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THE GRAY, a Screenplay Adapted from the Laura Hendrie Story "Arroyo"

Alexander Van Ark
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THE GRAY

a screenplay

Adapted from the Laura Hendrie story "Arroyo"

By

Alexander Van Ark

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Email: alex@alexvanark.com

Mobile: 347-306-4834

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: NIGHT (PRE DAWN):

A ROOSTER perches on the arm of a weathered couch in the rear yard of the Jopa ranch-house. Long strands of prairie grass grow out of the couch's decaying base.

The rooster CROWS long and loud.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: BECCA'S BEDROOM: NIGHT (PRE DAWN):

(another burst from the
ROOSTER, muffled a bit)

As the crowing trails off, BECCA, seventeen, gets out of bed wearing a frumpy, cotton nightgown. She immediately takes it off revealing her lean, attractive body.

She dresses quickly, slipping into a long-sleeved Henley and overalls.

She plucks up a pair of blue men's riding boots from the bedroom floor and hugs them to her chest as she leaves the room.

INT. HALLWAY - BECCA: CONTINUOUS:

Framed photos hang on the hallway walls at angles, as if forgotten. Several of them (some of the family, some with Becca's mother) have fallen to the floor and are propped against the baseboard.

Barefoot, Becca slips quietly down the hallway. She stops at her brother BRICE's bedroom. The door is open, hanging off of one of its hinges.

INT. BRICE'S BEDROOM:

Brice is asleep, tangled in his bedclothes. He is a young man nearly falling out of his childhood bed.

He GRINDS his teeth, filling the room with a sound like the crunching of gravel-

BRICE
(MUMBLES something that sounds like
Idonwanto)

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY: BECCA:

Her face is full of anxiety and sadness.

(a pause)

Becca turns away from her brother and slips further down the hallway coming to Pa Jopa's bedroom. The door is open, the interior night dark. Pa Jopa's loud SNORES penetrate the hall.

Becca slips by quickly without looking inside.

Pa Jopa's WHISTLING SNORE follows Becca into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN: BECCA:

The sky outside the kitchen windows has lightened a bit to a soft prussian blue.

The Jopa kitchen is quaint, spartan, the cleanest part of the house. In fact, it is as though someone has taken great care to remove all suggestions of personality.

Becca props herself against the rustic table that dominates the kitchen and struggles her boots on over her bare feet.

She removes a loaf of country bread from a bread-box on the table and twists-out a buck-knife stabbed upright into the hardwood.

She cuts two slices from the loaf, wraps them in a dish towel and deposits the package in to her overalls' pocket.

She stabs the buck-knife back into the hardwood and heads for the rear door of the ranch-house.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE DOOR: DAY (DAWN):

Becca exits the ranch-house (the house's wood siding is chipped and grayed by years of neglect). She pulls the interior door closed behind her, and rests the screen door quietly on its jamb.

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE: REAR YARD:

Fresh pink streaks across the eastern sky.

Becca thumps down the porch-steps and follows a dusty furrow carved by thousands of crossings between the ranch-house, the corral and the barn.

EXT. BARN:

Becca slides the barn door aside revealing an ink-dark interior.

She steps inside.

INT. BARN:

Becca slides the door closed behind her, her silhouette a cut out in the dawn brightened rectangle of the open jamb.

She pauses allowing her eyes to adjust to the darkness. The contours of farm implements and horse tackle materialize on the walls and the posts supporting the loft ceiling.

A row of horse stalls is positioned along one wall. The RUSTLE of loose straw stirring and the SOUNDS of several horses BLOWING AIR issues from inside those stalls.

Becca walks toward the stalls and slips an arm through a slot in the iron gate.

The straw sounds like WHISPERS as JACOB, a chestnut Quarter horse stallion, steps through it to catch Becca's attention.

Jacob NICKERS when Becca's outstretched hand makes abrupt contact with his shoulder.

BECCA
(firmly)
Go on. Git, Jacob.

Becca digs her fingertips into Jacob's muzzle and shoves hard.

BECCA (CONT'D)
I'm here to see Mattie, not you.
Now git!

Jacob takes the cue and sidesteps.

Becca wriggles her fingers in the air past him.

(a beat)

The shape of Mattie, an American Paint mare, shuffles up to Becca's hand.

Mattie nuzzles Becca's palm, licking it, hinting she wants a treat.

Becca reaches into a plastic feed bucket hanging on a hook nearby. She scoops up a handful of feed and thrusts her arm back into the slot in the gate.

She pats Mattie's neck and muzzle with one hand while the horse eats gently from the other.

BECCA (CONT'D)

(cooing)

There she is. My, Mattie. My girl.

(a beat)

I don't care what Pa Jopa says, you got more sense than any other horse we ever had. More than all of em put together. Ain't that right girl?

Mattie's nickers of approval are mingled with the sudden STIRRING of a third horse SHIFTING in the next stall. Mattie starts to fidget and back up.

The ghostly muzzle of a Gray gelding slips sideways through a slot in the stall gate. The horse SNIFFS, SNORTS and STOMPS trying to get Becca's attention.

Hesitating, Becca puts her hand out as if she intends to rub the Gray's muzzle.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLASHBACK: CORRAL: DAY: AT HALF SPEED:

It is a very bright day.

The image of one of Becca's blue riding boots as it rises and falls in contrast to the charcoal flank of the Gray as she rides it.

CUT TO:

Half of Becca's face falls horizontal into frame and makes a thud to the ground. Sweat damp dirt forms smudge lines across

her forehead and nose. A dust cloud rises up around her face and head during the impact.

CUT TO:

Pa Jopa seen from Becca's fallen perspective. He says something, but his words are muffled. He points behind Becca and motions for her to get to her feet.

RETURN TO:

INT. BARN:

Becca is aware her fingertips have brushed the Gray's fur.

She pulls her hand back suddenly, as if burned. She presses the "burned" hand against her chest, using the other one to cradle it.

The Gray shies. Its muzzle disappears back through the gate.

A SQUEAL of PANIC and a metallic SLAMMING issue from the Gray's stall as the horse backs up hard against the rear of its enclosure.

BECCA

Well, that's fine. I don't like you either, you know.

(a beat)

You rank lunatic.

Becca kicks the horse's stall with her boot-heel.

Becca turns as if remembering her original mission. She steps cautiously through the interior dimness reaching a ladder of two-by-four sections hammered to a post.

She ascends the few rungs it takes to reach the ceiling of the barn. She raises both hands above her pushing open a hatch.

She climbs to the very top of the ladder and steps into the hayloft. She re-sets the hatch.

INT. BARN: HAYLOFT:

The pinkish light of the day moving forward leaks into the gaps in the wall slats.

Hay bales, stacked like enormous straw bricks, are packed tight and high in the rear of the hayloft. Front bales are loosely stacked and more random where the Jopa's have been using them to bed the horses.

Becca slips into the loft and crawls over bales. She slips down to the front, where the bales are thin and the floor is visible through the remnants of straw. She stands and unlatches the barn's loading bay door swinging the door wide, letting in air and light.

She sits at the threshold of the loading bay door letting her legs dangle out over the ground. She KNOCKS her boot-heels against the barn wall and reclines on her elbows.

Becca inhales the fresh, morning air. She surveys the land in front of her, which is still for the most part covered in early morning shadow.

She is pretty, even without a touch of make-up, and sun-freckled on her cheeks and nose. Her ash-blond hair frames a deep sadness that sits behind her light brown eyes.

EXT. BECCA'S EYE:

Only one of Becca's eyes is in frame.

Reflected in her eye is the plains-scape she sees.

Loose strands of hair, set in motion by a breeze, wave before her eye like grass in the wind.

The image of her eye moves closer and closer until we pass right through her pupil and enter into the landscape reflected there.

EXT. FLYING: CONTINUOUS:

We are out of the hayloft and in the air, as if suddenly leaving the ledge and flying thirty feet above the landscape.

Facing forward, moving at a clip. We are running alongside the thin, dark line of HIGHWAY 34 each object materializes as if emerging through fog.

Once past the Jopas' ranch-house, the shadows dissolve and the landscape sharpens in stages. Shots of acreage passing beneath lead to the snow fence bordering the Jopas' property, then another ranch-house comes into view, and finally one more.

Heat bleached flatlands unroll and spread out before seeming to split and then deepen into the long, black cut of a canyon-like arroyo.

Beyond the far rim of the arroyo a lush patchwork of hundreds of acres of green beet fields, divided by the highway, comes into view.

The solid looking patchwork begins to split and fracture, multiplying into individual rows of plants forming thousands of parallel paths that run along Highway 34 all moving in the same direction.

Large mechanical sprinklers sit among the plants discharging churning sprays of water.

The sky over the fields becomes misty and orange-red.

The light of the sun brightens every second bringing the farthest edge of the fields into view.

Suddenly the momentum stops, and we hang in mid-air. The factory buildings of the Red Spot Sugar Refinery slip into focus, and beyond them the buildings of the town of Stygo, Colorado.

Unexpectedly, the world retracts. The landscape slides violently in reverse, like a rubber band snapping back after being stretched tight.

RETURNING TO:

EXT. BARN: BECCA'S EYE:

In Becca's eye a new image appears: a black-and-white milk GOAT wanders into the ranch-house yard. The goat hops up on to the couch and settles like a lover nuzzling next to the rooster perched there.

Just then the sun leaks like lava over the horizon.

EXT. BARN: OVER BECCA'S SHOULDER: DAY:

Highway 34 shines in the sun like a glowing, golden runway stretching out along the Jopas' property and continuing to somewhere beyond the farthest beet field.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-DOOR:

Pa Jopa, sixty-two, - a tough, been-there-done-that rancher with a sun-lined, steel-cut face and silver hair - emerges through the screen door. He wears wool socks, a baggy undershirt, and a pair of workman's pants held up by suspenders and a thick leather belt, cinched tight.

His face is pale, his arms tremble as he unbuttons his fly.

He turns and urinates off the left side of the porch, his arms shudder and he dribbles urine onto his socks.

PA JOPA

(whispering)

What kind of man are you now. Huh.
Wetting your good woolens with your
own piss?

(a pause)

Becca! Brice! Come on and get
yourselves up now.

(a pause)

You hear me? Brice? Becca?

He re-buttons his fly and rubs his chapped and cracked hands over his forehead and beard stubble. He goes back inside the ranch-house.

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE DOOR: MOMENTS LATER:

Brice, eighteen, solidly built, bare-chested, staggers out of the door, scratching his head. His wheat-colored hair sticks up in all directions. The legs of his jeans are tucked into the pair of emerald green riding boots he wears.

He starts to unbutton his fly, but stops when he senses he is being observed.

Brice turns to see Becca perched in the hayloft.

Embarrassed he steps around the corner of the ranch-house moving out of her line of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. BARN: BECCA

Becca's eyes light up as she chuckles about her brother's modesty.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE DOOR: BRICE MOMENTS LATER:

Brice returns from doing his business. He doesn't look up at Becca, but goes back into the ranch-house leaving the interior door open.

INT. BARN: BECCA:

She reaches into her overalls pocket and removes the dish towel with the bread wrapped in it. She eats a slice of bread slowly while she listens to the voices of Brice and Pa Jopa drifting across the empty space between the ranch-house and the barn.

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: SCREEN-DOOR:

Through the checkered pattern of the tiny squares in the door's screen, the images of Pa Jopa and Brice are blurred impressions moving rhythmically in the kitchen.

Pa Jopa
Where's the coffee at? Becca? Girl,
now you wake the hell up!

(a pause)

Boy, get up and help me get these
eggs started. Day's a wastin'.

BRICE
(his mouth full)
Just need a slice of bread afor I
get on that horse. Don't really
even need...

Pa Jopa rummages the cabinets SLAMMING doors and drawers as he moves about the kitchen.

PA JOPA
Well, I need a cup a coffee and I
can't find where your sister's hid
the grounds.

BRICE
 (his mouth still full)
 Well, I sure don't know.

(a pause)

Pa Jopa opens the door to the refrigerator freezer.

PA JOPA
 She put the damn coffee in the
 freezer again. ...tastes strong as
 death in all that ice... just
 doesn't listen...

He pulls the coffee can out of the freezer and SLAMS the door.

Pa Jopa FILLS a graniteware coffeepot with water from the faucet.

BRICE
 You know what I do know huh, Pa? I
know I'm gonna get that Gray today.
 Listen I got it down pat. I been
 listening to you. All I got to do
 is...

EXT. BARN: OVER BECCA'S SHOULDER:

The ranch-house is at a distance out of focus, Becca's mouth and lips are sharp in the foreground:

BRICE (O.S.)

BECCA

BRICE (O.S.)

BECCA

Whisper sweet nothings in his

Whisper sweet nothings in his

BRICE (O.S.)

BECCA

Bonk him on his head if he

Knock him between the ears if

He flashes Pa Jopa a smile showing his perfect teeth.

PA JOPA
 (shaking his head)
 Well, don't I got me a damn beaver
 for a son.

Pa Jopa steps off the porch and starts off across the yard toward the barn.

Brice follows like he's been lassoed off the porch.

EXT. BARN: BECCA'S VIEW:

Brice and Pa Jopa pass beneath Becca's boot-heels. She HEARS the barn door slide open. Her brother and father disappear inside.

INT. BARN: BECCA:

Becca flops back onto the loft's straw-strewn floorboards to eavesdrop.

PA JOPA (O.S.)
 Boy, none a these horses been fed.
 Get some of that feed and take care
 of Jacob and Mattie.

BRICE (O.S.)
 Alright. I'll do it.

Brice pours grain into Mattie and Jacob's bucket with a SOUND like rain pouring on a tin roof.

PA JOPA (O.S.)
 No, son, don't give him none a
 that. I want to get that Gray's
 appetite up. He'll work harder if
 he thinks the reward'll come later.

BRICE (O.S.)
 Does that really work?

PA JOPA (O.S.)
 Sure will.
 (taunting Brice a bit)
 Now you know you don't have to if
 you don't want to. You can just
 watch me work him...

The straw HISSES as Brice kicks it aside to DRAG a water hose in to the stalls. He runs WATER into the horses' water buckets.

BRICE (O.S.)
No. I want to do it.

The Gray SNORTS and BLOWS air, BANGS the side of its stall with its hooves.

PA JOPA (O.S.)
Where's that sister of yours? Don't she want to watch you ride?

Becca is startled at Pa Jopa's sudden mention of her. She remains motionless.

BECCA
(whispers)
Brice. Don't do it Brice.

BRICE (O.S.)
Maybe she's tryin to get her beauty sleep.

(a beat)
Good luck. Huh, Pa?

PA JOPA (O.S.)
(grunts)

Becca closes her eyes and sighs.

Becca winces at the sharp SCRAPING of iron against hardwood as Pa Jopa swings the gate open.

The Gray SQUEALS and STOMPS.

PA JOPA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(to the Gray)
Okay, sweetie pie. No need to kick the barn down.

Becca starts up and peeks out into the corral seeing Pa Jopa leading the Gray out of the barn.

Becca draws her feet up slowly into the bay. She holds on to the hayloft jamb and leans further out to get a view of the entire corral.

The WIND gusts and she barely misses slipping and falling out of the hayloft. Dust and hay BLOW into her hair and onto her clothes.

EXT. CORRAL:

Pa Jopa, Brice and the Gray bend themselves against the debris stirred by the dust up.

The corral's wooden gate flaps open in the wind. It KNOCKS against the fence.

The Gray suddenly becomes fidgety, it eyes the open gate and strains the lead, pulling Pa Jopa with it toward the possible escape.

PA JOPA

Hey, boy, go close that gate.

BRICE

Got it. You hold him, Pa. Don't want him escaping before I get my chance at him.

Brice sprints to the gate, shuts it and sets the latch in place.

Pa Jopa pats and rubs the Gray's neck.

PA JOPA

(whispering)

Now you don't want to get any ideas, do you sweet-heart? You can keep flaring your nostrils like a spoiled baby, but you need to be broken. That's the only way you're gonna get free.

Brice trots over to Pa Jopa and the Gray.

BRICE

All set.

INT. BARN:

Becca flops onto her back lying down in the hayloft.

She glances up into the rafters and spies a hornets' nest. Mesmerized, she stares at it.

INT. BARN: HORNETS' NEST:

Several hornets fly and BUZZ around the paper nest, others alight and climb inside the holes. One of the hornets flies down to buzz around Becca then drifts out of the loading bay into the morning heat.

PA JOPA (O.S.)

Becca! God damn it Becca, get out here!

(mumbling to himself)(O.S.)

What am I going to do with that girl?

Becca draws her knees up, sets her arms around her knees and rests her head on her arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORRAL:

BRICE

Like I said, I been honeyfuggling him, Pa. Getting him used to the sound of my voice.

Pa Jopa stares at him.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Think he's beginning to understand me now, too. You'll see, won't hardly rear when I sit on him.

(lightly touches a bulging breast pocket; it's snap fastened shut)

But I'll be ready if he does.

PA JOPA

Boy, quit your yakkin' and just get up on the damn horse.

Brice dances around the horse like a prize fighter, taking a few soft punches in the Gray's direction with loose fists.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)
You done prancing? Think you can
take this serious?

Brice nods his head.

He slips his feet into the stirrups, and swings up on to the horse. He squares his shoulders and takes the lead Pa Jopa hands him.

CUT TO:

INT. BARN: BECCA:

The Gray SQUEALS(O.S.).

Becca winces. She closes her eyes and holds her head in her hands shaking it back and forth.

She hears a SCUFFLE (O.S.), and then a THUD (O.S.)

BRICE (O.S.)
Awww, damnit! Damnit! Damnit to
Christ!

Becca pokes her head around the corner of the barn.

The Gray has thrown Brice. Wild-eyed, the horse swings its head as it trots all along the perimeter of the corral.

Brice dusts the dirt from his rear with his hands. He is only half-smiling now. He shakes his head nearly resembling the Gray's mannerisms.

Brice glances up at Pa Jopa.

BRICE (CONT'D)
Rope slipped.

Pa Jopa stalks up to Brice.

PA JOPA
Hell it did.

Brice, imitating Pa Jopa, stalks up to the man miming a Western showdown.

BRICE
Naw, it slipped. Horse's lathered a
bit. Lather got on the lead.

PA JOPA

Naw, you dropped it. Just like you
always do... Just dropped it.

Brice abandons the stand-off and checks the bulge in his
breast pocket. He seems satisfied as he re-snaps the pocket.

Pa Jopa steps back from Brice and the Gray to rest against
the barn. He is trembling again. He stands in the shade of
the barn, directly beneath Becca's perch.

EXT. BARN: BECCA'S VIEW:

Pa Jopa's bald spot resembles a duck egg in a nest of steel
wool.

Pa Jopa reaches into his pants pocket.

He stops.

He looks up noticing Becca for the first time all morning.

His eyes narrow to slits.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

What are you doing up there?

Becca shakes her head as if to answer.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

I've been calling you for half an
hour. You didn't hear me?

Becca shakes her head again.

Pa Jopa shakes his head mocking Becca.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

I know you heard me. What I don't
know is why you're playing games,
girl.

He removes a pharmacy vial from his pocket. He RATTLES a pill
out of the vial and places it under his tongue.

He slips the vial back into his pocket, sets his hat on the
back of his head and saunters back toward Brice and the Gray
at the center of the corral.

EXT. CORRAL:

PA JOPA

Well? You got another one in ya,
Brice?

BRICE

(big toothy smile)
Hell, yeah! I want-ta go again. You
hold him, I'll get on.

Pa Jopa holds the Gray's lead for Brice.

The horse lowers its head and remains calm.

Pa Jopa pats the horse's muzzle.

PA JOPA

(whispering to the Gray)
You got this darling. You can do
it. It's just a minute and you're
broke. It just takes a minute.

Brice mounts the horse again.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

Don't dig your heels into his
belly, this time. Use your rein to
your advantage. Relax yourself and
you'll last longer.

Brice nods. He grins as if he hasn't heard a word Pa Jopa's
been saying.

The Gray remains motionless for half a second before it lays
its ears back and takes off bucking like someone shot a squib
up its butt.

Brice rocks and reels in his saddle trying to stay on, but he
soon releases the rein and slips neatly off the horse's back
landing on his feet.

Pa Jopa catches the rein in midair and spits out his
toothpick.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)
That's right. Ride 'im cowboy.

Without warning the Gray rears straight up on its haunches, its forelegs pawing the air as it attempts to lift Pa Jopa off the ground. The horse twists its muscular body around and tries to plant its hooves right into Brice's face.

The Gray glances off as Pa Jopa yanks him back to ground with the lead.

Startled, Brice trips on his own feet as he backs up and lands on his rear again.

Pa Jopa reaches out his free hand and hoists Brice to his feet.

Brice frantically pats the dust from his jeans and shirt.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)
Oh, dust don't hurt, boy.

(a beat)

But it might would help if you
tried to stay on im.

BRICE
(nearly sobbing)
Awww, damnit! I can't do
it, Pa, I just can't. I
thought I could, but he
got the best of me.

PA JOPA
Boy, you got to show him who's who.
That's only way you're gonna break
im.

BRICE
If I can't do it, then why do I
have to?

PA JOPA
Someone's gotta learn. You know
that.

EXT. BARN: BECCA:

Pa Jopa squints up at Becca from under his Stetson.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)
Idn't at right, Becca?

EXT. CORRAL:

Pa Jopa grabs a hold of the Gray's lead.

PA JOPA

Alright now, Honey. This won't hurt a bit. Ole Brice's as light as a bee. Just give him a nice ride. Can you do that for me?

The horse STOMPS and SNORTS.

Brice, grinning like he has forgotten everything, including the horse, climbs onto the Gray's back.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

Are you ready?

Brice sits heavy and square on the horse. He grips the rein.

BRICE

Yeah. I'm ready.

Pa Jopa releases the lead.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORRAL: BRICE RIDING THE GRAY:

Brice is on the Gray's back. The Gray bucks hard straight away, its front hooves meeting the back ones on its springy jumps.

Brice fumbles in his breast pocket but before he can remove the egg in it and smash it on the horse's head, the egg flies into the air.

Brice tries to catch it and loses his balance following it to the ground.

CUT TO:

Brice is back on the Gray. The horse refuses to move even with Brice's knees digging into its side.

The horse drops its back legs and squats attempting to sit. Brice SCREAMS in the horse's ear, but the Gray plunks its rear down on the ground forcing Brice to somersault off the horse's back.

CUT TO:

Brice is back on the Gray. The horse rears and Brice, somehow getting tangled in the lead, dangles off the side of the saddle for an instant before he's turfed again.

CUT TO:

Brice is back on the Gray. The horse stands still. Not moving even when Brice whips him with the lead and urges him with his spurs.

CUT TO:

Brice is back on the Gray. The horse rears flailing its forelegs in the air and Brice flies off over the Gray's tail landing on his back.

The Gray shies off to the end of the corral, but then the horse turns, its teeth bared, its eyes bugging out heading straight for Brice.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARN: LOADING BAY:

From her position Becca sees Brice and the Gray. Her eyes widen as she anticipates the trouble.

BECCA
(screaming)
Brice! Watch out!

CUT TO:

EXT. CORRAL: BECCA: DAY:

It is the same very bright day as before.

Half of Becca's face makes a horizontal thud to the ground. Her forehead and nose are smudged with sweat moistened dirt. Dust rises up around her head at impact.

(a pause)

A charcoal foreleg - hoof to fetlock joint, the fetlock blowing in the dusty wind - slams into view in front of Becca's face, barely missing her nose. Fear in Becca's eye as the foreleg lifts out of view.

RETURN TO:

EXT. CORRAL: BRICE:

Brice hears Becca's warning. He gets to his feet, trying to make a run for the fence.

In an instant the Gray overtakes him, its shadow looms over Brice.

Brice tries to roll out of the way.

The Gray skids sideways with agility, it stretches out its neck parting its lips and bites Brice on the fleshy part of his nape.

Brice YELPS and places his hand where the horse's teeth were an instant ago.

A trail of blood slips like oil through Brice's dusty fingers and down his forearm.

EXT. CORRAL:

With a deep guttural ROAR, Pa Jopa limps over to the boy and pulls him clear of the horse.

Pa Jopa grabs the leather lead up from the dust. With the lead he raises the horse's head and pulls the Gray's muzzle to one side.

Man and horse are eye-to-eye staring at each other unflinchingly.

Pa Jopa punches the Gray square on the muzzle with all of his might and dashes the lead to the ground.

EXT. CORRAL: THE GRAY:

The Gray is more shocked than hurt. The horse SCREAMS and rears twisting backwards away from Pa Jopa.

The Gray gallops to the other end of the corral SQUEALING and whipping his head to shake off the blow.

EXT. CORRAL: PA JOPA:

Pa Jopa's face is pale. He turns his back on the horse to see that Brice has made it to the other side of the fence.

Brice, breathing heavily, peers into the corral looking dejected, his hand pressed to his wounded neck.

Pa Jopa reaches into his pocket and removes the pharmacy bottle again.

PA JOPA
 (working to catch his
 breath)
 (to Brice)
 What d'you think you're doing? All
 you gotta do is ride 'im, not feed
 'im breakfast.

(a pause)

Pa Jopa places a pill under his tongue.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)
 Becca, git down from there an take
 your brother to see Doc Seymour.

EXT. STYGO, COLORADO: MAIN STREET: DAY (AFTERNOON):

Stygo's Main Street is decorated for the 4th of July. The faint music of a high school marching band tuning up drifts in from a distance.

Becca and Brice exit Doc Seymour's office. Brice's throat is wrapped in gauze, tacked in place with thick pieces of medical tape. He touches his neck tenderly as he walks down the steps behind Becca.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET:

A rusted Chevy truck roars by on Main Street headed out of town.

A barking cur, the end of a chain wrapped around its neck, twists and lunges in the truck bed. The other end of the chain is threaded through a rust hole in the tailgate. It is secured in place with a padlock.

RETURN TO:

EXT. JOPA TRUCK:

Brice and Becca both slam themselves into the truck.

A man with an Uncle Sam hat walks in front of them on the sidewalk. He waves at the siblings.

INT. JOPA TRUCK: MOVING: FAVORING BECCA:

Becca starts the truck and reverses it out into Main Street.

The siblings are soon moving away from the center of town and the Fourth of July festivities.

Becca glances in the rearview mirror. The truck has covered some distance and through the rear view Becca sees the July 4th parade has begun moving down Main Street.

The truck passes the town limits. As they leave town, the "Welcome to Stygo!" sign at the side of the road flits by for an instant as seen from the rear window.

INT. JOPA TRUCK: MOVING: FAVORING BRICE:

BECCA (O.C)

Lucky Doc Seymour was in. You'd have a bigger scar without those stitches.

Brice is in the passenger's seat, his customary grin gone.

BRICE

Yeah. Guess so.

He bends forward and presses both hands into his stomach.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Aaaaaagghh! Argh! My stomach's killing me.

BECCA (O.C.)

Maybe one of your ribs got cracked too.

BRICE

Naw, I don't think anything's broken. It was that shot Doc Seymour gave me.

BECCA (O.C.)
Well, nobody said a rabies shot
would tickle did they, Brice.

BRICE
It didn't tickle. Argh!

(a beat)

I'm going to kill that damn horse.

BECCA (O.C.)
You're just mad cause you got bit
you, once you're riding that Gray
again you'll forget all about this.

BRICE
No. I'm serious. If you'd help me,
I'd take that Gray up into the
arroyo and, BLAM, pop it in the
head...leave it for the rains to
wash away.

BECCA (O.C.)
The dogs or the ravens would get at
it before any flood could .

BRICE
All I can tell you is that that
horse is gonna pay one way or the
other.

BECCA
Brice, I'd kill that horse before
you could get up the guts to do it.

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE: REAR PORCH: PA JOPA:

The Jopa truck swings into the driveway.

Becca and Brice exit and saunter toward Pa Jopa who is
sitting on a small, knot-wood bench on the rear porch.

Becca can tell Pa Jopa is lit to the gunnels. She hangs back
a few paces behind Brice.

Pa Jopa sways in his chair, a half empty bottle of Red Spot
rum shoved between his thighs.

He watches the Gray as it paces back and forth in the corral. Pa Jopa's face is screwed up into an unsettling smile.

Brice ambles up to Pa Jopa. Meekly, unself-consciously he stands in the man's line of sight. Brice lowers his head. He reaches up to lightly pat the sudden pain the stretching causes in his neck.

Pa Jopa doesn't look Brice in the face, instead the man angles sideways in his chair to look around the boy, pleased to regain his view of the Gray.

BRICE

Listen, Pa...that Gray, he....

Pa Jopa waves a hand in the air dismissing Brice.

PA JOPA

Just go on and get out of here,
boy. You and I, we don't got
anything else to discuss tonight.

Brice sulks past Pa Jopa and opens the screen door. He pauses, looks at the Gray for a moment and then at Pa Jopa, who ignores him.

(a beat)

BRICE

Awwwright. I was just trying to
apologize.

Pa Jopa dislodges the bottle of Red Spot from between his legs. He takes a long swig.

Pa Jopa swings around in his seat. He raises his arm and sloshes the bottle's remaining contents in Brice's direction.

PA JOPA

God-damn it, Brice, It's gonna take
the rest of the year to undo the
damage you caused today.

Thinking this is an invitation to talk, Brice turns toward Pa Jopa.

BRICE

Aww, Pa, come on. I can show that
horse who's boss if you...

PA JOPA

Boy, how dense are you? Ain't that bite on your neck telling you a god damn thing? You're better off staying in the house washin' dishes with your sister.

BRICE

Now look, Pa, you ain't being fair at all. Tryin to break that horse got me five stitches and a rabies shot. Let me...

PA JOPA

What you think I never been bit by a horse? Or stomped by one? Well I have. Made me tough.

Pa Jopa takes another draught from the Red Spot. He throws the empty liquor bottle off the porch.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

I wadn't a pussy about it like you were though.

BRICE

I...I ain't no pussy.

Brice stalks into the ranch-house and slams the door behind him.

Becca stomps onto the porch and up to Pa Jopa who seems to not realize, or care she has been listening the whole time.

Becca leans into Pa Jopa's face.

BECCA

You should be ashamed of yourself, you know that. You are a heartless old man. All Brice wants, all he's ever wanted, is to please you... and you can't even see that.

Becca walks past Pa Jopa and slams the screen door behind her as she enters the ranch-house.

PA JOPA

(raising his voice at the place Becca was standing a moment ago)
(MORE)

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

You coddle the boy, just like your mother.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: KITCHEN: EVENING:

Becca and Brice are eating dinner: fried chicken, potatoes, gravy, and biscuits.

Becca pokes a fork at her portion of chicken.

Brice sops up gravy with a biscuit and stuffs the whole thing in his mouth.

The screen door CREAKS open and Pa Jopa stumbles into the kitchen. He has sobered a bit by now though he wobbles with each step.

PA JOPA

Becca, don't you call your pa in when it's time for dinner?

BECCA

I did call you. You were soused. Knocked out from all that Red Spot.

Brice stretches out his hand and points to the seat at the head of the table.

BRICE

(smiles)

Come on, Pa. Sit down, Becca outdid herself this time.

Pa Jopa sits in the chair at the head of the table.

Becca rises from her disheveled, uneaten plate of food.

BECCA

Let me fix you a plate before it gets too cold.

Becca walks over to the kitchen stove.

She pulls a plate and a fork from a shelf above the stove.

She scoops up a serving spoon's worth of potatoes and flicks them onto the plate. She forks a couple of pieces of fried chicken and soaks the potatoes in white gravy pouring it from a pan.

Becca walks back to the table and drops the plate down in front of Pa Jopa. The fork CLANGS on the rim of the plate flicking gravy on Pa Jopa's hand.

PA JOPA

Girl, it isn't gonna do any good for you to be mad at me.

BECCA

I'm not mad. I'm just not hungry anymore.

PA JOPA

I'm never excused you.

BECCA

I think I'm old enough to excuse myself.

Becca picks up her plate and walks to the sink. She sets her plate into the sink.

She walks past the table and down the hallway toward the front door.

BRICE (O.S)

(his mouth full)

Pa, you got to try one of these biscuits with some of Becca's gravy. I'm telling you she's outdone herself.

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE: FRONT-PORCH: NIGHT:

Becca sits on the porch steps looking out in the darkness. A sliver of new moon hangs pale above her.

In the distance a flash of light rises high in the sky for an instant then winks out. A POPPING echo reaches her a moment later.

Another quick flash of light and then a popping echo: the test shells for Stygo's Fourth of July fireworks display are being set off.

A tiny streak of light rises in the sky for a moment before the globe of a green and blue chrysanthemum fires into bloom.

Other fireworks pop in various colors. The display becomes a mixture of peonies, glitter palms and brocades that explode at intervals.

Becca looks back at the warm yellow lights inside the ranch-house. Sounds of the incoherent conversation between Brice and Pa Jopa float out through the screen door.

Becca stands and crosses the porch. She opens the screen door. She turns to look at the next few bursts of fireworks before closing it behind her.

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE: REAR YARD: DAY (DAYS LATER):

Brice sits on the couch in the rear yard. He leans forward, his total concentration is on the corral where Pa Jopa is lunging the Gray.

Brice's throat is still wrapped in gauze, but the edges are frayed, dirty and hanging like a loose collar around his neck. Every now and then he slips two fingers into the space behind the gauze and scratches his neck.

Becca comes out of the ranch-house with a chinette plate of tashbread in her hands. She sits on the couch next to Brice. She waves the plate under Brice's nose. He ignores her.

Pa Jopa looks up from lunging the Gray. His eyes meet Brice's for an instant.

Brice mistakes Pa Jopa's gaze for amiability.

BRICE

(grins)

(yells)

Look at how fine and sleek he moves, Pa! Boy, would love another crack at 'im!

(normal voice)

Don't you know it. One more crack.

PA JOPA

Boy, you're just gonna mess around and get another one of those rags wrapped round your neck.

Becca stands up. She opens her mouth as if to respond, but instead she flicks the remainder of the tashbread toward a cluster of chickens and stomps into the house.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: BRICE'S ROOM: NIGHT:

Becca walks down the hallway to Brice's room.

BECCA

Hey, Brice.

She knocks on the jamb and peers in.

Brice isn't in his room.

Becca hears the Gray SQUEAL (O.S.) in a strange high-pitched way out in the barn.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE REAR YARD: NIGHT:

Becca rushes from the ranch-house to the barn. The barn door has been slid open and left that way.

From the door she sees Brice inside. He is leaning into the Gray's stall, his folded arms resting on the top of the gate, a turned-on flashlight in his hand. The beam bounces over the interior walls.

At first, at a distance, Brice's tone of voice suggests he has resumed his practice of sweet-talking the Gray.

BRICE

(whispers gently)

Now, sweetie-pie, let me tell you something...

But as Becca slips inside the barn, her footsteps muffled by thick piles of straw, a noticeable hiss is evident in Brice's voice.

Brice trembles. He shakes the hand with the flashlight in it at the Gray as he speaks.

BRICE (CONT'D)

(whispers, deceptively gentle)

I'm going to kill you, you know.
You rearin, bitin, stompin' dirty son-of-a-bitch.

(MORE)

BRICE (CONT'D)

One day I'll get you right out to the middle of that arroyo and put a bullet in your stubborn skull. Then we'll see who's in charge 'round here.

The horse SQUEALS again. It STIRS in its stall, KNOCKING from side to side.

EXT. BARN: FAVORING BECCA:

Becca leavess the barn unnoticed. She fold her arms over her chest. She shivers.

An idea seems to come to her and she hurries back to the ranch-house.

CUT TO:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: LIVING-ROOM:

Becca rushes into the living-room.

She opens the door to the gun cabinet.

She smiles and sighs when she sees Pa Jopa's sawed-off shotgun positioned upright in the cabinet.

INT. HEN HOUSE: DAY (NEXT MORNING):

Becca collects eggs in the hen house. She carries a basket with a handle. She ruffles up each of the hens up moving them off the next to check the for eggs. She sets each egg she finds carefully inside the basket.

Pa Jopa steps into the hen house, smiling. He is dressed for riding in his Stetson (wrapped with the red bandana) jeans and boots. He holds a Mustang potatoes sack.

BECCA

I'm almost done with chores. If you want I'll be in in a minute to fix you up a scramble and some bacon.

PA JOPA

No need. I'm heading to town.

BECCA

Alright, well you might need to fill up the truck cause the tank's running pretty low.

PA JOPA

I'm not taking the truck. When you and Brice went to see old Doc Seymour, did he tell you he and me made a bet?

BECCA

No. He didn't mention it.

(a beat)

A bet? What'd you bet him?

PA JOPA

When those docs did this zipper job on me, Ole Seymour told me I should think about retiring. Just...just give up training horses. Retire. He might as well've to me to leave my life behind and sit watching the dust blow in.

Pa Jopa looks distant, blank for an instant, and then the light comes back into his eyes.

PA JOPA (CONT'D)

He said getting that old Gray was just signing my own death warrant.

BECCA

We all think you should slow down a bit. Your heart still isn't right. You know that.

PA JOPA

Well, I ain't worried about my heart, girl. It's still strong as ever. When Doc said that shit about retiring, I bet him Brice would come riding into town on that Gray one day carrying a sack of eggs. Not a one of em broke from the trip.

BECCA

Well, we know how Brice's riding
the Gray turned out. You intending
on going to town to pay the Doc?

Pa Jopa walks over to Becca and peers into her basket. He
carefully plucks up the egg she has just collected and places
it gently into the bottom of his gunnysack.

PA JOPA

Nope. If anything he's gonna be the
one paying me. I'm gonna ride that
damn Gray to town myself, a dozen
eggs settin in this sack. I'll go
by Doc's and collect on that bet
personally. Show him he doesn't
know what'll kill a man half s'well
as he thinks.

BECCA

Now you're talking plain
foolishness.

Pa Jopa hums to himself as he plucks another egg from Becca's
basket.

BECCA (CONT'D)

And you're acting like a plain
fool, too.

She shoves the basket into Pa Jopa's hands. He shuffles to
keep hold of the gunnysack and basket at the same time.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Why don't you have em all. Suit
yourself. Carry the whole damn hen
house into town on the back of that
Gray if you want. I don't care.

Becca bumps past him and exits the hen house. A quick cluster
of CLUCKING sounds kick up (O.C) as she parts a knot of
chickens on her way to the ranch-house.

Pa Jopa stands in the hen house cradling the basket in his
hands.

Pa Jopa begins to hum to himself again.

He plucks up egg after egg, counting them as he places them
in his gunnysack.

When he reaches a dozen, he pitches the empty basket aside and heads to the henhouse door. Before he exits, he stops, seems to think better of leaving just then and reaches under a nearby hen. He lifts the chicken away revealing another egg.

PA JOPA
 (wide Brice-like grin)
 Yep, a baker's dozen ought to do
 it.

Pa Jopa steps from the henhouse door into the white light of the bright, hot day.

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-DOOR: DAY:

Brice and Becca watch as the Pa Jopa leads the Gray skittering out of the barn and into the corral.

BRICE
 (to Becca)
 Is he sure he wants to do this?

BECCA
 He's trying to prove something.

BRICE
 Prove what?

BECCA
 That he can make an ass of himself.

Pa Jopa makes a show of saddling the horse. First he dusts and brushes the saddle leather. Then he wipes the leather down with an oil cloth making it dark and shiny.

Pa Jopa grips the gunnysack between his teeth and climbs up the stir-ups swinging himself onto the Gray's back. He sits spine straight, head high.

Pa Jopa removes the gunnysack from his teeth and holds it against the Gray's flank.

He waves at Brice and Becca.

PA JOPA
(smiles)
Won't be gone long kids. Just
taking the him into town and back.

BRICE
(enthusiastic)
It's a good day for it, Pa.

BECCA
(under her breath)
Dumb. Just plain dumb.

He SNAPS the reins and CLICKS his tongue.

PA JOPA
Alright now, Honey, let's hit the
trail.

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-YARD:

Pa Jopa nudges the Gray out of the corral gate. The gunnysack swings like a pendulum when the horse trots.

The Gray and Pa Jopa start off across the yard headed for the barren flats beyond the Jopa ranch.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS:

Pa Jopa and the Gray are on the flats. The horse skitters sideways with every few steps. It twists kicking its forelegs and fighting Pa Jopa's commands. Pa Jopa digs his boot-heels into the horse's belly; he pulls and snaps the reins CRACKING them like a whip.

The horse veers too far to the left and Pa Jopa slides sideways in the saddle, nearly spilling off the horse..

Pa Jopa brings his fist down with a pop on the flat spot between the horse's ears. The horse stops veering.

They trot off toward town, their heat-blurred image becoming smaller and smaller as they recede into the horizon.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: KITCHEN: MORNING (NEXT DAY):

Becca steps into the kitchen. Brice is already seated at the kitchen table eating breakfast, drinking his coffee.

BRICE
Wish you'd make breakfast next
time. Everything tastes like shit
when I make it.

Becca sits in the chair next to Brice.

BECCA
He come back yet?

BRICE
Pa Jopa?

BECCA
Yeah. Who else?

BRICE
Don't think so. You don't see him
do you?

BECCA
Of course not. Are you sure he's
not in his bedroom?

BRICE
I think you'd hear him snoring?
Go on and check anyway.

Becca gets up and walks down the hallway. She steps into Pa Jopa's dark room.

She backs out of the room and into the hall again.

She wrinkles her nose.

BECCA
Ugh! The smell in there? He's not
here.

BRICE
I told you.

She returns to the kitchen.

BECCA

Well if he's not in his room... Did you check the barn?

BRICE

(nonchalant)

Gray's probably dumped him someplace and fled into the arroyo...

BECCA

(absentmindedly)

Well, Pa Jopa could use the walk home.

Becca sits down next to Brice and plucks up a piece of soggy bacon from his plate. She sniffs it and sets it back down.

BECCA (CONT'D)

You know you gotta cook this right? This is still cold.

(a pause)

Becca starts upright in her chair, now fully aware of the implications of what Brice said to her.

BECCA (CONT'D)

What are you saying? Do you think Pa Jopa's out there in some ditch?

BRICE

Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. I mean, what else'd keep him out all night. Especially when he's sober.

(a pause)

Brice shakes his head and gets up from the table leaving the rest of his breakfast behind.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Well, I guess I'd best go look for him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE DOOR: DAY:

Brice slams out the door and strides across the rear-yard. He enters the barn.

INT. BARN: DAY:

Brice saddles up Jacob. Becca comes up to the door and watches him as he readies Jacob.

BECCA

I don't see why I can't come with you.

Brice glances at Becca annoyed.

BRICE

Think about it. What if he shows up hurt or something and we're both out looking for him? You have to stay here and be on the lookout.

BECCA

You ought to take that short cut up the draw?

BRICE

Wasn't planning on it.

BECCA

You'll get to the east rim faster that way.

BRICE

Jacob's fast enough. I don't have to follow that old cattle trail.

BECCA

You just don't want to go up the steep side of the arroyo. I'm telling you it's shorter.

BRICE

And I'm telling you the it's the Gray's likely to end up in the arroyo not Pa. I'm heading out around the east rim.

BECCA

Either way, you just ought to go up
the shortcut.

EXT. CORRAL: FAVORING BRICE:

Brice climbs atop Jacob and kicks the horse out of the corral gate and into the yard. Brice gallops off across the gravel driveway, stirring up dust and rocks as he immediately sets Jacob into a gallop.

In no time Brice and Jacob are running at a clip off in the same direction in which Pa Jopa and the Gray disappeared.

CUT TO:

EXT. REAR YARD:

By the time Brice disappears over the horizon, Becca has saddled Mattie. Becca climbs onto the horse and turns her out of the yard. Soon they are galloping off in a different direction than Brice.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO:

Becca rides Mattie across the barren flats and down into the arroyo.

They cross the rust colored, dry chasm at the bottom of the arroyo and are soon climbing up a trail that rises steeply, following the cliffs along the draw.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLEACHED FLATS:

Becca comes riding up out of the arroyo rising on to the east rim which leads to the eastern expanse of bleached plains.

From her perspective, Becca eyes the length of the chasm.

She digs her heels into Mattie's flank urging the horse onward.

BECCA

Come on Mattie let's go find Brice
and Pa Jopa.

Mattie gallops faster.

EXT. ROADSIDE: DIRT ROAD: EASTERN RIM OF THE ARROYO:

Brice halts Jacob along a dirt road running the length of the
east rim.

He dismounts and runs over to a ditch at the side of the
road.

He kneels beside a barbwire fence.

He has found Pa Jopa tangled in strands of loose barbwire.

Brice breathes heavily, his mouth hangs open.

Jacob stands astride the furrows marking the road. The horse
bends its head down to nibble the leaves from a prairie bush.

Brice's hands work quickly to extricate Pa Jopa from the
tangle of barbwire hooked into the older man's clothing and
skin.

Pa Jopa reaches up gripping Brice's forearm.

PA JOPA

(weakly)

Where...Where is he?

BRICE

Just relax. There's time. I'll get
him. I promise I'll get him for
you. There's time. I just need to
find your heart pills first.

With one hand Brice searches the prairie grass for the vial
of Pa Jopa's heart pills.

BRICE (CONT'D)

(frantic)

Where are they? Why is the bottle
so small? They're just not here Pa.
Not here.

PA JOPA

Not here? Why? Your fall...

Pa Jopa's hand relaxes releasing Brice's arm. The hand drops to the ground.

Brice redoubles his effort, rummaging though the man's shirt and pants.

BRICE

Not yet. I got em. Not yet. There's time.

CUT TO:

EXT. EAST RIM: DIRT ROAD: BRICE IN FOREGROUND:

Becca comes riding up along a short iron bridge spanning a split along the dirt road. She recognizes Brice ahead of her and knees Mattie on.

She is a short distance from Brice when she slips off Mattie. She walks the horse the rest of the way.

Becca comes up behind Brice, her shadow falls on him. She looks at Pa Jopa's body for an instant, but turns away unable to take in anymore.

Brice stands up. He looks at Becca for an instant then bends again, returning his attention to Pa Jopa's body.

EXT. EAST RIM: DIRT ROAD: BECCA'S VIEW:

Brice looks up at Becca from his squatting position.

He squints as he looks toward her, the afternoon sun lighting her hair.

BRICE

(calm as if discussing the weather)

He's dead. Pa Jopa's dead.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FAIRVIEW CEMETERY: PA JOPA'S GRAVE: DAY:

The cemetery landscape is a lush oasis. Ancient trees grow at intervals along the cemetery's perimeter. Large stands of lilac bushes rest among tombstones nested in the thick grasses.

Becca and Brice stand before Thomas Jopa's humble headstone, beside it sits their mother's, Esther Jopa's, identical headstone. Pa's mound of freshly tilled earth stands in contrast to Ma's flat and grassy plot.

The siblings wear all black clothes and black hats. Around Brice's neck hangs a turquoise bolo tie in the shape of a mustang.

The REVEREND walks up to Becca and Brice. He grips Becca's hand and then Brice's before he walks off toward a line of cars parked down the tree-lined lane leading out of the cemetery.

EXT. FAIRVIEW CEMETERY: FAVORING BRICE:

FRANK STILES and JAKE LOPER, both dressed in black cowboy shirts and black jeans, walk up to Brice.

Frank, thirty-five, a tall, thick-shouldered man with a fighter's nose, shakes Brice's hand.

FRANK STILES

Sorry about your Pa. Come by the Rockeroy soon and have a drink on us won't you.

BRICE

(somber)

Thank you.

Jake, twenty-one, a handsome man, big and dark like an Angus, shakes Brice's hand.

JAKE LOPER

It's just a shame. Like Frank says, come out and we'll lift one to ole Pa Jopa.

BRICE

(somber)

I'll take you up on it. I'm sure Pa'd appreciate that very much.

EXT. FAIRVIEW CEMETERY: FAVORING BECCA:

Mama Jewell, sixty-one, and her daughter Baby Annie, seventeen, walk up to Becca.

Mama Jewell wears a long black dress, a widow's veil hangs like a spider web from her shiny black hat.

Baby Annie chews on a large wad of gum. She wears a short, sleeveless black dress, her face painted in heavy, dark makeup, her skin is smooth and bone white.

Mama Jewell takes Becca's hand in hers squeezing firmly before letting go and letting her hand drop to her side.

MAMA JEWELL

The Lord is mysterious isn't he? To leave two angels like you and your brother alone in this world. With no warning.

(a pause)

MAMA JEWELL (CONT'D)

Makes you wander doesn't it?

Mama Jewell begins to weep at her own sentiment. She pulls a black handkerchief from a black feather purse and daubs her eyes delicately.

BABY ANNIE

She's been doing this all morning. Even when we were getting ready.

MAMA JEWELL

(to Becca)

I'm sorry dear. I just feel everyone's pain so deeply.

BECCA

Don't worry, Mama Jewell, my brother and I thank you for your sympathy.

BABY ANNIE

(pointing to Mama Jewell)

You'd think it was her father that kicked.

MAMA JEWELL

Baby Annie, that is such a terrible thing to say. Please remember your manners.

BABY ANNIE

Sorry, Mama, I just get nervous at these things.

(whispers to Mama Jewell
through clenched teeth)

I told you to call me just Annie now.

MAMA JEWELL

You're right, dear, I'd forgotten with all this sadness hanging on me.

Brice walks over to Becca. He stands next to his sister.

BRICE

(smiles shyly)

Don't worry, Baby Annie, I get nervous at these things too.

Baby Annie looks at Brice. She smiles.

BABY ANNIE

You do?

MAMA JEWELL

Well, we must run. Oren is watching the humble orphans while we're gone.

BRICE

The sheriff? You've got the sheriff baby-sitting for you?

MAMA JEWELL

Oh yes, the girls love him.

Mama Jewell places a hand on Becca's arm.

MAMA JEWELL (CONT'D)

Baby Annie and I will stop later to check in on you.

BECCA

Thank you, but that won't be necessary.

MAMA JEWELL

Oh, Honey, I insist.

CUT TO:

EXT: JOPA TRUCK: THROUGH CRACKED WINDSHIELD: MOVING: DAY
(LATER):

Becca drives home after the funeral. Brice is in the passenger's seat.

Brice, eyebrows knit, face hard, stares at the cracks that spiral though the passenger's side windshield. His limp hands sit in his lap turned up like two dead birds.

EXT: JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: FRONT-YARD: (LATER):

The Jopas' truck swings into the driveway.

Brice gets out and slams the door.

He walks out behind the barn his hands shoved in his pockets.

Becca gets out of the truck and walks into the ranch-house.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: BECCA: CONTINUOUS: DAY:

Becca walks from room to room throwing open all the doors and raising the windows in the house.

She walks into Pa Jopa's room. She tears the drawn curtains from the windows throwing them to the bed. In the light, she sees the room is tidy and clean, as if kept that way by a who served in the military.

Becca throws open the window in Pa Jopa's room. Dust rises from the window sill and glitters in the afternoon sun.

CUT TO:

INT. BECCA'S BEDROOM:

Becca steps into her room. She closes the door behind her and flips the lock with a CLICK.

She slips out of her funeral dress and underwear. She lays her things out on the bedspread.

She stands nude at the mirror, her hands on her hips. She twists and turns around looking over her naked body. She smiles, pleased with what she sees- perhaps for the first time in her life.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY:

Becca steps out of her bedroom wearing a tight cowboy shirt and form fitting jeans, her pant legs are tucked into her blue boots.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN:

Becca goes to the kitchen. She plucks a knife from the shelf above the sink. She opens a cabinet and removes a jar of peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She lifts the loaf of bread from the bread box. She make herself a sandwich.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVINGROOM:

Becca moves an armchair in the living-room to just inside the open front door. She sits on the chair and takes large bites from her sandwich.

CUT TO:

INT: SCREEN DOOR: STORM: BECCA'S VIEW:

Through a window in the front screen Becca watches a brief storm in the distance, a thin curtain of rain drifts below a dark line of clouds moving across the bleached flats and over the arroyo.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-YARD: NIGHT:

Becca steps out of the ranch-house into the rear yard. She lies down on the couch and stares up at the sky.

The air is clear, the sky full of stars.

SAMMY, the milk goat climbs onto the couch and Becca draws her legs toward her chest allowing Sammy to curl up behind her knees. After a moment the goat begins to snore.

Becca begins to giggle.

She starts to laugh and is suddenly laughing out loud so much that she can't control the hysterical shudders.

Once the laughter passes and she catches hold of herself,

She sits up, wiping tears from her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: BECCA'S BEDROOM: NIGHT:

Becca climbs into bed wearing a long night shirt. She turns off her bedside lamp.

CUT TO:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: FRONT WINDOW: DAY (NEXT DAY):

Becca seated as previous day. She looks out through the screen of the open front door. She is dressed similar to the day before.

A white sedan out on Highway 34 catches the sun and turns into the Jopas' driveway.

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: FRONT-YARD: DAY:

The sedan pulls up in front of the ranch-house. The dirt and wind it kicks up swirl in a dust devil across the yard.

Mama Jewell exits the driver's side door, a glass casserole dish cradled in the crook of one arm.

Her daughter, Baby Annie opens the passenger side door and steps out.

BECCA

I told her we were just fine.

The women shut the car doors daintily and walk onto the ranch-house's front porch.

Mama Jewell raps lightly on the screen door with an open palm. She then holds the hand up to shield her eyes as she peers inside.

She's startled when she sees Becca sitting a couple of feet away from the door.

Baby Annie chews gum like a cow chewing a cud. She looks bored to death as she blows a yellow bubble. She sees Becca and shrugs.

Becca stands up, unlatches the screen door and steps out onto the porch hustling Mama Jewell and Baby Annie away from the entrance.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Ladies? Brice and I weren't expecting anyone today. We're still, well, you know...mourning.

MAMA JEWELL

Becca, dear

Mama Jewell thrusts the casserole dish at Becca like it is a newborn baby.

Becca ignores the dish in Mama Jewell's hands. She shoves her own hands into her pockets.

MAMA JEWELL (CONT'D)

Please pardon us for coming out unannounced, but...you see...

BABY ANNIE

(sharply, with no emotion)
...she's worried about you.

MAMA JEWELL

Yes. It's as she says. And I brought you and Brice one of my delicious cobblers. Blackberries are in season...I overbought at Safeway...

Mama Jewell holds out the dish more emphatically, urging Becca to take it.

Becca pulls her hands from her pockets and reluctantly cradles the dish on her forearms.

<p>MAMA JEWELL (CONT'D) It's an old family recipe. You just heat at 350 degrees</p>	<p>BECCA Thank you. but Ma'am there's really no reason to worry</p>
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BECCA
My brother and I are...

MAMA JEWELL
Well I also thought...You know, I
take in the most precious of God's
children, the orphans and,
well...the abandoned.

BECCA
Mama Jewell, we were hardly
abandoned and we're not orphans.

MAMA JEWELL
Well losing both your parents does
make you both orphans.

BECCA
(losing her patience)
Yes, I suppose.

(a pause)

Mama Jewell, I've accepted your
cobbler - and Thank you again - so
I can't help but wonder how I might
be of any more help to you.

MAMA JEWELL
Far be it from me...Well...Did you
know I was close to your mother?
...Far be it from me to ask you and
your brother to come to my home in
Stygo when you have a home here.
Not that we have any room for the
two of you, and your brother,
Brice, well we don't take young
men. That would be too much
trouble, you know.

BABY ANNIE

(interested)

It might be nice though having Brice around. He could help out in lots of ways. We often need a guy to come to our rooms to fix things, or kill a spider or a mouse.

Becca's face is set hard. She glares at Mama Jewell.

BECCA

Now, Jewell, I do not know what you and Baby Annie are really doing here, but I am 17 - 18 this September - and Brice was 18, last July. It is not that we do not want your charity; but frankly Ma'am we don't need it.

Becca holds the casserole dish out to Mama Jewell, indicating the woman should take it from her.

Mama Jewell shakes her head and folds her arms over her chest.

MAMA JEWELL

Now I don't mean to be presumptuous, dear, but losing your ma and pa, well, I mean children need parents, but they also need family.

BECCA

We got plenty of family.

BABY ANNIE

Who?

MAMA JEWELL

Now Annabelle, let's not be indelicate.

BECCA

Brice and I are all the family we need. Now, Jewell, if you and Baby Annie will...

BABY ANNIE

It's just Annie now. I don't like to be called Baby Annie anymore, besides did you know I'm getting married.

(a pause)

To Harley. If you can believe it.

MAMA JEWELL

Well, that's partly why we drove out. As you know, your mother and I were very close. She would have wanted to see you married and I was...

BECCA

Jewell, I hope you don't take this wrong, but you and my mother were never that close and I doubt she would want you in her daughter's business so soon after her husband's death. Now, if you and Annie will take yourselves off our property, I'd appreciate it.

MAMA JEWELL

We'll leave, Dear. If you want to talk to someone though feel free to stop by.

BABY ANNIE

And my room will be open soon if you need to get away from all this dreariness.

BECCA

Thank you ladies, but my brother and I are just fine without your help. Good day to you.

Becca draws away from the door and shuts it, flipping the latch.

Becca watches as Mama Jewell and Baby Annie stand stunned for moment before they descend the porch-steps.

Mama Jewell's sedan glints along Highway 34 heading back to town. They are soon out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN:

Becca steps into the kitchen, the casserole dish in hand.

She walks over to the trashbin and turns the dish over. She shakes the cobbler out of the dish and then bangs the dish on the lip of the trashbin.

As Becca turns the dish back over it slips from her grip and falls to the floor shattering into several large cobbler covered pieces.

Becca squats down to pick up the glass. She stacks the pieces into her palm.

She slowly begins to weep.

She turns her hand over and lets the pieces she's collected drop to the floor.

As she begins to lose control of her emotion, the Jopas' truck pulls up in the drive (O.C.). Becca hears it and gets to her feet.

The truck door CLOSES (O.C.) and feet CRUNCH across gravel (O.C.).

Becca hurries to the sink. She turns on the faucet and begins to scrub her hands.

Brice steps into the kitchen door.

Becca doesn't look at Brice.

BECCA

Watch your step. There's broken
glass on the floor.

Brice looks down at the mess, then back at Becca.

BRICE

D'you make cobbler?

She looks at him. Her eyes are ringed red. Her mouth works to form an answer, but she can't find one.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, you can just make
another one. It's a shame though,
that one looked really good.

CUT TO:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: BECCA'S BEDROOM: NIGHT:

Becca lies in bed. She hears Brice crying loudly (O.C.) in
his room.

BECCA

(whispers slowly and
matter of factly)

Pa Jopa is dead.

Becca pulls the covers up to her neck. She reaches over to
her nightstand and switches off the bedside light.

Brice's cries dwindle with the fading lamp light.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: KITCHEN: MORNING:

Becca enters. She finds an empty can of beans on the table
and a dirty spoon flung into the sink.

CUT TO:

INT. HEN HOUSE: DAY:

Becca dumps feed into a trough for the chickens. She collects
eggs, placing them delicately into her basket.

CUT TO:

INT. BARN: OVER BECCA'S SHOULDER:

Becca sits on a stool milking Sammy, the goat.

BECCA

(to Sammy)

...and if you stay awake this time,
I'll teach you all about the
constellations.

(MORE)

BECCA (CONT'D)

There are two names after goats,
Sammy. Amalthea is one. That goat
gave her milk to the god Zeus.
Raised him from childhood.

(a beat)

Did you know there is a half-goat,
half-fish? That one's Capricorn,
like the zodiac.

(a beat)

I bet you wish you had a fish tail,
huh, Sammy?

CUT TO:

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: KITCHEN:

Becca forks freshly cooked sausage out of a frying pan and
sets it on a big plate next to a pile of tashbread.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-YARD:

Becca turns the corner of the barn, the plate of food in her
hands.

EXT. OUT BEHIND THE BARN:

Brice is sitting on the ground, his back against a barrel of
sheep dip. He chews a length of straw. His hair and face are
streaked with dirt. He looks like he hasn't slept for days.

Becca flops down next to Brice and sets the plate on the
ground between them.

BECCA

Aren't you ever going to eat
anything but beans, Brice?

Brice reaches toward the plate, as if he intends to pick up
something and eat it. Instead he withdraws his hand and rests
it in his lap.

Brice hides his face in the crook of his arm.

BRICE
You know what the son-of-a-bitch
said?

BECCA
Who?

BRICE
Who else? Pa Jopa.

BECCA
You mean when he died?

BRICE
Yeah.

(a pause)

BECCA
Tell me. What'd he say?

BRICE
He said it was all my fault.

BECCA
Sure it's your fault. It's your
fault when it rains and your fault
when it doesn't and your fault
Dinah turned out to be a rooster
and your fault Mama died and
everything else, too. You should
know that by now.

Becca picks up the plate and holds it out to Brice urging him
to eat.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Want something to eat?

Brice shakes his head.

She picks up a piece of sausage and bites into it.

BRICE
He wanted that horse.

(a pause)

All he ever wanted was that horse.

BECCA
(around her food)
I know.

Brice stares at her as if she hasn't heard a word he has said.

BRICE
But that's all he talked about
before he died. That gray was all
he damn asked for when I got
there...

BECCA
It's not going to help to lose your
temper at me. I agree with you.
It's better without him.

Becca picks up a piece of tashbread and chews on a bite of it.

Brice is still staring at her.

BECCA (CONT'D)
What?

Becca puts the plate on the ground again.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Okay. What do you want to do about
it?

Brice turns his face away from Becca. He picks up a piece of gravel and throws it.

BECCA (CONT'D)
We got to do something. That's what
you're thinking isn't it? We can't
just sit here the rest of our
lives.

Brice picks up another piece of gravel.

BRICE
Girls.

He really gives the next rock a throw. It dings off the hen house roof.

BECCA

Come on, Brice. I don't want to fight. Not anymore. I mean, you had a thousand more reasons than I did for getting the hell out of here and despite it all you stayed.

BRICE

Yeah, but you stayed too.

BECCA

We both stayed. Don't you think that counts for something.

Brice reaches for another piece of gravel, but he stops. He narrows his eyes at something in the distance as if he is seeing all of the things that might have driven him from Stygo.

Becca follows his gaze.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS: THE GRAY:

For a moment a faint image of the Gray hightailing it across the flats appears in her line of sight then quickly fades.

RETURN TO:

EXT. BARN: BECCA'S VIEW:

She sees nothing out past their land but dead grass and sky all the way to the horizon.

EXT. BARN:

Becca looks over at Brice.

Brice looks down at the ground as if looking for something in the dirt.

BECCA

Want to know what I think?

BRICE

Not much.

BECCA

Well, I think we should kill him.

Brice jerks his head back. He doesn't meet Becca's hard stare.

BECCA (CONT'D)

I bet he's down there. In the arroyo. On the north end. That's where he'd go. We just take the shotgun and run him up one of those blind draws. BANG! Just like we talked about before... Well, you and I ought to...

He slowly turns to look at her.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Well? That's what you were thinking isn't it?

They stare at each other, meeting each other's eyes.

She picks up the plate.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Forget it then. I was just trying to help.

BRICE

You're telling me you want me to kill the gray?

BECCA

Cut it out, will you.

BRICE

No wait. I want to get this straight. You're trying to tell me the last thing in the world he thought of before he died was worth nothing...

BECCA

It doesn't matter to me.

BRICE

...worth nothing but a hole in the head?

BECCA

I don't have to do this for you.

She stands and walks toward the house.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Do whatever you want with that...that horse. I don't want to help you. You'll probably just shoot yourself in the foot anyway.

BRICE

So she's lost her temper now, huh. Ole sweet-pie's got her feathers ruffled. You go ahead and stalk off there, Becca, I knew you didn't have the follow through in you.

Becca stops. She turns to face Brice.

BECCA

For your information, that horse isn't worth a ding and you know it and even if you want to bring it home alive, you can't do it without me. You know you can't.

Brice stands wiping dust from his jeans.

BRICE

I don't have time for this shit.

Brice walks over to Pa Jopa's truck. He opens the driver's side door and climbs behind the wheel.

Becca tosses the plate to the ground and runs up after him facing him through the windshield from over the hood.

BECCA

I've got just as good eyesight as you.

She pounds the hood of the truck with her fist.

BECCA (CONT'D)

...and I'm better at tracking. You have to let me help. You know you do.

Brice stares out at Becca through the cracked windshield. His mouth is tight, his upper teeth biting visibly into his lower lip.

BRICE

Honey, why don't you go on in the house, this is too much for you. Besides, you just said you wouldn't help. Now you're telling me you want to track the gray for me.

BECCA

I won't help you if you keep talking like Pa Jopa.

BRICE

I'm not talking like anybody.

He slams the driver's side door closed.

BRICE (CONT'D)

I don't need your help. I can get somebody in town to give me a hand.

BECCA

Like who?

Brice reaches under the seat and pulls out the keys.

Becca comes around to the driver's side window and grabs the door handle. She leans into the cab of the truck.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Give me the name of one person, just one, who'll help you bring back that Gray if I don't.

BRICE

(flatly)
Frank Stiles.

Brice shoves Becca's arms off the door. He starts the truck.

Becca takes a few steps back.

BECCA

Right. Frank Stiles. Good choice. Better yet, how about Jake Loper? He really knows his horses.

Brice throws the truck in reverse and peels backward down the driveway kicking up gravel and dust.

Chickens squawk and flutter around the yard in his wake.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Don't you leave me here. I'm warning you.

Brice presses the break. The truck stops and he leans over looking out the passenger side window to stare at Becca.

BRICE

Buck up, Sis. We all got to get tough sometime.

Brice makes the sound of a baby sucking a bottle at her. Then he drives the truck out of the yard.

Becca backs up finding the outdoor couch with her hands. She sits on it stirring the rooster Dinah from its afternoon nap.

The truck bumps down the driveway before hitting Highway 34 where it turns right. Brice is heading for Stygo.

BECCA

You damn...damn you, Brice.

INT. STYGO, COLORADO: ROCKEROY BAR: EARLY EVENING:

The Rockeroiy is a large, deep, dark crowded space. An old fashioned hardwood bar spreads across one wall, bar stools positioned all along it, an ass in every seat. Several semi-circle leather booths are positioned in the space between the bar and the pool tables.

The wait-staff is made up of local women. The clientele, mostly men leaving their shifts at the Red Spot Sugar Refinery, stop in here to blow off steam before going home of a night.

INT. ROCKEROY BAR: BRICE, FRANK STILES, JAKE LOPER:

Brice, FRANK STILES, and JAKE LOPER sit on stools. The men lean against the bar. Jake Loper wears a Red Spot uniform, his dark hair still lightly dusted with sugar dust.

Jake reaches over the bar stretching both hands out to fish three bottles of Red River beer from an ice bucket in the cabinet below the bar. The bottles CLINK together as he awkwardly rights himself on his stool again.

He hands one Red River to Brice another to Frank. The men nod thank yous and twist off their caps.

BRICE

Don't let ole Tom Go see you do that. He's a bear, he'll throw you right out on your ass.

JAKE LOPER

He'll just put it on my tab when he sees me. Sides, Frank does it all the time and Tom never says anything to him.

FRANK STILES

You know that's 'cause I'm the night manager. Those are the perks.

Jake raises his beer, tilting it in Brice's direction.

JAKE LOPER

To your Pa, Brice.

Frank raises his beer.

Brice has already taken a swallow.

FRANK STILES

To your Pa. Hell of a thing that happened.

Brice nods.

The men take swigs from their Red Rivers and set the beers down on the bar-top.

JAKE LOPER

Tastes...tastes....

Jake Loper laughs before he can get his joke out.

JAKE LOPER (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Tastes like horse piss!

BRICE
(his toothy smile is back
on his face)
Well it's the best horse piss I
ever drank!

JAKE LOPER
Well, you got a lot of catching up
to do, you're still too young to
even grow peach fuzz.

Brice points to his chin.

BRICE
I got a little coming in.

JAKE LOPER
Where? Your face is as smooth as a
baby's ass.

FRANK STILES
Well, I can tell you you won't ever
get Willa Moon if all you got's
peach fuzz on your face and 'tween
your legs.

BRICE
I got more than peach fuzz down
there I can tell you that.

(a pause)

Who says I want Willa Moon anyway?

FRANK STILES
The question is, who don't want a
piece a Willa? Practically, every
feller in this place's here to see
if she'll stop by. Their jaws get
to hanging as soon as the doors
swing open.

JAKE LOPER
Not to mention the other thing that
gets to swinging when she walks in.

Jake points his beer, as a sign of humor and acknowledgement,
at Jake.

FRANK STILES

(playfully)

Yeah, that too. But she ain't looking for no beet jockey like you. That's for sure, or she would've found one by now. You can't move without stepping on one in here. No, that Willa's looking for a man with a bit of...you know substance...

Frank trails off, lost in his imagination.

Bored with this part of the conversation, Brice straightens his back and looks at Frank who's still mesmerized with his image of Willa.

BRICE

What would you guys think about helping me get that Gray back?

FRANK STILES

What the hell for?

BRICE

So I can train him?

JAKE LOPER

That was a hell of a thing happened to your pa. That horse ditching him and running off like that.

FRANK STILES

You can't save a horse like that. A horse mean spirited and mouthy won't break.

JAKE LOPER

Yeah, it's true you can't save him. A horse done something like that's got to be put down.

Jake mimes aiming and sighting a shot gun at Brice's temple. He cocks the shotgun.

JAKE LOPER (CONT'D)

Blam!

Jake lifts his hands in mock recoil.

JAKE LOPER (CONT'D)

That's what you got to do with him.

BRICE

I just thought I'd go out and collect him from the arroyo. He's bound to be out there. Thought maybe...

FRANK STILES

If he's out there let one of those gully washers flush him out.

JAKE LOPER

Or one of them doggoned coyotes take care of him.

FRANK STILES

Worse than that, one of those packs a dogs.

JAKE LOPER

I gotta say though, it tickles me to no end to think of that old gray buckin at one of those surges come after a rain storm.

FRANK STILES

I seen one a those flash floods lift a man's pickup and leave it high up in a tree, not ten miles from where it was parked. Water did the whole transfer in an hour. The whole engine rusted into one solid piece of metal. When he found it, the man said there were dents from where the boulders were clackin at it along the way.

BRICE

There ain't much of a chance some gully washer's gonna bring that horse right back to the house.

JAKE LOPER

Got that right.

(a pause)

JAKE LOPER (CONT'D)

You all want another one.

FRANK STILES

Not even done with this one. I
don't know where you put it Jake.

Brice put the bottle to his lips chugs the rest of his beer.

He sits the bottle on the bar.

He nod to Jake.

BRICE

Let's get another round going.

Jake does his reaching trick and lifts out three more Red Rivers.

CUT TO:

TOM GO, swings through a door out of a back room, a wet bar rag in his hand. His curly, fiery-red hair outline his pale, thin features. He wears a t-shirt, silkscreened with the silhouette of a mountain surrounded by fir trees, The slogan "Juneau you want to go!" is splashed across the middle in white curlicue lettering.

Tom Go waves the rag swiping Jake's arm with it.

TOM GO

Come on, Jake, you didn't even pay
for the ones you had the other
night. This bar ain't a charity,
besides you make good money up at
Red Spot.

JAKE LOPER

I'm running this on my tab.

TOM GO

You been running shit on your tab
for the past year.

FRANK STILES

Longer than that.

Tom notices Brice sitting there, Red River in hand.

TOM GO

And you ought not be drinking at all.

BRICE

You and I are 'bout the same age. Besides, you work here.

Tom GO

Yeah, I work here. Don't mean I drink though. Need the money, got to...

ALL FOUR

(Tom - dreamily; the other three as if it's a line from their favorite movie)

...get to Alaska somehow.

Jake, Frank and Brice start to really laugh. Tom Go seems miffed about their joke at first, but then breaks up, chuckling a bit.

TOM GO

Well, I'll give you a pass on drinking this time with your Pa done passed on and everything. Hell of a thing happened to him.

FRANK STILES

Hell of a thing.

JAKE LOPER

Hell of a thing.

BRICE

Yeah, what that Gray did and all was bad, but Pa'd want me to bring that horse back. You know, get him trained real good, prove it can be done. I need you guys to help me track him though and bring back.

Tom Go

You still think you can train him?

BRICE

Sure I can. I think because of all that's happened, I should be the one to do it. Don't you? It's what Pa would have done.

FRANK STILES

Yeah, your pa was one hard ass son of a bitch.

TOM GO

That man could bite a nail in two.

JAKE LOPER

But I think if it had been Becca got killed, or you, your Pa would've tracked that horse down and unloaded a shot gun 'tween his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SWINGING DOORS:

A charismatic and beautiful woman flits open the saloon doors and struts into Rockeroy. She switches her hips past the booths, heading for the pool tables.

BACK TO:

INT. BARSTOOLS: BRICE, ET AL:

FRANK STILES

Jake's right. Just shoot that cagey, biting son-of-a-bitch. You'll be a lot happier for it.

Tom Go points as Willa makes her way among the patrons.

CUT TO:

INT. POOL TABLES:

Willa smacks a man on the ass just as he is about to make a shot with his cue.

He scratches and the cue slips from his hand and KNOCKS along the hardwood floor.

Angry, the man turns to fight whoever it was that messed up his shot.

POOL PLAYER

What kind of asswho...

He sees Willa standing behind him.

WILLA

Got to hold on to your stick better than that cowboy.

POOL PLAYER

Honey, if I'da known that was you behind me, I'da let you hold my stick for me.

Willa pulls up close to the man and wraps her arms around his neck.

WILLA

There's still time.

All the men are silent, all eyes are on Willa. At that moment it is as if the air has been suddenly sucked out of the room.

FRANK STILES

Now that's a filly I'd like to rope.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA TRUCK: MOVING: NIGHT:

Through the cracked windshield we see Brice driving leaning forward his mind thinking back at the bar.

INT. JOPA TRUCK: MOVING:

Brice's hair blows in the wind, his left arm hangs out of the truck window beating a tuneless tatoo on the side panel.

The lights of Stygo twinkle behind him. As seen through the rearview mirror they create odd earthly constellations.

The country darkness that surrounds the road ahead is broken for an instant by headlights.

Brice slams his fist hard on the steering wheel.

BRICE

Dammit.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: REAR-YARD: NIGHT:

The Jopas' truck roars up to the house. Lights burn in the kitchen, and the rear porch light has been turned on in expectation of Brice's return.

Brice steps from the driver's side and stumbles drunkenly a bit before gaining his balance. He climbs onto the rear porch and pushes the screen door open.

INT. JOPA RANCH-HOUSE: KITCHEN:

Brice comes into the kitchen. He sees Becca sitting at the table and slams the door closed behind him.,

Becca looks up at him.

Brice storms up to Becca coming within inches of her face.

BRICE

We're going out to the arroyo tomorrow. And we're doing it from the south end.

BECCA

You been drinking?

BRICE

Went down to the Rockeroy Bar with Jake and Frank.

BECCA

Well?

He waves his hands in the air and shrugs at her.

BRICE

I can drink if I want.

BECCA

That's not what I meant and you know it.

BRICE

Well what?

BECCA

Frank and Jake told you the gray
was better off with a bullet
between its eyes. Right?

Brice heads for the hallway leading to his bedroom. He
pauses, changes his mind and returns to the kitchen.

BRICE

We'll take Jacob with us tomorrow.
He can carry us both. That
shortcut's too steep for your nag
anyway.

BECCA

Mattie's not a nag.

BRICE

What ever she is, she can't take
that steep draw. We're leaving her
here.

BECCA

Mattie's got up the draw plenty of
times. We took it that day we found
Pa Jopa. I would'a beat you to him
too if you didn't have a head
start.

Brice turns to go down the hallway again.

BRICE (O.C.)

(trying to hold back his
emotion)

Whatever.

BECCA

(calls after Brice)

Yeah. Whatever.

INT. KITCHEN: DAWN (NEXT DAY):

Becca comes into the kitchen. She wears a Stetson and she's
dressed for riding.

Through the open door Becca sees Mattie and Jacob saddled and
hitched to the corral fence.

Brice comes into the kitchen from the outside. His Stetson is pulled low to shadow his face, Pa Jopa's red bandanna is tied around the crown of his hat.

BRICE

Bout time you got up. You ready?

BECCA

It's still a bit dark out. Besides, I didn't think you were serious.

BRICE

About letting you come with me, or heading out first thing this morning?

BECCA

Both. Brice, you look awful. How long you been up?

BRICE

Long enough to get the animals fed and lunch packed.

BECCA

You been up all night again?

Brice swings out of the screen door and walks across the rear yard.

BRICE (O.C)

Yeah, all night. Now let's go.

He walks toward Jacob and grabs the horse's lead.

Brice moves more quickly than Becca expects.

BECCA

Brice, don't you leave without me.

Becca opens the bread box. She pulls out a half loaf of bread and tears a handful of it returning the remaining portion to the bread box.

She munches on the soft bread pulp as she walks to the door. Suddenly she stops and turns. She goes to the living-room and checks on Pa Jopa's gun in the gun cabinet.

The holding slot empty, the sawed-off is gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH-HOUSE REAR-YARD:

Becca steps out into the rear yard and takes Mattie's rein from Brice's hand.

Brice nods at Becca as he climbs up onto Jacob.

Becca climbs up onto Mattie.

EXT. CORRAL:

The dawn bright, breezy and cool.

Becca and Brice are somber as they walk their horses single file out of the yard and across the road toward the bleached flats.

EXT. BARREN FLATS: FAVORING BECCA:

Brice and Jacob are a fair distance away from Becca, they are moving quickly toward the dip of the horizon.

Brice raises his hand past the brim of his hat. He looks back and forth searching for anything on the horizon.

BECCA

(cheerful)

Those beet fields out on the far rim look real green today, huh? Real beautiful.

BRICE

Ugh.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS: FAVORING BECCA (LATER):

BECCA

...then I lifted the hatch and there it was. A killdeer's nest. Right in the chicken coop. I was asking myself, how did it get there... I didn't have the heart to move it. There were two little eggs sitting in the nest. I wondered where the mother was.

Brice kicks Jacob in the side and the horse begins to gallop quickly pulling away from Becca and Mattie.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS: FAVORING BECCA: (MUCH LATER):

BECCA

And I noticed she was doing it, but
I thought it was my imagination.

BRICE

I don't buy it.

As she trots along behind Jacob, Mattie tilts her head eyeing Jacob's movements as he walks in front of her.

BECCA

There. She did it again. She's not
making any secret of it, is she?

Jacob crosses in front of Mattie. She shifts her head toward his new direction and moves to follow him. She eyes him in the same manner as before.

BECCA (CONT'D)

There. There. Mattie now you stop
looking at Jacob's butt. He's too
young for you anyway. Why you dirty
old nag!

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS:(MUCH MUCH LATER):

Off to the side of the horse trail a coyote comes into view.

The coyote twists and turns on his back, taking a dirt bath.

Suddenly, it stops and starts up onto its feet. It sniffs the air sensing the siblings and the horses.

The coyote runs into the scrub brush and disappears from view camouflaged by the scrub-brush landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARREN FLATS: FAVORING BECCA (MUCH MUCH LATER):

BECCA

Hey, Brice, d'you see that coyote. You know ole Kwami Quail told me the Yiwa's believe coming up on a coyote like that means it's going to rain.

(a pause)

BECCA (CONT'D)

Did you know that Brice? That's what the Yiwa say.

Silence.

BECCA (CONT'D)

But I mean, how could they know that. That every time they see a coyote rain's coming. Maybe that sort of thing was a coincidence? Do you think it could be?

(a beat)

BECCA (CONT'D)

You know what I think is that maybe...

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUTH OF THE ARROYO:

Brice and Becca reach the low entrance to the arroyo. They make their way along the draw. The cliffs start to slowly rise around them. They trot Jacob and Mattie as they start up into the draw along the bone dry bed of the chasm.

BECCA

We should come here more often. Brice, remember how this used to be one of our favorite places to play.

(a pause)

BECCA (CONT'D)

(relaxed)

You know, I was thinking.

(MORE)

BECCA (CONT'D)

We can do just about anything we want now. We can even buy a dog. Who's to say we can't? You always wanted a dog, right, Brice?

Brice's eyes light up at the mention of getting a dog. The light disappears. His jaw tightens.

He halts Jacob and snaps around in his saddle looking at Becca.

BRICE

How come you talk so much?

BECCA

Jeez, Brice. What's wrong with talking?

BRICE

There's nothing wrong with talking normal, but you just can't keep quiet for a second.

BECCA

Sor-ry. I thought I was keeping you entertained.

BRICE

Well, you aren't. So don't.

Brice turns back to survey the path. He kicks Jacob ahead.

EXT. ARROYO: BECCA'S VIEW:

Becca trots Mattie slowly, a fair distance behind Brice.

Brice begins to gallop Jacob and the pair get farther and farther away.

They are nearly out of sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: CROSSROADS:

Becca spots a set of horse tracks off to the right of the trail.

She nudges Mattie over to the crescent shaped indentations in the hard pack and leans down to take a closer look.

She follows the tracks with her eyes noticing they lead up a narrow offshoot to a split in the draw a short distance away.

BECCA

Stop! Hey, Brice stop! Come back!

Brice doesn't seem to hear her shouting. He keeps going.

Becca kicks Mattie in the ribs and the mare starts to gallop, working hard to catch up to Brice and Jacob.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: BOULDER FIELD:

The sun is high and hot.

Becca and Brice pick their way through fallen boulders reining Mattie and Jacob to keep them from getting their hooves caught between the rocks.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: OFF SHOOT OF THE DRAW: A BLIND ALLEY:

They come up upon the end of a blind alley off a distance from the trail.

BECCA

You know I'm a pretty good tracker.
I should be leading us.

BRICE

Well you ain't the one leading this
posse so hang up your sheriff's
star, Sis.

Brice turns Jacob around angrily and kicks him fast past Becca and Mattie.

Becca annoyed turns Mattie to follow Brice and Jacob back to the arroyo.

EXT. ARROYO: SEVERAL LARGE ROCKS IN THE SHADE OF THE CLIFFS:

Brice stops Jacob and dismounts.

He rummages through his saddle bag removing the lunch of sandwiches he packed at the house. He pulls out a can of soda and a Red River beer.

Becca stops Mattie and dismounts.

She walks up to Brice. He hands her a sandwich and the soda. She notices the beer in his hand.

BECCA

Since when are you drinking beer on a regular basis?

BRICE

Since it's been hot outside. And since I decided I wanted to. Why do you care?

BECCA

Alright. I was just askin'.

They sit in the shade of the cliffs on a large boulder and start to eat their lunch.

CUT TO:

Becca and Brice sitting on the ground, lying back, their hats pulled down over their upturned faces.

CUT TO:

INT: INSIDE BECCA'S STETSON: BLACKNESS:

Becca's breath blows like a gust of wind under the Stetson. She listens to the horses sigh and stamp away flies. A bird calls as it flies overhead. The sounds multiply, echoing off the walls around her.

FADE TO:

INT. DREAM: ROCKEROY BAR: DAY:

Becca is in the Rockeroy. She leans against the long bar. The usual crowd of Red Spot Sugar Refinery workers is noticeably absent. There are only a few patrons circling the pool tables.

Across from Becca, Willa Moon and Kwami Quail sit in one of the leather booths. The women are dressed exactly the same, in clothes that match Becca's riding outfit. They wear Stetsons and blue riding boots.

The women are playing a game of cards.

Willa Moon holds a thick deck of cards made from several packs shuffled together. She deals five cards face down to Kwami, then she deals five cards face down in front of herself.

KWAMI
(to Willa)
Don't deal me all spades.

WILLA
Honey, I'm trying for hearts this time.

KWAMI
(emphatically)
And no diamonds.

WILLA
I agree. No diamonds.

BECCA
Kwami. Willa. What are you playing?

Kwami throws all of her cards face up onto the table. They are all in the suit of diamonds.

KWAMI
I said no diamonds. These are all diamonds.

BECCA
Hey Willa. What are you playing?

(a pause)

Willa, come on deal me in this next round.

Willa spreads her cards out face up on the table. The cards are all in the suit of hearts.

WILLA
There they are. Five hearts. Eat it and weep, Kwami.

KWAMI

Cheater!

WILLA

I didn't cheat. Some people just
have luck on their side. I got
these hearts fair and square.

KWAMI

I say you stacked the deck.

Kwami scoops up all the dealt cards and the remaining deck of cards. She straightens them before handing them over to Willa.

KWAMI (CONT'D)

You deal again.

BECCA

Come on, Willa, deal me in this
time.

Becca turns, noticing the sliver of sky out beyond the saloon doors has become storm dark, the clouds roll like steel colored waves.

Like a thrown frisbee, Pa Jopa's Stetson flies into the bar over the saloon doors. The hat lands on the floor coming to rest beside Becca's boot.

Becca steps down from her stool and bends intending to pick up the hat.

Suddenly she hears the sound of fast galloping approaching from a great distance.

She becomes frightened and crouches down between two bars stools trying to hide.

Becca is alone in the Rockeroy. She looks to see Kwami and Willa have disappeared, their decks of cards sit on the table top.

The sound of galloping is closer now.

A clap of thunder echoes outside and boils into the depths of the bar.

Becca places her hands over her ears.

The Gray, Brice on his back, crashes through the saloon doors with a whirl of gray mane and tail.

Becca notices it's Brice.

She reaches her arm up waving her hand get Brice's attention.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Brice stop! It's Becca.

As the horse and rider gallop past Becca hiding place one of the horse hooves kick Becca's hand. She pulls her hand back.

INSERT: BACK OF BECCA'S HAND.

A red mark in the shape of a horse track is stamped into the back of her hand.

RETURN TO:

INT: ROCKEROY BAR:

Pa Jopa's hat sweeps past BECCA scooped up and carried in the horse's wake.

Becca dives after the hat. She is almost able to reach the hat, but it is suddenly jerked out of her reach rising farther up into the air.

BRICE (O.C.)
You crying?

Becca dives for the hat again. Her hand nearly touches the brim.

RETURN TO:

INT: INSIDE BECCA'S STETSON: BLACKNESS:

Becca pulls the hat off her face which is covered with sweat.

EXT. ARROYO: FAVORING BECCA:

The cliffs of the arroyo rise straight up over Becca and Brice like the walls of a room with no roof.

Brice looks at Becca.

BRICE
Were you crying?

BECCA
No.I.was.not. I had a dream, is
all.

BRICE
I thought you said you never dream.

BECCA
I never do.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEILING OF SKY: DAY:

Cumuluous clouds roll over the sun.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLOOR OF THE ARROYO: (LATER):

The wind whistles down the arroyo kicking up dust.

Becca looks over at Brice.

Brice lies on his back, Pa Jopa's bandana wrapped around his eyes.

BECCA
Want to hear it?

BRICE
What?

BECCA
My dream.

BRICE
No.

BECCA
You used to tell me all your
dreams.

(a pause)

Becca sits up. She glares at Brice.

BECCA (CONT'D)
(matter of factly)
I know where he is.

BRICE
(doubtful)
Uh-huh.

BECCA
It's true. I saw his tracks.

Brice pulls the bandana off his eyes. He jerks up into a sitting position, his face pink from sleep.

BRICE
What did you say?

BECCA
We crossed them.

BRICE
What? How come you didn't say anything?

BECCA
I did. I hollered for you to come back when we reached that first fork.

BRICE
God!

Brice flops onto his back, his hands pressed to his eyes in frustration.

He removes his hands.

BRICE (CONT'D)
First you say you don't want to help, then you do want to help, and now you tell me you've known all morning we were going in the wrong direction.

BECCA
I tried telling you-

BRICE
Well why didn't you try harder.

He sits up.

BRICE (CONT'D)
And from now on, don't lead me to
think you're doing one thing when
you're doing another.

BECCA
Look who's talking!

Brice stands up and wraps the bandana around the crown of his
hat. He pulls Jacob to him.

He turns to Becca who remains seated.

BRICE
Lets go!

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: CROSSROADS:

Brice and Becca stand atop Mattie and Jacob at the fork where
Becca first saw the Gray's tracks.

Brice leans over his horse peering closely at the ground. He
turns to Becca. From his perspective he doesn't see the hoof
prints.

BRICE
So. Where are they?

Becca nudges Mattie ahead of Brice. She points to the marks
in the dirt.

The wind has marred them a bit, but they are still evident in
the dirt.

BECCA
(her voice starts strong
and then trails off)
Right there. If you can't see
tracks as clear as that then I
don't know how we're supposed to
find...

Brice draws Jacob up and squints at the ground again.

BRICE

How?...How?

(under his breath)

Son of a bitch.

(to Becca)

Come on, girl. The day's a wastin.

Brice whacks Jacob with his open palm. Jacob leaps out and they take off following the tracks into a split off the main split in the arroyo.

BECCA

(shouting)

You better wait for me. Brice?

Becca swats Mattie with her rein and they trot after Brice and Jacob.

They pass two hundred yards along the narrow split and the walls of the arroyo widen out then circle around a flat, open spit of sand, the only exit now behind them. Light pours down into the opening.

At the far end of the circle is the Gray, standing in the shade of an overhang.

The Gray's saddle is missing and he stands hock deep in a slime pool. Green water drips off his muzzle. His rein is looped over an ear and dragging in the slime pool. The Gray's flanks are scratched with whip-marks. A nasty-looking hole leaks a trail of puss and fluid down his neck. The Gray's mane is matted with burrs, sticks, and bits of eggshell.

The air is quiet and still.

The Gray catches the newcomers' smell and steps forward as if to greet them, shivering flies away.

Becca eases Mattie up behind Brice and Jacob.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Brice?

Brice turns in his saddle, the leather CREAKING. He looks at Becca.

BRICE

Been back there fixing your hair,
or what?

His closed lips twitch at the corners.

He shakes a rope out of his saddlebag and knots it into a lasso.

The Gray leaps off to a trot circling the round like it was back in the corral. The horse flashes his tail and wags his head while keeping Brice and Becca in view.

BECCA

Looks like he's trying to find a way out.

BRICE

Well, I've got news for him. The only way out's through me.

Brice throws a lasso, aiming the rope at the Gray's head.

The Gray lifts his head high at the throw to avoid its neck being caught in Brice's rope, and at the same time avoiding having its hoof hooked by its dangling rein.

Alternating his technique, the horse lowers his head to avoid Brice's next throw.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Oh. Come on.

BECCA

You've got him, Brice. Take it slow.

Brice makes several tosses with the rope missing each time.

After every miss, the Gray paces back and forth along the wall, SNORTING and stirring up the dust and sand.

The Gray makes a quick run at Mattie, trying to bluff Becca's horse into moving away from the escape slot behind her.

Becca holds Mattie firm.

BECCA (CONT'D)

(to the Gray)

Go on git! Heyah! Heyah! Get away!

The Gray spooks and wheels turning from Mattie.

The dust becomes thick making it hard for Becca to see Brice or the Gray very clearly.

After a while in the hot afternoon sun, Jacob and the Gray become lathered up. Mattie starts to cough in the dust storm.

Becca pulls up next to Brice. She reaches out a hand to Brice.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Toss me one of those ropes. Let me give it a try.

BRICE

You wouldn't know what to do with it.

BECCA

Just toss me one.

BRICE

No.

Brice tosses his loop at the Gray again. The rope misses the horse's head and slides down its body.

The rope finds purchase though as snagging one of the Gray's back hooves.

The Gray SQUEALS and drops sideways wriggling so the loop begins to slip off. In the horse's frantic attempt to get out of one rope his foreleg becomes caught in the dangling, wet rein.

The Gray SQUEALS again redoubling its efforts now to shake loose of the rein and Brice's rope.

Brice sees the horse is caught up. He nudges Jacob backwards and the line on the Gray's back hoof draws tight.

Brice prepares a second rope, making this one a noose.

He whips the noose before the Gray has a chance to roll out of the way. The rope catches the horse firmly around the neck.

Brice anchors the other end of the rope to his saddle horn.

He slips off Jacob and makes a run toward the wriggling, tangled Gray.

BECCA

Use the third rope! Get his front feet! Front feet!

Brice runs past the Gray, as if he hasn't heard Becca.

He stops at the arroyo wall, a cliff rising up from the flat circle of sand. Brice picks up a rock the size of two fists and hefts it in his palm, tossing it in the air like a baseball.

Satisfied with the rock Brice runs back and grabs hold of the taught neck line which is still strung from the saddle horn and caught around the Gray's neck.

He stands a short distance from the Gray ensuring the horse's entanglement. He clutches the rope in one hand, the rock in the other.

He watches the horse flail frantically. With every twist the Gray pulls the neck line tighter and tighter, cutting off its own air.

The horse stares, all wild-eyed and out of breath looking from Brice, to Jacob, to Mattie and Becca wobbling on its legs.

Tired and breathless, the Gray grunts and his forelegs buckle out from under him. The horse is stuck in this pose unable to rise back up or fall down completely.

This is the opportunity Brice has been looking for. Before the Gray can stir again, Brice leaps forward and yanks the Gray's head up by the neck line.

BECCA (O.C) (CONT'D)

Oh, Brice don't. Don't!

Brice drives the rock down in a fast arc and cracks the horse on the forehead.

Brice backs up to survey the hit.

The Gray grunts and drops the ground completely limp.

Brice smiles widely at Becca.

Brice walks up to the horse' and toes its belly with the point of his boot.

The horse lies motionless, breathing heavily, not moving or resisting the jab.

Brice gives the leg rope some slack. He leans over and blows hard straight in the Gray's face. He slips the leg rope off allowing the horse can stand up again.

Brice steps back and whistles for Jacob to come to him. Jacob trots over slackening the neck line quite a bit.

The Gray swings its head until it has enough slack in the rope to breathe normally. The horse lunges to its feet, the rein still wrapped around its foreleg.

Brice watches the Gray waiting for it to make a move.

But the Gray just stands there, head down, mouth open, nose flared, blowing hard.

Brice drops the rock. He steps forward and slips the noose from the horse's neck. He throws the rope behind him.

Keeping an eye on the horse's mouth, Brice bends down and lifts the Gray's foreleg.

BRICE

Ok now, Honey, let's get this off too, ok. You gonna behave? There's only one way you're getting out of here. With me.

Brice gathers in the Gray's rein. Once he has enough rope in hand he backs up slowly toward Jacob. Brice pulls the Gray along, his shoulders set still and square as fence posts.

The whole back of Brice's shirt is wet with sweat.

Brice swings up onto Jacob and pulls the Gray's rein tight again.

Brice raises his free arm. He looks up at the sky.

BRICE (CONT'D)

I got him!

The arroyo walls echo his victory.

ECHO

I got him! I got him! I got him!

Jacob shakes the dust out of his mane.

Brice wipes the dust from his shirt sleeves.

An absolute stillness settles around them.

Brice and Becca, Mattie and Jacob stand unflinching. They watch the Gray breathe heavily, staring at them.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: PATCH OF SUN AND SKY BLOCKED BY CLIFF WALLS:

Thicker clouds rolls over the sun blocking it out. Shadows slide down the face of the cliff cooling everything they touch.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: FAVORING BRICE:

Brice's hands shake as he begins to coil up his ropes.

Becca climbs down from Mattie and grabs one of the ropes, coiling it up absentmindedly.

BECCA

He's ours now. You did it Brice. I didn't think you would. He just-wham -gave up when he got that rock between the eyes.

Brice turns his head. He looks hard at Becca.

BRICE

What do you mean he's ours?

BECCA

Well, I thought we...

Brice turns away.

BRICE

Go fetch my hat for me. It's over there.

(a pause)

Becca looks lost for a second, as though she might turn in the other direction and run off.

Instead, she sighs and walks over to the spot where Brice's hat fell. She swipes it up from the dirt.

She walks back to Brice holding his hat out to him at arm's length.

Brice hisses and tears the hat from her hand.

BECCA

Well, you ought to at least say
thank you.

He sets the Stetson on his head and looks at the Gray. The horse is struggles to breathe and has begin to endeavour to free itself from Brice's tight grip.

Becca returns to Mattie and grabs the horse's lead.

Brice trots Jacob past Becca and Mattie, yanking the Gray behind him.

The Gray attempts to find purchase in the earth digging its hooves into the dirt floor which blisters and cracks raising more dust along the way.

Brice pulls ahead of Becca. He doesn't look back.

Brice and Jacob disappear through the split returning to the main channel of the arroyo.

For an instant the Gray remains skidding along, resisting, but he soon passes out of the split.

Becca is now alone on Mattie.

Becca looks around at the cliff, at the slime pool and at the spot where her brother dropped the Gray in the sand.

Becca looks up at the remaining part of the sky still visible above her. Clouds, driven by the wind, choke the view over the top of the arroyo's north wall. The clouds bank up on each other in puffy, cotton billows.

The wind kicks up.

She nudges Mattie forward toward the place where Brice and the horses slipped out.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Come on, Mattie. We best be going.
Let's get out of here before that
split seals up for good.

Becca and Mattie trot back out through the split.

Brice, Jacob and the Gray are just a bit farther up the trail.

Brice halts Jacob and pulls a jacket out of his saddlebags. He slips into the jacket and grabs the reins again.

Becca nudges Mattie into a trot. She catches up to Brice.

BECCA (CONT'D)

We better get out of the arroyo.
There's rain coming.

Silence.

Brice's eyes are fixed hard on Becca, his hair and face covered in sweat.

He jerks the Gray's rein and turns Jacob away from Becca and Mattie.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Brice? Going south is the long way
out. We got to talk about this.

Brice kicks Jacob making him trot faster.

BRICE

Sorry, but I don't have time to
baby-sit.

THUNDER, comes low and rumbling out of the sky, like someone pushing heavy furniture around a hardwood floor.

Brice slaps Jacob into a gallop.

Becca slaps Mattie into a gallop.

CUT TO:

EXT. SKY: STORM CLOUDS:

Thunderheads roll through the sky over the arroyo: purple and green, with high silver crowns.

EXT. ARROYO: FAVORING THE GRAY:

The Gray becomes skittish as the THUNDER rumbles again. The horse snorts and crowds up behind Jacob. Jacob becomes skittish stepping sideways for an instant.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO:

Becca leans forward in the saddle kneeling Mattie's flanks, pushing the horse to move faster.

At the main fork in the arroyo the first breath of wind whispers down the walls, it loosens the dust off the coyote tobacco growing all along the base of the cliffs.

Brice halts Jacob, he tilts back to gaze up at the weather coming, his mouth open.

Brice turns in the saddle, looks to Becca.

BRICE

For chrissake, will you hurry up?

BECCA

Brice, you've got to slow down.
Mattie's getting tired. She can't
move any faster.

BRICE

I told you we shouldn't have
brought that nag.

Becca draws Mattie up alongside Brice and Jacob and stops.

She inspects Brice's face.

BECCA

We should take the shortcut up the
cliff. If we keep going south we
won't get out for another hour. The
shortcut takes twenty minutes.

Brice wets his bottom lip with his tongue.

BRICE

The shortcut's too steep for the
horses.

BECCA

I took the shortcut with Mattie three days ago. It isn't too steep. If we walk the horses, we can do it. Even if the rain starts before we get to the top, we'll still be off the floor of the arroyo.

BRICE

Dumb.

He nudges Jacob ahead of Becca and Mattie.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Dumb, dumb.

Becca stands in her stirrups.

BECCA

If you can't do it, then I guess that leaves four of us who can. Then we'll see who's dumb.

Brice snags Jacob to a stop.

BRICE

What are you trying to prove?

BECCA

What am I trying to prove? What about you?

A much closer CRACKLE of thunder breaks the air.

Becca looks up and wheels Mattie around heading north up the draw.

BRICE

Wait a minute. How do you expect us to get the gray up a trail like that?

BECCA

Hey. It's your horse. Remember? Do what you want.

BRICE

Leave him? Is that what you're saying?

(MORE)

BRICE (CONT'D)
(his voice cracks)
He's mine. Mine!

BECCA
Yeah, Brice. I heard you the first
time. But if you want to save him -
if you want to save all of us - we
need to take the short cut.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO: SHORT CUT: BASE OF THE TRAIL:

Brice and Becca dismount at the base of the trail.

Brice ties Jacob's reins to the horse's saddle-horn and slaps
him on the rump sending him ahead of them on his own.

THUNDER rolls from the west.

Wind RATTLES the branches of the mesquite trees that grow on
top of the cliffs.

All along the arroyo everything is still.

Brice looks up at the cliff face. He is noticeably worried.

BECCA
Don't worry. You won't get height-
sick.

Brice turns to Becca.

BRICE
Shut up. I'm not worried.

BECCA
I was just saying if you were
worried...Don't...

Brice resumes looking up the trail. He yanks the Gray and
marches forward. The horse resists at first, pulling back on
the lead, but it eventually comes along.

BRICE
(talking to himself)
I don't want to do this...

The siblings and the three horses start up the trail in single file. Jacob walks a head of Brice; Brice leads the Gray by the bridle and Becca follows leading Mattie.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TRAIL: HIGHER OFF THE ARROYO FLOOR:

The trail is narrow, only five or six feet divide the cliff face from the drop into the arroyo.

Brice tosses Becca the other end of a rope he's clutching.

He motions to her to string the rope around the Gray.

She pulls the rope around the outside of the Gray.

BRICE

Pull it like a guardrail. So if he gets spooky, he won't shy near the edge. All we got to do is snap it a little. Just a little. Not enough to spook him. Like this. So he can feel it if he gets--

BECCA

I know, Brice. Let's go.

From each end they pull the rope tight on the drop side of the trail fencing the Gray in against the safety of the cliff.

They climb the trail which rises fast at first and then levels out, winding in and out of the cracks along the wall.

The Gray is wild-eyed as it looks out over the edge. It SNORTS and tries to slip back down the cliff toward Becca.

Brice notices the Gray receding down the trail. He pulls on the rein dragging the Gray along.

BRICE

Now come on Sweetie-pie. Just a little further and we'll be out of this. Hold on just a bit longer.

THUNDER echoes around them.

The Gray tenses like iron in response to the thunder. The horse swings its head high. It's feet scuttle sideways.

Brice turns to get control of the skittering horse.

BRICE (CONT'D)

There you go, come now. Come on,
Sweetie-pie, that's right.

Becca sticks her head out peering around the Gray's flank.

She draws back her lips like a horse showing her teeth. She sticks her nose in the air.

BECCA

(whinnying)
Ye-e-s, master.

BRICE

Can't you take anything seriously?
Huh?

Becca's head disappears behind the horse again.

They edge past the first most narrow part of the trail, an area four feet wide from cliff to edge.

Becca notices the slow down and looks out around the Gray again.

Brice notices her looking. He forces a grin.

The Gray starts to balk, backing its rump into Becca's chest, forcing her back on Mattie who is quietly climbing behind Becca.

Becca places both hands on the horse's rump. BECCA
Come on dammit. Move!

She shoves the Gray forward.

They walk along an outside bend, the cliff begins to sheer off.

Rocks SKITTER over the edge with every movement.

A GUST of wind sweeps down the face of the rock.

Becca's hair blows straight up and whips like a pony's tail along her neck like.

The Gray lays its ears back flat and SNORTS.

Brice and Becca flick the guide rope at the same time SNAPPING it like a flyswatter against the Gray's belly. The horse shies sideways against the cliff face, out of the danger of the drop

Brice looks nervously out over the drop, his back and rear pressed up against the cliff face as he climbs. The distance between the wall and the air is becoming narrower and narrower.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Jesus. This isn't going to work.

BECCA (O.C.)

It's not gonna help you looking at the bottom like that.

Brice straightens and braces himself against a rock.

He caresses the Gray's nose.

BRICE

Sweetie, sweetie, good boy. Stay against the rock. Alright?

He leans out over the edge again and gazes at a wide spread just ahead, where the cliff recedes a bit and the trail begins to widen up again.

Brice looks back past the Gray's shoulder at Becca.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Hey, Becca?

BECCA

What?

BRICE

Just up ahead there's a place wide enough for us to turn around.

Becca leans in a forty-five degrees angle out over the drop in the trail, peering around the Gray's mass in order to get a partial glimpse of what Brice sees up ahead.

BRICE (CONT'D)

God, don't do that!

Brice presses his back against the side of the cliff, his face is pale, the Gray's rein held tight in one of his fists, the guide rope held tight in the other.

BECCA

We can't go back, Brice.

BRICE

Listen to me. I think we have to turn around.

BECCA

You can do this. It's only a storm. Just don't look down again till we get to the top.

BRICE

Al-right. I'll try.

The rain suddenly begins to fall on them in fat, heavy, slow drops.

They pick up the pace, moving faster now. At first the Gray steps forward shivering, as eager as Brice and Becca are to get off of the cliff.

The trail they are following turns suddenly from loose gravel to bedrock.

Without explanation the Gray spooks again, kicking up its forelegs, trying to raise up on its back hooves.

Brice works to pull the horse down before it can get its forelegs up too high. Once the Gray is down again, Becca pushes against the horse's hindquarters to keep it moving forward.

They climb slowly now. For every step ahead, the Gray dances two back, yanking Brice with him, its hooves CLATTER like castanets on the rocks.

The rain beats down harder runnels come down every surface, collecting in the horses' tracks and filling the divots in the trail.

The rocks become dark and slippery with rain.

The wind kicks up at first pushing the climbers against the rocks and then pushing them away an instant later.

The Gray weaves sideways on the trail, stepping back and forth between the guide rope and the cliff. As soon as there is slack Brice and Becca pull the rope tight again. With every move the Gray swings his head attempting to pull free, alternating between testing Brice's lead and testing the guide rope.

Becca leans out to glimpse the road beyond Brice. The trail rises and curls around a corner. There is nothing to see, but the whole of the storming sky, low and rolling like a violent ocean.

One of the Gray's rear hooves slip onto a crack in the rocks tripping the horse a bit. It bumps hard against the wall of the cliff.

In trying to right itself again, the Gray takes a jolt backwards and knocks Becca into Mattie.

BECCA

Hey, now. Hyah! Hyah! Keep moving
you son of a bitch.

Mattie's hooves skitter on the trail. She snorts and CLOPS a front hoof to signal her irritation.

The guide rope slackens and starts to fall toward the ground.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Brice, what's going on, I've got
slack over here.

BRICE

Then tighten your end.

BECCA

I got it tight over here.

Becca swings her forearm backward with a jerk making her end even tighter. The slack instantly disappears. The line hardens digging into the Gray's side, making a deep indentation.

BRICE

Now hold it there. Don't move.

BECCA

It's not me moving, Brice. It's the
damn horse.

BRICE

Becca?

BECCA

Yeah?

BRICE

I've got an idea.

Brice pulls Pa Jopa's red bandana off the crown of his hat. He ties a knot under the horse's jaw and makes another knot behind the horse's ears. He slips the thick part of the bandana over the horse's eyes blinding it.

Blindfolded, the Gray staggers immediately backward on his hocks and then eases off, trembling.

A bolt of lightning STRIKES overhead.

Becca sees Brice's mouth move, but she can't hear what he's saying.

BECCA

What?

They are both crouching against the rocks.

The RUMBLING of thunder following the lightning seems to come from everywhere - the air, the rock behind and beneath them - as if the earth is about to crack open.

Becca holds her breath waiting for the thunder to end. She clutches Mattie's rein tightly in her right hand and the Gray's guide rope in her left.

From Becca's perspective, she is unable to see or hear Brice, but the line is still drawn tight against the Gray's belly, despite the horse's frantic prancing back and forth.

When the thunder ends, Becca pushes herself off the rock and stands up-

BECCA (CONT'D)

Okay, Brice, move!

Another thunder-strike pops, its hollow, tinny echo snaggles across the wall of the canyon.

Brice and Becca lean into the cliff, and yank the guide rope against the Gray.

Because the Gray is blindfolded, this new, unexpected snap spooks it. The horse screams and tries to shoot forward. The horse bumps into Brice nearly knocking him over the edge.

Brice grips the Gray's rein tighter holding himself in place while he regains his balance.

BRICE

Oh no you don't, sweet heart. Get
back to your place in line.

Brice smacks the horse on the nose with his open hand.

The Gray rears, lifting its forelegs higher this time.

Becca looks up to see the bandana fly from the horse's head like a red bird. Caught by the wind, the bandana darts out into the air over the drop and falls from view.

Brice reaches out grabbing the air as if he believes he can regain the bandana by will.

BRICE (CONT'D)

Dammit! Dammit! Goddammit!

The Gray comes down onto its forelegs.

Brice and Becca pull the guide rope.

The horse twists around to see behind it. It tries to back down the trail, swinging its big club head side to side, its nose and mouth stretch open, its eyes blank and white.

The rain picks up.

Another lightning strike hits just to the right of their position, the thread of descending into the drop.

Brice pulls the rope harder now. He squats down on his haunches, using the weight of his whole body to keep the Gray from rearing, and to keep it against the wall.

BRICE (CONT'D)

I have him. Becca keep your end
tight.

At first it seems Brice has the Gray under control, but the Gray is still slipping its hooves sliding closer to the edge.

Underfoot more and more rocks slide over the side.

The guide rope slips from Becca's grip. She quickly catches it again.

Becca watches the muscles of the Gray's flank gather and bunch under the horse's soaking wet skin.

BECCA

He's getting ready to lift! Move
away! Let him go!

Brice doesn't answer.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Let go! Brice, let him go!

Brice looks around the horse's flank. He shakes his head emphatically. He points a finger upward.

BRICE

We're getting him to the top!

He turns his eyes away from Becca and stares hard the horse's slipping hooves.

Brice opens his mouth in anticipation of yanking the rope harder as the Gray rocks toward the edge.

Both siblings watch the horse slip again. They snap the guide, holding the horse against the rock.

BECCA

You need to let him go, Brice.
Release him.

BRICE

I won't. He's mine. You can't make
me let him go.

BECCA

This isn't just about you.

Becca steps forward. She gathers the guide rope wrapping the slack around her hand. She leans into the rock.

Behind Becca, Mattie steps forward too. Mattie nudges Becca's neck with her nose. Mattie BLOWS AIR sounding flustered.

Becca turns to look at Mattie. She pats the horse's neck.

BECCA (CONT'D)

I know Mattie. You are so patient.
You were always the sensible one.

Mattie SNORTS.

BECCA (CONT'D)

I know, I'm tired of the whole
thing, too.

(a beat)

BECCA (CONT'D)

Brice just can't let go, Mattie. He
can't.

Becca looks down at the guide rope in her hand and up at the
Gray.

Her takes in the horse's flank, its wet tail clinging to its
leg like an iron-colored vein, then down the leg to the hoof
fumbling repeatedly for balance on the slippery rock, the
fetlock whipping in the wet wind.

Becca zeroes in on the pink nail of the Gray's rear right
hoof.

BECCA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Move.

The hoof slides a bit toward the edge as the horse works to
get its balance.

Becca stares harder at the hoof. She squints her eyes.

BECCA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Move.

The hoof slides a bit more toward the edge.

Rocks fall over the edge and the hoof glances out into the
air over the drop for an instant before settling back onto
the trail.

The wet leather bridle has become tight squeezing Brice's
hand, painfully cutting his circulation. Brice relaxes his
grip on the rein rope. He unwraps it working his hand to
regain blood-flow.

The Gray senses the slack in the rein and pulls the cord free of Brice's hand.

Becca watches as the Gray springs its head up and twists its neck.

Brice reaches for the bridle. The wind whips it out of his grasp.

The horse's entire body tilts away from the cliff face in anticipation of rising up.

The horse rears, standing on its rear legs. Its forelegs rise, bouncing and flailing when they leave the trail.

The Gray's rear right leg lifts and jabs trying to get leverage, keeping it from the edge.

Becca whole being is focused on the rear hoof.

BECCA (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Move you son-of-a-bitch!

The hoof comes down on nothing but air.

Becca opens her left hand releasing her hold on the guide rope completely.

The sudden release of the rope causes it to CRACK the air like a whip. The bedrock beneath the Gray gives way.

Becca closes her eyes for a second, making a long slow motion blink.

She opens her eyes and the Gray is gone. Fallen into the drop. The horse's shrieks echo horrifically up and down the arroyo.

Lightening streaks blindingly over Becca and Brice, followed instantly by explosive THUNDER.

With the Gray gone, Becca is suddenly face to face with Brice.

She searches his pale, wide eyes.

Becca lifts her hand. She looks at it twisting it and turning it as if discovering something new.

She opens her hand and holds it out to Brice showing him its empty palm.

Exhausted Becca falls back against the rocks of the cliff her hands pressed against the slick, wetness. The water runs in slicks over her hands.

She closes her eyes and presses her ear to the cliff as if listening to the horse's lingering death-cries through the rock.

(a pause)

Becca opens her eyes.

The RAIN eases, but the WIND WHIPS hard against the horses and the siblings.

Brice is still holding on to his end of the guide rope, Becca's half dangles over the side of the cliff.

Brice drops the rope and the whole thing slithers over the ledge like a long, thin snake.

Brice presses his back against the cliff face. He crosses his arms over his chest as if to brace himself.

Becca edges along the trail until she is standing up next to her brother.

Brice turns his face away from hers.

Becca slips an arm around Brice's neck and pulls him slowly against her.

Brice keeps his face turned the other way while the rest of his body gives in to her affection.

They stand this way both of them pressed against each other and into the cliff-rock.

Becca pulls her brother closer, she presses her lips to the curve of Brice's ear.

BECCA (CONT'D)

It's me. It's Becca.

Brice shakes his head rubbing his lips, nose and cheek against the wet rocks and dirt.

Brice start to weep. His throat works as he mumbles incoherently into the rock.

Becca presses her lips to Brice's wet hair.

Their legs start to give out and Brice and Becca sink in unison until they are sitting on the trail, their backs propped against the cliff face.

Becca hitches and shudders as grief suddenly finds her. Emotion begins to spill over inside her and she weeps openly and uncontrollably, her body convulsing as she sobs.

Becca rests her neck on Brice's neck similar to the way horses rub necks when they communicate with each other.

Brice turns from the rock, his Adam's apple bobbing, his lips fluttering incomprehensible words of pain against his sister's wet hair.

EXT. ARROYO: RECEDING:

For an instant the shot is of the siblings clutching each other tightly, both weeping in their own way.

Slowly and steadily we begin to recede from the trail.

More and more of the surrounding area collects into the scene.

The horses reenter the shot bookending Becca and Brice.

The lip of the arroyo cuts across the top of the shot. The view of the split between the arroyo's wall and the east rim moves down the frame revealing more of the flat top of the that spreads into the bleached flats.

The town of Stygo comes into view, a small huddle of buildings on the plain.

Beyond Stygo purple and gray storm clouds flicker with threads of lightning strikes. A curtain of dark rain falls beneath the storm clouds.

Moving further up and back we see the landscape which has become a panorama revealing the variety of the region's geology.

The thick clouds in the foreground dissolve parting so that slices of the classic Western sky peek through.

Fans of sunlight fall onto the barren flats and a few beams reach into the arroyo lighting Becca, Brice and the horses.

The whole image bleaches filling with more and more light
until the-

FADE TO WHITE:

THE END