Zakanakis and I and from the fabled City of Athens, Greece. My people made foot racing and sports competition an art. I'm sure you have heard of marathons and the Olympics. I come to you wearing the uniform women wore in our glory days.

CROWD

Long live the glory days...which way is Greece?...Marry me, Zoe.

POLLIE ANN

Don't you pay them fools no mind, Miss Zoe.

Phoebe has seen enough and ducks back into the tent.

INT. TENT - DAY

The 'star', looks at her self in the mirror. She inhales a long breath. Lets it out slowly.

PHOEBE

Well Daddy. These here folk came from all over world to have your little girl whup them. Let's teach them a lesson about betting against the Henry family.

An audible growl escapes from her. It's game day.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Just like all the victories...this one is for you, Daddy.

As Phoebe wipes her crying eyes, she sees a woman's shadow approach the tent. She pulls herself together.

MOLLY (O.S.)

How you feel? You ready to show 'em who's running thangs, out Arizona way?

PHOEBE

I'm ready.

EXT. PHOEBE'S RACE TRACK - DAY

Pollie Ann heads to the stage as the audience turns to see two of Phoebe's neighbors unfurl a paper version of an American flag and tie it between two trees near her tent.

POLLIE ANN

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the daughter of a slave, who became a king. She not only carries on the family name, but also its blessing.

(beat)

The one and only baby girl of American hero, John Henry. Please put your hands together and welcome, FAST FOOT PHOEBE!

Atop the hill, Phoebe crouches like a tiger ready to pounce. Ahead of her, at the end of a cliff, the paper flag.

She slowly closes her eyes, then starts running and running hard. So fast that her knees look like a blur.

From below, the crowd hears the sound of a STRONG BREEZE coming from the hill. As all eyes are trained on the cliff, the wind force that Phoebe creates, makes the flag flutter.

In a burst of sheer energy, the paper flag dramatically rips down the middle seconds before Phoebe even gets there.

She leaps through the gapping hole and finds herself sprinting in mid-air. Instead of fear, calmness seems to surround her. On her face, a huge smile.

Her billowing petticoat slows her re-entry speed down a bit, like a parachute. Phoebe's competitors clear out of the way in a hurry.

KABOOM!!!! The Earth rocks and moans as young Miss Henry hits the race track.

Instantaneously, a huge cloud of dust is kicked up from the dirt track. It obliterates Phoebe from view. The crowd is in awe. It is so quiet, an earthworm's hiccup could be heard.

Very slowly, the impact-cloud blows away and little by little, Phoebe begins to be seen.

Her wide gleaming smile has been replaced by her game face. No grin, or hint of a smirk. Just total focus, jaws clinched.

Zoe and Puma are the first to start clapping for her. As the audience comes back to their senses, which had been totally blown, they applaud wildly. Whistles and chants of...

CROWD

Phoebe ... Phoebe ... Phoebe!

POLLIE ANN

WHAT? WHAT? Did y'all see that?

Her mom comically re-enacts Phoebe's landing and subsequent posturing on the little stage. The crowd gets a good laugh out of it.

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)

Y'all need to hang on to your britches, cuz you ain't seen nothing yet.

Everyone in the crowd is out of their seat, clapping. On the track, her competitors pull themselves together and brush the dust off of their clothes.

Quick Vic picks himself up off the ground and straightens out his suspenders, unimpressed.

QUICK VIC

Can't you see that was some kinda  
trick? Ain't nobody in the world  
can even come close to beating  
Quick Vic in a race. And a girl  
too? When it comes to that finish-  
line, I own it.

Phoebe says nothing. She just looks over to Quick Vic and  
smiles. Not an, "I'm glad to meet you" smile. More like "I'm  
gonna beat you...and love it", type smile.

QUICK VIC (CONT'D)

Can we get this race started before  
some of these kiddies need their  
diapers changed?

Pollie Ann puts her hand on her hip and swivels her head on  
her shoulders before she answers the brash infantryman.

POLLIE ANN

Well ain't you something? Wheww.  
Boy, you head is so swoll up, I  
don't see how you can stand up  
straight without tipping over.

She mimics him trying to walk around with a head too big for  
his body. The crowd gets a big laugh out of it.

Quick Vic points his finger at her, face red as a desert  
sunset. The look he gives Pollie Ann, could melt twenty  
pounds off of her on a Winter day.

QUICK VIC

Come on. Look at her. Little old  
thang. Last week in Amarillo I ate  
a slab of ribs bigger than that.

Quick Vic walks over to Mr. Suk and whispers to him.

QUICK VIC (CONT'D)

You and me. We gotta stick together  
against these smart mouthed kids. I  
have a few tricks for them. You  
with me?

SUK

All the way.

POLLIE ANN

Hey, Mr. Infantry. I hate to break  
up your date, but we have a race to  
run here.

The crowd laughs at Quick Vic and he rapidly moves away from around his new cohort.

QUICK VIC

Ya know lady, I'm starting not to like you so much.

POLLIE ANN

Ya know, soldier, you are gonna like me even less after you lose in front of all these folks today. Now shut yer yap and line up on the track.

The look on Pollie Ann's face is no-nonsense, all the way.

Quick Vic tries to walk to the starting line with dignity, although many in the crowd laugh at him.

QUICK VIC

We shall see, madam. We shall see.

The contestants line up. Phoebe waves to her mother, then focuses on the track.

Molly pulls out an old shotgun from behind the table and runs it over to Pollie Ann.

MOLLY

Be careful with that thing.

Pollie Ann takes the shotgun from her and is surprised by the weight of it. She raises it to her shoulder and aims away from the crowd.

POLLIE ANN

I'm a tough old bird. Don't you worry about me. Ready, set...

BOOM! The kick from the blast knocks her firmly on her backside and almost does a flip.

The audience laughs so hard, they barely notice the runners take off.

All the sprinters are tearing up the track except one, Phoebe. She yells to her mom.

PHOEBE

Are you okay?

Pollie Ann raises up on her elbow, her Sunday hairdo looks like a wild mop and her eyes are glazed over.

POLLIE ANN

You best run, girl. That rabbit is getting away.

She is out-of-it. Phoebe looks puzzled.

MOLLY

Just go ahead and run, baby. I'll take care of her.

PHOEBE

That's all I need to know.

She winks at her mom and gets them legs pumping. The crowd is amazed that she catches up with the pack of runners in a matter of seconds.

The racetrack is an oval shape. The part that she is on right now, is the straight-away. In the distance, as the track goes into a curve, trees somewhat obscure the view.

Phoebe sees her other five competitors making a break for the turn. The Prince is slightly in front of Quick Vic and Suk. Behind them is Little Puma. Holding up the rear is Zoe.

Quick Vic nudges Suk. Suk nods that he understands. They stay close to the Prince, who is bare-foot and seems to run effortlessly.

Meanwhile, Phoebe catches up to Zoe. The Greek girl seems pleased to see her.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Miss Zoe, no offense but, when I take a bath I wear more clothes than you got on right now. You Greek ladies are pretty brave, huh?

ZOE

Ha, we like to think so.

Quick Vic and Suk follow the Prince, as the track is now partially hidden by the trees from the spectators.

The soldier reaches in his shirt pocket and pulls out several thorny burr balls into his right hand. He heaves them so that they land just in front of the Prince.

From behind, Phoebe and Zoe witness the cruel treachery, first hand.

The Prince doesn't notice the prickly land-mines that lie before him. His last moments of pleasure are enjoyed, before a world-of-hurt, makes itself known to him.

QUICK VIC  
Good-bye, your highness.

When the Prince takes his next steps, they are his last. The burrs burrow deep into the meat of his feet. He topples forward onto the dusty track, face first.

Due to his speed, he tumbles and rolls a while. Quick Vic and Suk keep running and seem to chuckle as they pass by him.

The rolling Prince finally comes to a rest. He is covered in dirt, dust and agony.

ZOE  
Watch out, Phoebe, you are bare-footed too.

Phoebe slows down and watches her steps. She gets to the Prince first, then Zoe arrives. Blood is on his knees and elbows, a bloody nose too.

ZOE (CONT'D)  
Phoebe, you have to beat that cheater if it's the last thing you ever do. I'll stay with Prince.

PHOEBE  
You don't have to tell me twice.

Phoebe takes off like a bullet out of Daniel Boone's musket. Puffs of dust are kicked up by her fast moving heels.

Ahead of her is Little Puma. He runs extremely fast. Must be the shoes.

As Phoebe gets closer, it seems that the two bullies out front are slowing down, making a space so that the boy can run in between them.

The soldier makes sure Little Puma sees him look exhausted and weak. Just as he starts to go in between the men, they come to life, and in a bad way.

They both flank the youngster, snatch Little Puma by the armpits and pick him off the ground. Quick Vic sports an evil grin.

Both men toss the child into the air, in the direction of Phoebe. Little Puma is now Little Eagle. He twists his body in mid-air so he is facing Phoebe.

With his long black hair and dark features, he looks more like a raven.



LITTLE PUMA

Ahhhhhhh!

Phoebe dashes toward him.

PHOEBE

I got ya.

The kid has incredible hang-time, but just not enough. Phoebe catches the top part of his body but his ankle slams into the ground and twists.

LITTLE PUMA

Yeeoow! My foot!

Phoebe tries to steady him in her arms. She almost falls down on her backside as she struggles to hold him up.

PHOEBE

Whoa, back up, brother.

Finally he balances himself on one leg. Little Puma grimaces in pain as he tries to put the other foot down. He bangs his head into his fists.

LITTLE PUMA

Now I let the whole tribe down. The shaman put a blessing on these shoes. She said I wouldn't lose this race. Now what?

Little Puma isn't so little compared to Phoebe. He is thin but lanky. Phoebe rolls her eyes, exhales hard and shakes her head in frustration. Suddenly, she starts to chuckle.

LITTLE PUMA (CONT'D)

What's so funny? This is no joke.

Phoebe walks in front of him with her back facing him.

PHOEBE

Get on my back. I'll carry you.  
Hurry up. We don't have much time.  
You don't want your shaman to look bad do you?

Of course Little Puma looks at her like she is crazy. Who wouldn't?

LITTLE PUMA

How can you carry me and finish this race? Much less catch up with those devils?

PHOEBE

You let me worry about that. I need  
a challenge anyway. Get on and go  
with it. Come on. Are you a  
Brave...or a chicken?

Phoebe moves her arms like wings.

LITTLE PUMA

Fine. I'll ride. Too bad I forgot  
my spurs.

The spectators at the finish line see the runners come out  
from behind the line of trees. Quick Vic and Suk are neck-n-  
neck. Although running hard, they appear to be laughing.

People in the crowd crane their necks trying to see the rest  
of the runners coming from behind the trees.

None come forth. A perplexed look covers the on-looker's  
faces, but on the face of Phoebe's mom, worry.

MOLLY

Look, there she is! What in the  
world? She can't be carrying that  
boy. Can she?

POLLIE ANN

Where is everybody else? I don't  
like the looks of this. Betcha that  
smart-mouth soldier is up to  
something. He put down a whole lot  
of money. I knew there was  
something wrong-in-the-head with  
that boy.

Pollie Ann picks up the shotgun.

MOLLY

Woman, put that old gun down 'fore  
you knock yourself silly again.

She watches her daughter across the way, struggling with her  
load - as Quick Vic and Suk giggle like church girls that  
snuck into the whiskey.

Pollie Ann takes the weapon and empties out the blank shells.  
She replaces them with them 12 gauge, prime-time specials.

She locks it and cocks it. Her look says, "I'm ready...for  
what ever."

On the track, as Phoebe and Little Puma leave the trees behind and hit the straight-away, Quick Vic and Suk are far down the track.

After they go around the hill, the finish line is not far off. Phoebe's situation seems impossible, with the Hopi man-child on her back.

Little Puma looks like he feels bad about the tight spot he puts Phoebe in. He tries to do the honorable thing.

LITTLE PUMA

Phoebe, let me down. I make you too slow. It isn't working.

Phoebe peers over her shoulder and looks into his face.

PHOEBE

Keep that negative talk to yourself. I'm gonna kick it into Fast-Foot gear now. Hang on.

Little Puma hangs on her like a piglet on the underbelly of a mother sow.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Can you sing?

LITTLE PUMA

Heck yea. I even know the John Henry song. Sorry, I know he meant a lot to you. I know other songs.

PHOEBE

No. Sing that one. Please. Sing it now.

Phoebe's eyes narrow as she starts to pick up speed.

LITTLE PUMA

*Swing that hammer on down, John.  
Swing that hammer on down.  
Knock that mountain on down, John.  
Knock that mountain on down.*

As he sings, her speed increases drastically. The excitement alone makes him sing louder. The fact that they are closing the gap on the evil doers, gives him even more energy.

The crowd sees the distance between contestants closing too. They cheer for Phoebe loudly. Pollie Ann gets them all to sing along with Little Puma. Phoebe speeds up even more.

Quick Vic and Suk hear the commotion. They look behind themselves and see Phoebe and company closing in fast.

Quick Vic's eyes bulge.

QUICK VIC

That's impossible. That is smack-dab impossible.

SUK

You. Shut up. Run. Don't worry about girl.

The attention of Quick Vic is immediately moved from Phoebe to Suk. He eyeballs the foreigner up and down.

QUICK VIC

You had better watch your mouth, boy. You ain't no kin to me. I'll skin ya like a polecat out here.

Quick Vic exposes a huge hunting knife he has under his vest.

SUK

Stupid Americans. So violent.

Half of a chuckle comes from Quick Vic as he looks at the angry man on the outside lane.

Suk starts to pull away from the pace they had set. Vic waits until they are behind the hill and out of view.

QUICK VIC

Our partnership is hereby and thusly, dissolved.

As they start to go around the bend, Quick Vic shoves him on the side, very hard. The smaller Korean goes flying.

His legs are still running while in mid-air. He is headed for the bushes that line the track.

Suk closes his eyes and braces for impact. A Barrel Cactus grows among the shrubs. Suk lands on the prickly plant, hind-parts first.

As the sharp needles penetrate his backside, his scream can be heard from the heart of Arizona, to the soul of Seoul.

Phoebe and Little Puma see the whole thing. They are shocked, but Phoebe doesn't break her stride.

PHOEBE

Oh my goodness! This guy is crazy.  
If he tries something funny, you  
kick him in his pointy head with  
your magic shoes.

As they pick up speed they see Mr. Suk painfully struggling to free his tush from the cactus. The throne of thorns holds him captive.

SUK

Help me! GET BACK HERE. GET ME OUT  
OF HERE!

Suk tries to jump out of the clutches of the cactus but several very long, sturdy needles have a different idea.

Now behind the hill, they are closing in on Quick Vic and he is not too happy about it.

When they move to the outside lane to pass him, he gets in their way. Next they try to use the inside lane, he blocks them also.

QUICK VIC

You little brats. Get back in the  
playpen where you belong. Or else.

Quick Vic pulls out his huge hunting knife. It glistens in the sun in front of the kids. Phoebe doesn't slow down. She keeps zigging and zagging, trying to find a way around him.

PHOEBE

You don't scare me. You're a bad  
man and you're gonna lose. You  
deserve it.

QUICK VIC

That prize money is mine! Get back!

Quick Vic swings his big knife at them again. This time it nearly makes contact.

Puma reaches down and pulls off a moccasin. The youngster holds up the buckskin footwear, ready to strike. Quick Vic starts to laugh again, then catches himself.

QUICK VIC (CONT'D)

Ahh, you almost had me chuckling my  
way to second place. Clever little  
whipper-snappers ain't ya?

Little Puma holds the shaman blessed slippers above his head like a battle axe. Phoebe sees the shoe and rolls her eyes.

PHOEBE

Boy, what are you doing?

Meanwhile, the entire crowd is on their feet. All eyes on the empty track, waiting for the runners to come into view from around the hill.

The MAYOR (50s - white), arrives. He strides over to Pollie Ann and greets her warmly.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX

Good afternoon, Mrs. Henry. Sorry I'm late. Uh, what's the shotgun for? Is Phoebe racing grizzly bears today?

POLLIE ANN

I apologize, Mr. Mayor. Looks like we got something grizzly here but it's more like a two-legged serpent than a bear.

Far behind the front-runners, Zoe comes into view. Rather than stay on the track, she cuts across the concourse, headed for the crowd on the bleachers.

ZOE

Need help! Runner down!

Just as some men from the crowd leave their seats to offer assistance, they see Quick Vic who seems to be swatting at the children, then the glint from his knife is seen.

Pollie Ann flips. She cocks the shotgun and puts it to her shoulder.

POLLIE ANN

Oh lawdy Jeez-sus. Did you see that? Oh no. Not with my baby you don't.

Back on the track, Little Puma ducks a lunge by Quick Vic. They are almost side by side now.

Quick Vic swings at them again. The back-hand gets so close that the blade cuts a slice in Little Puma's shirt.

Little Puma slams the moccasin down on his fingers hard. The blade is knocked from his hand.

The surgically sharp tip, speeds to the ground with great velocity.

The angry blade looks for something to penetrate. The in-step of Quick Vic's foot will do.

Phoebe happens to witness the very instant when the rugged Army boot is punctured.

An inch and a half of the knife's business end, disappears into Quick Vic's boot. He SCREAMS as his eyes get huge in their sockets.

QUICK VIC

Yeeoooow!

Quick Vic hops on one leg to tries and keep his balance, just as Phoebe inches ahead of him, he lunges at the kids.

QUICK VIC (CONT'D)

Oh no you don't.

Phoebe sees him fling himself in the air towards them. She kicks in the after burners. What looked like an easy tackle, is suddenly almost out of reach for him.

Horizontal in the air, Quick Vic stretches out even more in a desperate attempt to ruin Phoebe's victory.

The tips of his fingers snare the long flowing locks of Little Puma, as the couple pass by him.

LITTLE PUMA

Get off me!

Little Puma's head is pulled back. He grabs his hair near the scalp, to wrestle it away from Quick Vic's grasp.

Quick Vic squeezes the hair tight, as his legs fall to the ground. The sudden jerk causes Little Puma's body to start to pull away from Phoebe's back.

Little Puma grabs onto Phoebe's shoulders, just as he is about to be yanked off.

PHOEBE

Whoa!

For a second she comes to a complete halt as she struggles to keep her balance. Her arms flail as she is knocked off of her stride.

She turns back to look at Little Puma. He is fighting hard not to be pulled to the ground.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Hold on.

Phoebe digs her feet into the track and muscles forward, one step at a time. With total focus in her eyes and determination in her legs, she picks up speed.

Unable to stand up and unwilling to let go, Quick Vic finds himself being dragged to the finish line.

Quick Vic's belly is pulled along the rough earth as his newly punctured foot painfully bounces around behind him. With each stride, Phoebe's heel comes up and kisses his face.

Phoebe picks up speed to that of a jog. With his belly dragging on the ground, like the snake he is, the suspenders break and his loose pants become another enemy.

For every stride taken by Phoebe, his government issued trousers slip down lower and lower.

Soon his colorful boxer shorts are showing and there is a good chance that they won't stay in place much longer.

At the finish line, Pollie Ann tries to get a clear shot.

POLLIE ANN

I need to shoot this fool before  
Phoebe gets a lesson in the Birds  
and Bees that I ain't intended.

The Mayor gently moves the barrel to the side. He motions for the Sheriff and his deputies to go out to the track.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX

No need for that Miss Pollie Ann.  
I'll have my boys take care of that  
scoundrel.

Quick Vic sees the lawmen coming his way. He knows the situation is grim but grins anyway.

He removes one hand from Little Puma's hair and reaches for the blade that is lodged in his boot.

The young Hopi looks down to see Quick Vic planning his next trick. Again, he swats at Quick Vic.

POW. Quick Vic loses his grip on the hair. Phoebe's heel comes back up to kiss him good night on the chin.

He is knocked out before he hits the ground. Phoebe and Little Puma look back at him. Phoebe chuckles.

The crowd goes wild for her and start to chant her name.



CROWD  
Phoe-be...Phoe-be...

They both cross the finish line.

HAMBONE (V.O.)  
No one could beat her. But now she realized that winning isn't everything. Her family soon moved away from the cotton fields and onto new adventures.

INT. CIRCUS - DAY

The Henry family has a seat under the 'Big-Top' tent and watch clowns, as they eat candy apples and hold stuffed toys.

Soon the big cats come out. A lion-tamer makes them do tricks. A leopard and tiger also entertain.

Phoebe notices a cheetah in its cage. He doesn't look happy. As soon as the lion-tamer opens the cage so he could show the audience tricks, the cheetah jumps right over his head. Now loose, everyone screams.

POLLIE ANN  
Oh no, this is terrible, someone needs to get that cheetah before it hurts somebody.

Before her mom can stop her, Phoebe dashes towards the cat.

PHOEBE  
I'll be right back, mamma. This time I'll bring back a fancy fur coat for you.

Phoebe's mom waves for her to come back, but she just keeps on a-running.

HAMBONE (V.O.)  
She chased that cheetah out of the arena, down the street, across the county and all the way to the May-he-co border.

MONTAGE  
Phoebe and the Cheetah dash out of the arena...Zip down Old West streets...Zoom across deserts and flash by a road sign that says. "WELCOME TO MEXICO". Both are exhausted.

EXT. MEXICAN BORDER - DAY

The fatigued cat finds shade, stretches out. Phoebe follows, gives him water and pets him.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

By the time she caught the cheetah,  
it was tuckered out and tame as a  
kitten. She decided not to skin him  
for her ma, but instead to keep him  
as a pet. What did she name him?  
Well, SLOWPOKE, of course.

A HOPI CHIEF (50s - Indigenous) sees part of the chase. He walks over to Fast Foot Phoebe and her new kitty.

HOPI CHIEF

Never have I seen such a hunter.  
Such speed. I have heard of you  
little girl. You are Fast Foot  
Phoebe from Phoenix, Arizona. I am  
the Chief of the Hopi nation...and  
we need your help.

She looks him up and down. Is he crazy?

PHOEBE

Me?...I'm just a kid.

HOPI CHIEF

Some man named, Mr. Dabney owns the  
railroad. Said he was going to tear  
up the reservation, drive the  
people away and put a big train  
station there. It will destroy our  
people and our way of life.

Phoebe's whole demeanor changes. Eyebrows furl a grimace follows. She studies the old man's face.

PHOEBE

Did you say...Dabney?

HOPI CHIEF

Yes. I pleaded with him, but  
nothing melted his cold heart. He  
just laughed at me and said, the  
only way he would change his plans  
is if I could find somebody to out-  
race his fastest locomotive.  
Otherwise, we better start packing  
up our teepees.

Chief hangs his head in sorrow. Phoebe's anger increases.

HOPI CHIEF (CONT'D)  
Since that day I have been  
traveling the whole west to find  
someone to beat that train and help  
my people.

PHOEBE  
Dabney. Urg. My dad died because of  
him. What an evil man.

HOPI CHIEF  
Yes. Very sad. Even out here,  
everyone knows of your father, the  
mighty warrior...John Henry.

The Chief reaches in his pocket and pulls out a sack. In it  
are many gold coins. He hands it to her.

HOPI CHIEF (CONT'D)  
Please. This is all the gold my  
people have. You may have it if you  
help us. You'll be rich.

Phoebe looks at the shiny coins, her eyes get big and smiles.  
Suddenly her demeanor changes. She hands the satchel back.

PHOEBE  
To honor my father, I cannot take  
your money. Use it to help your  
people in some other way.

The Chief appears sad.

HOPI CHIEF  
So, I guess you don't wanna do it?

PHOEBE  
Not for money. No no, Chief. That's  
not the way my father taught me.  
I'll do it for him -- And I'll do  
it for free.

Steely eyed, she winks back.

EXT. HOPI RESERVATION - DAY

Phoebe and Slowpoke run along a beautiful mountain ridge and  
then down into a settlement of very friendly Hopis.

Kids play with Kachina dolls. Little Puma cheers for her.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

For the next month, Phoebe and Slowpoke trained for six hours a day. As they ran around the countryside, they got to know the Hopi people well and soon they all became friends. She couldn't let them down.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PHOENIX - DAY

The Old West city is jammed with people.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Finally the big day arrived. People came from all across the West to see this very important race. It was like a carnival came to town.

Before the contest, the Hopi people do a very colorful ceremony for Phoebe. They dance, say chants over her, bless her with magic smoke and drumming.

After the ceremony is done, Phoebe lines up for the race, Slowpoke by her side. Meaner, older, Mr. Dabney, already in the train, looks over at her and starts laughing.

DABNEY

Hey Chief, You've been drinking too much fire-water if you think this little girl is going to beat my train. This race is from Phoenix to Utah. Are you nuts?

(beat)

This will be easy. Start packing now, Hiawatha. When I get back, that land will be all mine.

The Chief looks discouraged. Phoebe pats him on the back, then marches right up to the robber-baron's window and looks him dead in the eye.

PHOEBE

Ain't no one packing nothing today, Mister Moneybags. You have to beat Fast Foot Phoebe first, and I didn't come out here to play around.

DABNEY

Oh wow. I'm so scared of a little girl. I'm just shaking in my custom made, snake-skin boots. Boo-woo.

Now Dabney's sneers at her and talks with a mean tone.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Look kid, this is your last chance to grab your dolly and go home like a good little brat. What's it gonna be?

PHOEBE

Hmm. Slowpoke, what do you think of this mean old man's offer?

The big cat leaps from his sitting position and hurls himself, claws first, towards Dabney's open window. Slowpoke chomps down just inches from the loud-mouth's pudgy nose.

If he wasn't shaking before, he sure is now.

DABNEY

Why you little witch! If it's a race you want, then it's a race you get. No mercy. NONE!

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Angry? His face was redder than a drop of blood on a rose petal.

Dabney slams down the window and pulls the curtain in a huff.

PHOEBE

Fine! I don't need your mercy. I need you to keep your word to these people or else everybody will know you are the biggest fibber who ever lived. That's all I need. I'm not afraid of you, Mister Greedy-pants, or this...this elephant on wheels.

Phoebe storms closer to Dabney's window.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Do you know who I am? You better ask somebody. You're racing against Fast-Foot Phoebe. My feet are as quick as greased lightning and I might as well have wings a-popping out the sides of my ankles when I get it going. You better recognize and R-E-S-P-E-C-T me.

Phoebe gives the train a kick with the side of her foot to make her point.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Yeeoww!

She hops around like a one-legged flamingo as the pain throbs through her foot. The Hopi Chief dashes to her rescue.

HOPI CHIEF

Brave warrior, why would you do such a thing? If you broke a toe, the race would be lost before it started.

PHOEBE

Ouch. Maybe it's best that way. Look at that machine. Brand new, shiny and the fastest train ever built. What if I don't win? Your people will lose their homes and their whole way of life. They are my friends. I'd never be able to face them.

The Chief snatches some leaves from his bag and rubs it on the hurt foot. He smiles at her.

HOPI CHIEF

We are the Hopis. Not the 'Give-up-is'. We have faith in good over bad. We have faith in you, Phoebe. We will be proud to be your friends. Win or lose.

Phoebe then hears a familiar voice.

POLLIE ANN

Is that Miss Greased Lightning I see pouting over there? Why the long face? I thought you had wings growing outta your ankles and sparks flying outta your toenails?

PHOEBE

I just said that because, I'm a little scared.

POLLIE ANN

You should be. No other person on the planet would even try such a thing. But...no other person on this planet is you, Miss Phoebe. We're all God's children, but you have a very special shining on your life. This is your moment.

The Chief stops rubbing her foot.

HOPI CHIEF

Try it now. Put some weight on it slowly.

She steps down on it lightly, then smiles.

PHOEBE

Thank you, Chief. It's good as new!  
Wow!

The Chief smiles and claps his hands twice. Little Puma steps forward carrying a pairs of moccasins.

HOPI CHIEF

Phoebe, this is my nephew, Little Puma. He made you some special shoes to run in.

Phoebe smiles at her friend then laces up the strange looking shoes and ties them tight. She sprints a short distance and circles back.

PHOEBE

My goodness! I've never had anything like this on my foot before. So comfortable, so springy. Thank you. Thank you both, very much.

She gives Little Puma a peck on the cheek. Pollie Ann reaches in her pocket.

POLLIE ANN

I've got something to give you too, baby. You know your dad John Henry grew up as a slave for a while before he ran North and got freed, right?

PHOEBE

I remember his tears. The only time I saw my daddy cry, was when he was talking about the old times. Must-a been fearsome sad. But he overcame it.

POLLIE ANN

A-men, baby girl. Them was some hateful times of tribulation and sorrow. But just like you said, he overcame it. That's the blood of a survivor.

(MORE)

POLLIE ANN (CONT'D)

That blood be in you, 'Suga'. The only thing your daddy kept from them times was the pair of ankle shackles he was wearing when he stole away North. You know why they put them on him?

PHOEBE

Why?

Pollie Ann tries to smile but her eyes well up with tears.

POLLIE ANN

So that he couldn't...run.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Then it hit her. Like a wet sack of sweet potatoes. From little boy, to teenager, to strong young man...he wasn't allowed to run. To run? How crazy.

Her face twists up in sadness as she tries to feel her daddy's pain. Phoebe looks down at her unchained legs. A look of fierce determination sweeps her face.

Pollie Ann pulls a cloth from her pocket.

POLLIE ANN

To help him remember how he could get through the worst of times, however loathsome they might be, he put one of them chain links up 'round his neck. Like this.

Phoebe watches as her mom opens up the cloth. In it is a shackle link, dangling from a buckskin string.

Pollie Ann carefully puts it on her. Now mother's tears finally bust-a-loose and stream down her cheeks.

She is not alone. The Chief is even misty-eyed. Phoebe stares at the link like it is a diamond covered in gold dust.

PHOEBE

Wow!

POLLIE ANN

That there is the last one. Kinda seem like old John Henry knew we might be a-needing it, down the line.



HAMBONE (V.O.)

Phoebe looked her momma straight in the eye. Ain't a trace of tears nowhere's near her face. She was in the zone, baby. A heavyweight boxer on fight night, never looked more focused and ready for battle.

PHOEBE

Them evil men was scared to let daddy run? Heh, dummies, they should-a been more worried about his little girl. Mama, I'm ready.

POLLIE ANN

If I don't know nothing else in this world...I know that as fact, child. Sure do.

Her mom hugs her as they stroll to the starting line, Slowpoke by her side.

Her mom takes a seat with the Hopis. The Chief comes over to her as she does some last minute stretching.

HOPI CHIEF

We have our people set up along the way so you can get refreshment. Our shaman made up some special 'Firebird juice' for you. It gives you energy. It gives you power.

PHOEBE

Thanks Chief. The good Lord gave me all the power I need, but a nice pow-wow, to celebrate us crushing this stinky old tin can..that would be sweeter than a honey-dipped sugar cube.

HOPI CHIEF

With all the fry-bread you can eat, my friend. Be safe.

From the crowd, the Mayor strides up to the starting line like a soldier. He looks the young girl up and down.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX

Well, the famous Fast Foot Phoebe, again. Glad to have you represent Phoenix. You sure you want to go through with this? It's a long race. I'm concerned about your health.

PHOEBE  
I'm ready, sir.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX  
I see. Well, keep an eye out for old Mr. Dabney. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he tries to cheat. I know his kind.

PHOEBE  
I'll be careful, sir. Thank you kindly.

The Mayor steps onto the podium that is between the two rivals and gestures to the gathering.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX  
Greetings to the kind people of Phoenix and welcome to the race. What a battle we have for you. The fastest train on Earth versus the fastest little girl on Earth.  
(beat)

If Phoebe wins, then the railroad will not build on Hopi lands. If she loses, then the Hopis must all move out by the end of the month. Okay ladies and gentlemen, we want to see a thrilling race, a fair race, and a safe race. Contestants take your positions.

Phoebe takes one last stretch and glances over to see Dabney draining his beer. He launches a large, "BEELCH!" She rolls her eyes at him in disgust.

The Mayor takes a small gun from his jacket and points his pistol to the sky.

MAYOR OF PHOENIX (CONT'D)  
On your mark...get set...

BANG! He fires the pistol and the race is on.

To everyone's amazement Phoebe pulls out in front, Slowpoke, step for step beside her.

As she is legging-it down the train tracks, the townsfolk clap and wave at her. She warmly returns the greeting.

After a while, Phoebe looks behind her, the train is in the distance.

PHOEBE

Wow Slowpoke, we barely inching up  
to half speed and we already got  
him whupped.

As people on the side of the tracks throw flowers at her, she  
begin to skip, rather than run, as the petals rain over her.

To show her gratitude, and to show off a little, she wows her  
fans with ten cartwheels in a row. The crowd goes wild.

Afterwards she is very dizzy and the world seems to spin  
around like a bucking bronc at an Indian rodeo.

As she clears the cobwebs, she hears a familiar sound, but  
can't quite place it. When the horn blast, blows the wax out  
of her ears, she remembers.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Oh no, the train!

That locomotive speeds up and scoots down the rails like a  
jackrabbit with his cottontail on fire.

Phoebe, still off balance tries to run, but she zig-zags  
around for a while because she is still dizzy. Soon the train  
zooms past her as she tumbles to the ground.

Dabney waves at her as she looks up at him from the earth,  
dirt on her face. He laughs at her loudly.

She picks herself up and looks around. The Hopis there, do  
not look hopeful, no sir. They turn away from her and sadness  
fills their faces. On Phoebe's face, embarrassment.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

I'll catch him, you'll see.

The train is now almost out of sight. Her eyes tear up as she  
sees some old Hopi elders, openly weeping.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Come on, Slowpoke. We've gotta  
metal monster that needs a good  
whupping.

Wobbly and mad at herself, she dashes off behind the  
lightning fast locomotive. Phoebe and Slowpoke run and run  
but they can't seem to get much closer.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Why did I have to show-off back  
there? That's not me.

(MORE)

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Now I'm in a world of hurt and them poor Hopis are the ones who have to suffer for my foolishness. If I lose, I'll never forgive myself.

Off they run. Miles go by, but they still barely gain any ground on Dabney and his machine. She glances over at Slowpoke with worry on her face.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Maybe...I should just give up.

On the side of the tracks are some Hopis. She slows down and drinks the water they offer her. They look even more worried than she is. Phoebe avoids eye contact.

RED FLOWER, (80s - Indigenous) a very, very old woman with long white hair, studies her face and reads it like a book.

She is the same old woman who watched John Henry's show and in the crowd, cheering for Little Puma.

RED FLOWER

My name is Red Flower. Do not worry child. I am here to help you. You see, for a hero to light the way for a people, that hero's soul must be set on fire first. Drink the juice girl. The Firebird Juice.

The old lady hands her a clay jug.

PHOEBE

Are you the Shaman the Chief was talking about? I didn't figure you was, ya know, 'one of the girls.' Ain't that something.

Red Flower laughs. The old woman is not ashamed of her almost toothless smile.

RED FLOWER

Nobody has called me a girl in, oh, about a hundred years or so. I like you, Missy. A little girl, about to out-run the world's fastest machine. Ain't THAT something. Now go ahead and drink that juice girl. We can't just chit-chat all day.

Phoebe chugs it down it big gulps.

PHOEBE

Not bad.

RED FLOWER

Hey, save some for your puppy.

Phoebe obeys and gave the last gulps to her running partner. The cheetah laps it up. As she gets up to leave, Red Flower points to her.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)

The power of miracles is inside you girl. It runs through your veins. Call on it if you need it.

PHOEBE

I will. Thank you.

Phoebe and Slowpoke hit the road. Soon they are up to their normal speed. The train is even farther away than it was before. They run and run.

No big muscles growing, no super speed has kicked in. Nothing. She looks over to Slowpoke.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Firebird juice. Ha. More like Hummingbird juice. I'm flapping my wings as fast as I can, but I'm not getting no where. Figures, huh. If she had any real magic, she would cast a spell and get them teeth fixed.

Slowpoke blinks up at her like he understands the joke, then keeps on running with her, side by side.

Later they hear a strange sound in the woods. Is it DRUMMING? Can't be. As they get closer, they see someone holding a drum and banging out rhythms on it.

Red Flower? Can't be. Now near her, there is no mistake, it is the shaman woman, but how did she get here so fast?

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Slowpoke, am I seeing things?

She waves at her and keep running.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Maybe she got a twin sista, huh?

They run on. Just as the first drum dies out...another one is heard up ahead. Sure enough, the old woman is out there pounding the skins again.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
That ain't possible, right? I must  
be dreaming or something.

This time Red Flower smiles for them as they scoot by.  
Perfectly lined, bright, pearly teeth shine at them. Phoebe  
and Slowpoke are shocked.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
You don't think she heard me  
talking about her, do you?

Slowpoke looks at her, puzzled. They continue ahead. Finally,  
silence.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
I kinda liked that drum. Maybe it  
brings out the Africa in me.

Slowpoke nudges her.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
I mean, in us both.

Up ahead, a tunnel comes into view. The opening on the other  
side looks like a tiny diamond.

As she gets closer, she hears the DRUMMING again, but it is  
ten times as loud. Mixed with it is the sound of a chorus of  
women CHANTING.

As she gets closer, she can't believe what she sees. Up ahead  
are a dozen women, six of them spread out on both sides of  
the track.

The only thing is...they are all the same woman! Red Flower  
from the Hopi tribe.

Their eyes, closed. Their heads, tilted to the sky. Sweat  
pours from them as they bang the drums with all their might  
and shout the chants at the top of their lungs.

Phoebe's eyes are bigger than cannonballs. She can't believe  
what she sees. As Phoebe runs closer, the drum beats and  
singing swirl around in her head and she feels kind of dizzy.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
Oh no. I can't feel my legs.

Out of no where, clouds rush by above her. The wind starts to  
pick up. And yes, the music gets LOUDER.

Phoebe is almost upon them, yet they do not seem to notice her. Their bodies are on Earth, but their spirits are with their Gods.

The young girl keeps an eye on them as she sprints through their midst.

Suddenly they bang the drum one last time, HARD...and all at once.

It sounds like ten shotguns firing at the same time. The blast ECHOES through the canyon and vibrates through Phoebe's whole body.

As she takes another step, she realizes she has lost the hearing in both ears.

                    PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
            Slowpoke! I can't hear anymore.  
            What's happening?

Before Phoebe can react ... all of the old women point at her at once. Eyes wide like zombies. Their mouths are open like they are screaming but no sound is heard.

Slowpoke has had enough. He high-tails it into the tunnel. Still stunned, Phoebe tries to shake away the cobwebs from her head and catch up to him.

Close to the entrance of the tunnel, the sky turns black and it starts to rain. Just before she enters the darkness of the tunnel she looks back to see the women.

Now, there is only one. She smiles back at Phoebe as she gets drenched in the sudden storm.

As lightning flashes over head, her teeth, scraggly again, are seen clearly. Her hair is matted down as rivers of water run down her face.

Struggling to stand in the strong, swirling wind, Red Flower raises her wrinkled hand to her mouth.

Just as lightning hits a nearby tree and thunder shakes the ground below, the old shaman blows Phoebe a kiss.

This is no ordinary blown kiss. It can be seen, hurling through the air at blinding speed.

At first it looks like smoke. Then in mid-air it changes to a red arrow, then into a small fireball and later...into a huge mighty bird. A firebird.

As the firebird gets closer to the tunnel it grows and grows. Once it gets near the entrance, it is even doubtful that it will fit inside.

The blinding light and scorching heat from the firebird makes Phoebe cover her face. Slowpoke tugs at her leg, reminding her to try to run out of the way.

Phoebe spins around, sprints into the dark tunnel, Slowpoke at her heels.

The firebird manages to squeeze inside the tunnel. His face looks like a big, ornery eagle swooping down into Chicken Little's family reunion.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Run!

Phoebe and company shift into high gear, high-tailing it away from the burning heat and sharp beak as fast as they can.

The firebird lights up the dark tunnel like it is high noon in there. Fear is in Phoebe's eyes as she digs deeper to run even faster.

As quick as the duo is moving, the firebird is faster. Soon, they can feel the giant bird's hot breath breathing down their necks.

She looks back to see the monster bird open up its beak wide enough for a stagecoach to drive into. Phoebe looks over to Slowpoke with sad eyes. Then sad eyes turn mad, she screams.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Get away from me you big ugly  
buzzard!

Still running, they see the beak closing around them. A loud GULP is heard as the bird guzzles them up.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Now, in the belly of the beast,  
fire was all around them and even  
on them. Strange thing is, they  
ain't burnt up. Nor clothes, nor  
fur. Phoebe looked down to see the  
flames dancing on her entire body  
but it seemed no hotter to her skin  
than summertime in Phoenix. It sure  
enough was as warm as all get out,  
but bearable.



Inside the beast, they still run hard. They move down the tunnel quickly, but are not sure if it's their speed, or the speed of the firebird.

As they run, they see that they are going deeper inside the firebird's body. The bird lets out a mighty, "CAW" which vibrates loudly within the tunnel and within Phoebe's head.

PHOEBE

Hey, I can hear again.

They are now near the end of the tunnel. The firebird now goes into hyper-drive and zooms down the railroad tracks towards the exit.

As it picks up speed, the runners are pushed to the back end of the beast and then...squirted out.

Phoebe and Slowpoke tumble forward as the firebird "CAWS" again and leaves them behind. Flames still tickling their bodies. The firebird blasts through the tunnel's exit.

Outside the tunnel, the train tracks cross a river, run along side it a while, then go up a steep mountain.

As it crosses over the river, the heat of the bird mixes with the moisture of the water and makes thick steam.

Dense fog trails the firebird as it hurls down the tracks at an incredible speed. It disappears into the distance.

Phoebe and Slowpoke watch the scene and then pick themselves up. The tunnel, black again, except for four tiny flames. They burn in the eye-sockets of Phoebe and Slowpoke.

Out of nowhere, the old shaman woman appears. She brushes what is left of her teeth as a green glow covers her body. She spits out toothpaste.

RED FLOWER

What are you waiting for, your  
teeth to fall out?

She pulls out one of her jagged molars and puts it in Phoebe's hand, bloody roots and all.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)

Take mine instead. Keep it with you  
for luck. It's nice and clean.

PHOEBE

Ewww, yuck!

Phoebe hands it back to her.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
I don't wanna win that bad. Please  
take it. You need it more than I  
do. Lots more.

RED FLOWER  
As you wish, my pretty.

The shaman holds the tooth to her gum and the roots of the  
tooth start to move. Then they reattach to her gums and the  
tooth settles back to where it was extracted from.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)  
That better?

PHOEBE  
You really didn't have to show me  
that, did you?

Phoebe makes a face.

RED FLOWER  
Go on, girl. No time for joking.  
Start kicking up some dust. There  
is much at stake in this race.

The old woman slowly disappears. Behind her is the thick fog  
that the firebird left behind. Phoebe pets Slowpoke's head.

PHOEBE  
We gotta job to do. Let's get at  
it, buddy.

The two start running again. It seems like Phoebe only takes  
three steps and she is already past the bridge. As she  
passes, the steam around them gets even thicker.

Unable to see where they are going, they just follow the jet-  
stream that the firebird left behind.

In seconds, they are over the mountain and headed down the  
tracks.

As she runs through the mist, she sees ten foot tall monsters  
who look like the Kachina dolls kids played with on the  
reservation. They all seem to be cheering for her.

Just as she turns back to look forward again, "THUMP!".  
Phoebe hits something, hard.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
The-the train? Can't be.  
Yet it is.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
We made it!

They run along the side of the train, grinning, then pull out in front of it.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Dabney's eyes almost fall out of his head. He slaps the engineer on the back of the neck with his hat. It is COHEN, several years older.

DABNEY  
Cohen, What are you doing? We're losing this race to a snot-nosed kid. Speed it up, and I mean now!

The train goes faster. Phoebe and Slowpoke move to the side and run stride for stride with it.

The engineer sweats hard. The gauges all show that they run in the red. Dabney sneers at him.

DABNEY (CONT'D)  
You lose this race, you lose your job. Understand?

COHEN  
Yessir.

EXT. ALONG TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

They go down the track at top speed, sometimes Phoebe is in the lead, sometimes the train. Most of the time they dash along at the exact same pace.

They go up mountains, through tunnels and over rivers as they slice through the Arizona wilderness.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Cohen, worried, looks over to Dabney.

COHEN  
The train can't take much more. If we push this hard much longer, the engine is going to blow!

Dabney laughs. The engineer is confused. Dabney slaps him on the back so hard it makes him wince in pain.

DABNEY

I didn't get to be the top  
businessman west of Saint Louie by  
playing by the rules. No need to  
start now.

He laughs out loud to himself.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Always have a back up plan, boy.  
It's called insurance and I never  
do business without it. You get up  
in front of them. I got something  
in the back to slow them down.

EXT. OUTSIDE TRAIN - DAY

Phoebe and Slowpoke watch as the train speeds up a bit. One  
of the train's doors opens. Dabney sticks his head out. He  
grins like a madman.

DABNEY

Good running little girl, but ain't  
no-way, will I let you win this  
race.

PHOEBE

You have no choice. Now take your  
beer-breath back into the train and  
sit quietly like a good boy, while  
me and my kitty make some happy  
Hopis.

DABNEY

Choices are a funny thing, Miss  
Phoebe. Some are harder than  
others. As a matter of fact, let me  
give you an example of a hard  
choice right now.

He reaches behind and holds up a cage for them to see. In the  
cage are animals. Baby cheetahs.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Here is your choice. Either you  
stop this race right now, or I toss  
these polecats over the side so you  
can watch them be turned into  
something that looks like ground  
beef with catsup.

(beat)

(MORE)

DABNEY (CONT'D)

What kinda choice do you feel like making today? Either way you choose, I'm gonna win.

He holds the cage closer to them. The cute, furry kittens meow in fright. Dabney's drunken grin looks evil.

PHOEBE

I hate you!

DABNEY

Nothing personal, just business, kid. What do you care about Big Chief Stinky Feather and his tribe of losers anyway? Save these poor defenseless creatures right now and save yourself from nightmares.

(beat)

Seeing something like what I might have to do, could get up in your head and drive you crazy for years. Like I said before, this is your choice and whatever happens, well, that will be something Miss Phoebe caused to happen.

Phoebe looks over to Slowpoke. He growls at Dabney. Her heart is heavy. Tears well up in her eyes.

PHOEBE

What should I do, buddy?

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Her mind raced faster than her blazing quick feet. She can't let the Hopis lose their homes, and yet, she can't sit by as this cut-throat, murders baby cheetahs in front of her eyes. What to do, huh?. Finally an idea comes to her. A risky idea, but the only one she can conjure up.

DABNEY

Times-a-getting late, Missy. I can almost see the finish-line from here. What's it gonna be? Don't you wanna save these cute little critters?

(beat)

Aww, see, ... they like you. That's Auntie Phoebe over there. See her?

(MORE)

DABNEY (CONT'D)

She's thinking about watching all of you poor, little innocent babies, have an unfortunate turn of events that isn't gonna be pretty to look at.

PHOEBE

Ever since you and your machine killed off my daddy, I dreamed about whupping you at something. And this is it.

(beat)

You could throw the President out of that train for all I care. This race is about getting revenge for what you did to John Henry and for what you wanna do to the Hopi tribe.

(beat)

If you are gonna throw them in the air, try to be a man about it. I bet my little sister can toss that cage higher than you.

Dabney is shocked.

DABNEY

You're John Henry's snot-nosed brat? No wonder you are so ornery. You got bad blood. What a joy it will be to stomp two Henrys in one lifetime.

(beat)

You know, I made John Henry's heart explode inside his chest when he tried to take on my machine. It's been a long race. How's yours feeling?

Dabney cruelly clutches his chest like he is having a heart attack, then laughs at Phoebe.

PHOEBE

I have more heart as a little girl than you've had in your whole, pitiful, evil little life. John Henry was a real man. He died trying to help his friends. You ain't nothing but a drunk coward hiding behind your machines. A greedy fat rat. Hey Slowpoke, what do you do to fat rats?

Slowpoke licks his chops as he stares Dabney in the eyes.

DABNEY

Fine. These cheetahs are gonna look like mashed potatoes with spots the next time you see them. You live with it!

Dabney tosses the cage high up in the air and grins. The kittens inside look so scared it would make a grown man cry.

Without missing a stride, Phoebe jumps high into the air and snags the cage just as it is going over her head.

When she lands, her eyes are closed and she is near the train door Dabney is standing in.

When she opens her eyes, Dabney can see little flames flicker in her eyes where her pupils should be.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

Awwwrg!

He scrambles back into the cabin and slams the door, scared to death.

PHOEBE

You better run, yellow-belly!  
Picking on these poor animals.  
Shame on you.

INT. TRAIN - SAME

Dabney stumbles up to the front of the train, pale as a sheet. The engineer looks at him funny.

COHEN

What happened to you? Look like ya saw a ghost.

DABNEY

Worse than a ghost. Why didn't you tell me that was John Henry's kid? She's a witch. Why didn't you tell me?

Dabney hits him with his hat again and again.

COHEN

Cut it out now! Don't touch me again! John Henry's kid? Well I'll be.

DABNEY

How dare you talk back to me. I own you. You take the whipping and do what I say. Understand? I'm the boss. I don't care if that kid belongs to John Henry or John The Baptist. Your job is to work for me and crush her if I say so.

Dabney gets right in his face, veins bulging on his forehead. Cohen takes a step back and smiles.

COHEN

That's right, Buddy, you are the boss, but you are your own employee now, because I quit!

(beat)

I hope that little Henry girl wins. If you was a soup, you'd be cream of cockroach stew with stink bugs and snake venom sprinkled on top!

DABNEY

That's it! Get outta my train!

EXT. OUTSIDE TRAIN - SAME

Phoebe tries to run fast while she carries the cage. The cheetah kittens are get knocked around real bad. She slows down a bit.

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees someone get thrown from the train and tumble downhill. He seems okay but badly shook up. The train starts to pull away from her.

PHOEBE

Great, he loses a passenger and I pick half a dozen up.

After running awhile longer, she looks at the cats. It is a tough decision. She slows down and stops.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Slowpoke, I need you to stay behind and watch the kittens. Might be wolves, cougars or some of Dabney's kinfolk in these woods. You have to protect them.

Slowpoke purrs and rubs against her leg. He understands. She gives him a kiss on the top of his head and waves good-bye. It is off to the races again.



Dabney's train is quite a distance ahead of her now. She kicks her running into high gear. She gains ground, but not that much.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
Where's the old lady with the drum  
when you need her? What am I gonna  
do? God, help me.

The wind picks up. She looks up to see clouds rush by. One cloud doesn't move.

As she watches it, the cloud transforms into a face. A familiar face. John Henry...her dad.

Suddenly she hears his voice, it sounds like THUNDER.

JOHN HENRY  
God was busy. He sent me instead.  
Hello Phoebe my love. I'm so proud  
of you.

PHOEBE  
Daddy, is that you? But how?

JOHN HENRY  
How I got here isn't important  
child, why I'm here...is. You think  
you are losing this race? Far from  
it.

(beat)  
You're a winner, no matter how  
today ends up. You are doing  
something that I wasn't allowed to  
do when I was your age. Run!

(beat)  
All those years of not being able  
to run because of the shackles  
around my feet, were passed on to  
you. See that chain link around  
your neck. You and I are running  
this race together.

Suddenly the chain link starts to GLOW. The light it shines grows brighter and brighter.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)  
You're a great person to take on  
this painful challenge. Not for  
money or glory, but to save the  
lives of your fellow humans. That  
is a beautiful thing. Let me tell  
you, the BIG GUY really likes that  
kinda stuff.

(MORE)

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

(beat)

The finish line isn't far away. I want you to ran harder and faster than you ever have before. The universe will open for you and miracles will unfold. I want you to know that I love you in this world and beyond. Most daddies sing their babies lullabies, but child, we got work to do.

The cloud gets bigger and a full length view of John Henry is now seen. Big muscles and all.

Behind him is a choir of Angels. In his hand, his big, black hammer. He calls back to them.

JOHN HENRY (CONT'D)

Let me count it off. One, and a two, and a...

The angels starts singing.

ANGELS

*Run that steam train on down, gal.  
Run that steam train on down.*

As they sing, John Henry swings his mighty hammer down on a steel spike. Each time, a brilliant spark flashes, as metal hits metal.

Each spark from the hammer, makes the chain link on her necklace sparkle.

The "CLANG" of the hammer is in rhythm with the song's beat.

With tears in her eyes, she starts running faster and faster. The cloud above starts to fade away but the song is still playing loudly in her head.

PHOEBE

I love you daddy...

Are all her trembling lips can say. She looks down at the shackle. It now looks like a huge oval diamond.

She looks like a brown blur with a shooting star on her chest. The train is in front of her but is losing ground quick. The finish line is less than a mile away.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Dabney, now driving the train, sees a bright light reflecting off of his polished locomotive. He looks back to see Phoebe and her magic amulet only yards behind him.

DABNEY

Why you little brat! Think you are  
cute? I can be cute too.

EXT. OUTSIDE TRAIN - SAME

He blows the train whistle and gray, sooty air heads right for Phoebe's lungs. She chokes, coughs and slows down a little. Dabney laughs and does it again.

He looks to the back of the train again , but she is gone. A puzzled look crosses Dabney's face.

EXT. FINISHING LINE - SAME

The crowd sees Dabney dirty trick unfold as the first black cloud is followed by another. In the smoke from the second whistle blast, she seems to have disappeared.

Suddenly, out of no where, Phoebe is seen on top of the train. She sprints to the front of the train and stands there smiling.

The crowd at the finish line goes wild with applause for her. She waves back at them.

INT. TRAIN - SAME

Dabney thinks the cheering is for him. He combs his nearly bald head and straightens his tie. Dabney is startled by a strange noise.

It seems to be coming from the roof of the train. He tries to peer around, but can see nothing.

EXT. OUTSIDE TRAIN - SAME

Atop the locomotive, Phoebe backs up from the front of the train so she can pick up speed...for a jump?

EXT. FINISH LINE - SAME

John Henry's old buddies look much older now. They watch Phoebe intently. McCullough, Petey, Isaac and Emperor Ming stand side by side.

MCCULLOUGH

Oh no, Lassie. Don't do it!

PETAY

That girl's nuttier than a squirrel fart.

ISAAC

Good God, man. If she slips or twists an ankle she will look like a cheese omelet with spot of tomato paste on top.

EMPEROR MING

Do not worry. She has karma on her side. You will see.

EXT. ATOP TRAIN - SAME

Phoebe clasps her necklace and lets John Henry's work song play in her head. She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath.

The little girl runs across the top of that train so fast, it makes a sonic BOOM!

INT. TRAIN - SAME

The windows on the front of the train shatter. Dabney sees something fly off of the front of the train but he isn't sure what it is.

DABNEY

Whoa! What was that? I hit a flock of buzzards or something? I wonder if that little witch had something to do with it.

He sticks his head out the window, looks forward. Rage covers his face.

DABNEY (CONT'D)

No, no, no!

Less than a hundred yards from the finish line, Phoebe Henry smiles widely. All Dabney can see is the back of her head and the bottom of her Puma shoes.

DABNEY (CONT'D)  
Come on you bucket of bolts.  
Faster! I can't afford to lose this  
race. Move it.

EXT. FINISH LINE - SAME

Around the winner's tape is a huge gathering. In the crowd are John Henry's friends, townspeople, THE GOVERNOR OF UTAH, (60s - white) some dangerous looking THUGS and the Hopis.

The people of the tribe jump in celebration and joy as she gets closer to the finish line.

In the midst of them, did she just see the old shaman woman? No way. Not possible. But then again, with her...

Phoebe takes one look back before she becomes victor. She sees a red-faced Dabney, shaking his fist in anger at her.

She turns around, the colorful ribbon that marks the finish line is just inches away.

Phoebe extends her body forward and tilts her smiling face to the sky as the ribbon snaps in half.

A cloud seems to dip low. The face of John Henry forms. He smiles, winks at her and slowly dissolves away.

Phoebe doesn't stop after she crosses the finish line. Heck, she barely even slows down.

With hands held high in the air she does a victory lap around the adoring crowd. She makes sure to wave at John Henry's old friends.

Some of the Hopis try to douse her sweaty frame with water. It turns to steam as it hits her skin. All are amazed.

Dabney and his metal mule finally finish the race and stops. He sneers at Phoebe as the gathering celebrates her victory.

The Governor goes to the podium as Phoebe is still running.

GOVERNOR  
I hereby declare Phoebe Henry the  
official winner of this race!

The audience cheers for her.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
The disputed Hopi lands are now  
under the tribe's complete control.

Hopis hop for joy.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
As for this land deed in the name  
of Mr. Dabney...

The Governor takes the document and rips it in two.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
It is hereby considered null and  
void. Very good race Miss Henry.  
I'm sure that you made your daddy  
very proud.

INT. TRAIN - SAME

The thuggish men pay a visit to Mr. Dabney. The biggest,  
roughest and ugliest thug, Roy McAvoy, AKA CRAZY BOY ROY,  
(30's) sticks his head into the cab where Dabney is.

It startles the railroad man. Dabney looks more nervous than  
a baby chick in a snake pit.

CRAZY BOY ROY  
Mr. Dabney. Looks like you had a  
bad day. And you know what? It  
might get a lot worse. You know  
what I mean?

DABNEY  
Crazy Boy Roy? Look, she's a witch  
or something. She cheated and...

EXT. FINISH LINE - SAME

Still doing victory laps, Phoebe looks over towards the train  
as she hears a scream.

DABNEY (O.S.)  
Nooooo!

Partially hidden by the train, the thuggish guys carry Dabney  
off the train, hog-tied and muzzled. They toss him on the  
back of their horses and charge off into the woods.

PHOEBE  
I'd like to see you cheat your way  
outta that one, Mr. Daddy Killer.

Beyond the train, she sees Slowpoke on the horizon. The discarded train's engineer comes into view too. It seems Cohen has been volunteered to do an important job.

He very carefully carries the cheetah kittens, under the watchful eye of Slowpoke.

As Phoebe watches her jungle cat down the tracks, she hears a familiar voice. She doesn't know where it's coming from.

RED FLOWER (O.C.)

Pssst. Hey, down here...Down here.  
On the chain.

Phoebe looks down at the necklace. Red Flower's face floats above the chain link that is her medallion.

PHOEBE

How did you do that?

RED FLOWER

I'm not a butcher or a baker, I'm  
the Hopi magic maker. You better  
ask somebody, girlfriend.

The old shaman does a few neck swerves and snaps her fingers.

PHOEBE

You're a crazy old lady. Instead of  
calling you Red Flower, your name  
should be Wacky Tobacky.

RED FLOWER

Very funny. Listen to me girl. I  
want to take you to a very special  
place to cool off. On the way, I'm  
going to tell you a very important  
story. Ready?

PHOEBE

Ready!

The crowd cheers Phoebe as she dashes away from her victory party. She waves back to them.

Down the road they go, passing cowboys on horseback and stage coaches along the way.

One Pony Express rider tries to race her. Poor horse dies of a heart attack after only running 300 yards.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Oh no. I think that pony died.

RED FLOWER

My grandma's cripple mule with one eye was healthier than that sickly thing. Keep running. I have something to tell you.

PHOEBE

First. Let me thank you for helping me win that race. It meant so much to me, the Hopis and, believe it or not, to my dad also. I don't know if it was the Firebird juice or what, but I saw him in the clouds. His words gave me the power to win that race.

The face in the medallion wipes away a tear.

RED FLOWER

Phoebe dear, you are sincerely welcome. And no, that stuff ain't crazy. It has to do with what I need to tell you.

PHOEBE

What else is there to tell me? Did you know my dad or something?

The old lady cackles with laughter.

RED FLOWER

Well, we once knew each other quite well. When I was young, I was a beautiful maiden. My dad was the Chief of the Hopis. I guess that made me a princess.

FLASHBACK - YOUNG RED FLOWER

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Red Flower, much younger and in a stunning tribal dress is atop a horse, surrounded by Hopi braves. They look down from a hilltop at the violent scene below.

RED FLOWER (V.O.)

One day, we saw a young black man being robbed by bandits. He put up quite a fight, but he was outnumbered.



She signals for the braves to intervene. The bandits see them coming and scoot. Red Flower tends to the injured man.

RED FLOWER (V.O.)  
I had the braves chase the bandits away. I knew right then that I would be this man's wife.

PHOEBE (V.O.)  
Wow! He sure must have been handsome.

RED FLOWER  
Yes, he was handsome, big muscles too. We took him back to our village and the shaman healed him.

The black man, now healthy, is dressed like the Hopis. He holds hands with Red Flower as they watch the sunset.

RED FLOWER (V.O.)  
He said that the people we saved him from, were not only there to rob him, but they were also going to sell him back into slavery. We soon got married.

PHOEBE (V.O.)  
How romantic.

RED FLOWER (V.O.)  
I gave birth to a little boy a year later.

The happy family eats dinner together.

RED FLOWER (V.O.)  
I left one day to visit my dad. Those same men from years before came back after my husband. This time he fought them to the death. When I came back home, he was dead and my boy was gone.

Red Flower weeps beside her husband's body.

BACK TO SCENE

Phoebe stares down at the amulet through misty eyes.

PHOEBE  
Oh, Red Feather. That is so sad. I'm so sorry that happened to you.

Red Flower composes herself, then continues.

RED FLOWER

Thank you. My tribe looked everywhere for him. I was so sad I wanted to die. The shaman saw me crying one day.

(beat)

He told me that if I studied his magic, I would also be able to find my son again.

They zoom down the road towards a wooded area.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)

Then, years later, I found my son. What a handsome man. Big and strong like his dad, but with fire in his eyes, like mine.

Phoebe's smile finally returns.

PHOEBE

That's great! I'm so happy for you. What did he say when you told him who you were? He must have jumped for joy to see his mom.

RED FLOWER

Well, it didn't quite go as I planned. I had found out that he had been a slave since he was taken from me and only freed as a young man. By this time, he already had a wife and children.

The face in the medallion smiles proudly.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)

When I finally tracked him down, he was busy doing something important. So powerful, so kind to his friends and loving to his family. I figured that I would just visit him the next day after everything was over.

(beat)

I should have introduced myself. I should have used my power to help him. I didn't, and I will regret it for the rest of my life.

Red Flower's face saddens.

PHOEBE  
Why, what happened the next day?

RED FLOWER  
I found out the next day, that he  
had died.

Red Flower's voice cracks from emotion as she speaks.

RED FLOWER (CONT'D)  
I couldn't believe it. My heart was  
broken again. That night I had a  
dream.  
(beat)  
It told me that I would meet his  
daughter, years later, and I will  
have a second chance to use my  
powers to help her at a tough time  
in her life.

Phoebe zooms past trees so fast she pulls the leaves off the  
branches. She doesn't notice. Her mind is into the story.

PHOEBE  
Did you get a chance to help his  
kid?

RED FLOWER  
Yes.

The smile on the young girl's face shows relief.

PHOEBE  
Wow, how wonderful! Finally a happy  
ending. You had me worried. So what  
did the kid say when you helped  
out?

RED FLOWER  
She made fun of my teeth.

Red Flower smiles widely, showing her grizzly grill.

PHOEBE  
What? Oh, what a little, ungrateful  
brat. Point her out when we get  
back home. I'll pound her head like  
I had my daddy's hammer in one hand  
and a brick in the other.

Phoebe looks down at the medallion...just as Red Flower  
points up.

RED FLOWER  
There she is.

The old, wrinkled finger points upwards. Phoebe stretches her neck backwards and searches the sky.

PHOEBE  
Up there? Did you teach her to fly  
or something?

The old woman shakes her head in pity.

RED FLOWER  
We all see that downstairs you are  
quick as lightning, but upstairs  
you are slower than a drunk turtle  
with bad feet.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

They come up to a clearing. A body of water is seen beyond the trees.

PHOEBE  
Huh?

Phoebe looks puzzled for a moment, then her face changes as the clues all come together.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
What? No. No, no, no. That's crazy.  
Are you meaning to say...

RED FLOWER  
Yep.

PHOEBE  
Naw, no way.

Phoebe doesn't even notice the lake in front of her. She takes the necklace off and holds it so she is eye to eye with the old woman's image.

They study each other for what seems like lifetimes.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)  
Grandma?

RED FLOWER  
Yes Phoebe Henry, I am your  
grandmother. And because of you, I  
have finally reunited with my baby.

John Henry's face appears next to her. He kisses his mom on the cheek.

JOHN HENRY

You did some good running baby girl. We're both so proud of you. I was just wondering...have you done much swimming?

PHOEBE

A little bit Daddy, why?

They both point downwards. Phoebe looks down at her feet. Below her, fish look up at her with puzzled faces.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Great glory, I'm walking on water!

Red Flower chimes in.

RED FLOWER

Not for long.

The shoes Little Puma made start to get soggy and weigh her down. With each step she gats a little slower and a little deeper in the water. She puts the necklace back on.

She stops running and then floats on her back. Smiling and cooling down as steam rises from her body.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

I hear-tell that the lake changed that day forever. That salt on her body from the sweat was mighty strong, or maybe magic, don't rightly know. But one thing for sure, after Phoebe Henry left them waters, they started to call it the Great Salt Lake. They even named a nearby City after it.

EXT. HOPI RESERVATION - DAY

Red Flower strolls through the village. Next to her is a smiling Phoebe, dressed in similar tribal clothes.

HAMBONE (V.O.)

Phoebe and her family later moved to the Hopi reservation. Red Flower taught her the secret of Hopi magic and eventually she became a shaman too. She never took off her necklace again.

(MORE)

HAMBONE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 And she never had to worry about  
 the railroad messing with her  
 kinfolk, ever again.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Hambone takes the last swig of water and chuckles. Bernie  
 stands up and applauds at the end of the story as he smiles.

BERNIE  
 Great little story, Mr. Hambone.

HAMBONE  
 Thank you. When you get my age,  
 stories is about all you got left.

BERNIE  
 Got any more?

Hambone smiles and looks at the stars.

HAMBONE  
 Make yourself comfy, Manila. I can  
 talk till my dentures turn to dust.

**THE END.**