

TAKING THE REINS

By

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FADE IN:

INT. BARN - NIGHT

More resembles a dilapidated storage shed. Minimal tack hangs on nails by wood framing that's seen better days.

Moonlight shines through holes in the roof, illuminates HEMINGWAY - a 12 year old Thoroughbred that deserves better.

He peers at a makeshift stall cut-out with warm eyes. All is quiet. Then, his ears point up. His head turns.

BAM. Suddenly, the door is nearly kicked off its hinges.

Seconds later, bloodied hands grab the door frame and pull in WILL RANCK, 25, rugged. Bruises and blood on his face.

He steadies himself but staggers, grabs Hemingway's stall.

Will's crimson knuckles cling for support as he fixates on Hemingway. The horse blinks back with gentle eyes.

Will pulls one muscular arm over the stall door, displaying his torn shirt. Hemingway backs up.

Three attempts at unlatching the stall gate show some fuzziness in Will and his droopy eyes now further indicate that there's alcohol behind the bruises.

He finally unlatches the door, stares at Hemingway. As they face-off, it looks like a duel, only one can leave. Then --

Will steps forward. Hemingway stands his ground. Gently, Will's fingers tussle Hemingway's ears and forelocks.

WILL

Hey. I'm home.

Barely whispered and slightly slurred. Hemingway steps into Will, offers his torso for support.

Will drapes his arm over and embraces the powerful animal as he would the welcoming arms of a partner.

Moonlight shines down on them and Will's breathing settles. Hemingway turns his head, nestles it into Will's shoulder. Their bond is evident. Will pats Hemingway's chest.

WILL

You know...

His voice trails off as he tries to stand on his own.

Will wipes his face on his sleeve, trudges out of the stall.

As Hemingway repositions himself in the stall, Will falls onto the door and pulls himself up by pulling it closed.

WILL

You know what the best--

THUMP. Will releases his grip, alcohol winning the fight. He slides down to a sitting position with his back against the stall and squats outside the stall.

Moonlight fades as clouds overtake and Will's perspective darkens with every blink as he fights off collapsing.

WILL

You know what the best thing about
the future is?

Will leans forward and crawls toward the stairs on his hands and knees, slowing with each movement until finally --

He turns onto his back, lays across the dirt and shavings on the barn floor. He fights off sleep, manages to whisper --

WILL

It only comes one day at a time.

Will resigns to sleep, settling with his face turned toward Hemingway. Moonlight surrenders to complete blackness.

INT. BARN - DAY

Sunlight beams through the holes in the roof. THUDS of car doors closing emanate from outside. Will sleeps on the dirt. Blood caked down his cheek and across his knuckles.

FOOTSTEPS approach, then -- Will blinks awake as the door swings open and a REALTOR, 50, gasps at finding him.

REALTOR

Oh my word.

(pulls out cell)

Don't move. I'll get help.

Will props up on his elbows, then stares at the Realtor trying to dial while turning away a middle-aged couple.

WILL

Who are you?

The Realtor whirls, pockets the phone.

REALTOR
Lea Bass. I'm showing the buyers
the property.

Will blinks hard, clearly confused.

REALTOR
I was told anytime after 10...

Her words trail off as Will leaps up and storms past her. He
breaks into a run toward a house in the distance.

INT. RANCK HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

EDWARD RANCK, 55, kicks aside trash that has gathered in his
path as he packs art supplies into beer boxes.

The once-proud interior of the room is drab and lifeless.
Someone stopped caring a long time ago.

Will charges in, stopped cold in disbelief at finding his
father packing.

WILL
You sold the place?

Edward continues packing. Nonchalant.

EDWARD
Yes, I did. They're trying to
figure out how much it'll cost to
level the stall and put in a pool.
(peers through curtains)
Hell, I'd do it for them if they'd
settle tomorrow.

Will yanks Edward away from the window.

WILL
Why didn't you tell me you were
doing this?

Edward regains his balance, resumes packing.

EDWARD
Hell, son, you were never around
enough for me to tell you anything.

WILL
I've been getting Hemingway ready.
We can make some three star events
this year.

Edward slows, squares on Will.

EDWARD

Is that what you were doing last night? Getting ready?

WILL

You can't be doing this.

EDWARD

Already done. I'm making a fresh start. Bought a condo in Philly.

WILL

Philly? What about me?

EDWARD

What about you?

WILL

What am I supposed to do?

Edward's eyes scan the tattered remains of something that was supposed to look much different.

EDWARD

Helluva time to bring up what's supposed to happen.

Edward pushes past him. Will grabs his father's shoulders, whirls his body to face him. The contents of Edward's box and Will's heart spill out.

WILL

I've got no place to go.

Edward's eyes search the chaos of the dirty floor. No answers there. Will shoves Edward aside, sprints out.

Edward scoops up a picture frame that fell from the box. A younger Edward and a Woman embrace. A truck's motor REVS --

EXT. RANCK HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Will barrels his truck out of the driveway. He clips a concrete mailbox pillar, rips off the passenger rear view mirror. He tears away in a cloud of dust.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Will drives. Smacks the wheel in sporadic fits of anger. As he glances into the rear view, he glimpses his reflection.

Still bruised, blood-crusted and disheveled. He reaches behind the seat, opens a water bottle and literally pours it over his head. He blinks through, rubs off the scabbed blood.

He slows at an intersection, draws stares from other drivers beside him as he washes blood from his knuckles and face.

Undeterred, he drives on, peels off his shirt and mops his face and upper body dry with the inside of his torn shirt.

Fingering his hair back into place and somewhat cleaned up, he digs deeper behind the seat and pulls free a new shirt.

Driving into an industrial lot, he pulls on the new shirt and parks in a lot just as he completes his image transformation.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / LOADING DOCK - DAY

Huge warehouse doors open to truck beds beyond the gate. Workers move inventory from the warehouse onto the trucks.

Will approaches the gate marked 'Employees Only' and extracts a key card from his wallet. He swipes, pushes. Nothing. He sighs, checks the time, swipes, pushes. Still nothing.

WILL
(mutters to himself)
Not today. C'mon. Not. Today.

After a third failed swipe, he bangs the gate, marches away.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / OFFICE - DAY

A CLERK marks orders behind a desk. She fakes finding them riveting so she can avoid Will's determined walk toward her.

WILL
My card won't work. Buzz me in?

CLERK
I have to ask you to leave that
with me. And your other ID.

Will stares at her in disbelief.

CLERK
I'm sorry, Will.

She points to the Administration Office behind her. ZACH, a graying, fastidious businessman awaits. Hands on his hips.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Will sits opposite Zach. Shoulders slack. Defeated. Zach pushes a pencil around Will's card and ID badge.

ZACH

My hands are kind of tied here,
Will. Bar fights are none of my
business until you drop the boss's
son and leave a few of his teeth as
a tip. What were you thinking?

WILL

It's between me and him.

ZACH

Fair enough. But this is between me
and the boss. He tells me that
you're gone and I'm just the
messenger. Get what I'm saying?

WILL

He was driving that truck that
killed her. Court or no court. He
did it.

Zach shrugs. Will rises and heads for the door.

ZACH

Want some advice?

Will stops in the doorway and faces his former supervisor.

ZACH

It's been two years. Let it go and
move on with your life.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Will drives, lost in thought. He glances at the gas gauge
leaning on the edge of 'E,' lets out a heavy breath.

INT. BARN - DUSK

Will pulls a bridle and saddle off the tack box. He brushes
Hemingway, gets him ready for a ride.

As he reaches over him to adjust the stirrups, Will allows
himself to simply lean against his horse.

Hemingway reciprocates, turns his head and nestles against
Will's shoulders. Will addresses his horse like teammate.

WILL
You know I'd do it differently if I
could. We're up against it.

Hemingway neighs and Will pats his chest, ready to ride.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Vast and immaculately tended. Top-of-the-line fencing
surrounds acres of pastures and riding rings.

Several riders work their horses in the main ring near a huge
indoor facility. Real money here.

Will's truck and trailer kick up dust as he shuttles
Hemingway up the lane to an upscale house on a hill.

Will parks his truck in front of the house, climbs out. CARI
SAUNDERS, 23, an athletic, spitfire of a barn manager, meets
him as she leads her mare, YAZ, to the schooling ring.

CARI
You're gonna need to move.

WILL
Kathryn around?

CARI
Not until tomorrow. Please move.

WILL
What time tomorrow? I need--

CARI
You don't hear well, do you?

Will glares at her. She could easily go around his truck and
trailer but she makes a point of showing he's in her way.

Will takes out his keys, climbs back into the truck.

WILL
What's with the attitude, Cari?

CARI
Haven't you picked enough fights
for one week, Will?

He shakes his head, revs the engine. Cari waits him out.

WILL
Thought you were different than the
other snobs 'round here.

CARI

Move!

Will shoves the truck into gear, circles his truck and trailer out of the lane.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK - DAY

Fast food wrappers litter the seat. Will sits and reviews a notebook with scribbled dollar amounts and entry deadline dates. Toward the bottom we see the words "Plantation" and "Fair Hill." Near both are lots of dollar signs.

Will falls back in the seat. His eyes gaze into the rearview mirror. Hemingway stands in his trailer, growing restless.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Zach approaches Will's truck and trailer with an envelope. He hands it to Will through the open window.

WILL

Appreciate you cashing my last check for me.

ZACH

Don't spend it all in one bar.

WILL

Funny. Listen, you still interested in the truck? Without the one mirror, I'll go down to ten.

Zach's eyes swing to the loaded horse trailer.

ZACH

How will you get him around?

WILL

I'll have to find something cheaper. You want the truck or not?

Zach considers, then shakes his head, pained and torn.

ZACH

Look, use me as a reference. You'll get something quick. But you're gonna need this to get around.

INT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE - DAY

KATHRYN BROOKS, 56, perpetually composed and stylish, signs checks in an old-fashioned ledger book. Even her signature is fluid and graceful. Will fidgets across from her desk.

She closes the ledger, folds her hands and addresses Will. Purposely leaves a check between them.

KATHRYN

Eight thousand for the truck. Take it or leave it. What happened to your mother's saddle?

WILL

Had to sell it last year to cover expenses for the horse trials.

That hurt to say. Kathryn avoids Will's water-rimmed eyes.

KATHRYN

I'm sorry.

Kathryn pours herself an iced tea. Pours another for Will.

WILL

I...eh...I was wondering. I mean, I'm exploring options right now. But I might be... possibly...

Kathryn places the iced tea down in front of Will. Hard. The THUD brings Will's eyes to lock onto Kathryn's.

KATHRYN

The answer is 'no.'

KATHRYN

The question is -- how could you even consider it? Your mother trained you on that horse.

WILL

I'm thinking of that horse! I have him ready. I just can't afford... what he needs.

Kathryn stands, watches Cari and other riders in the ring.

KATHRYN

I've got my riders.

WILL

I'll earn his cost. Whatever it takes.

KATHRYN

Look, Will. I'm sorry but it's not fair to my team. I could make some calls, maybe another barn...

Will plunks down his glass with a THUD. The gust blows the check back to Kathryn. He gets up to leave.

WILL

Yeah. Maybe another barn.

KATHRYN

You've turned hard since she died.

The final straw. He storms toward the door, rips it open.

KATHRYN

You can keep him here.

Will stalls at the door. His face runs a gamut of emotions.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Kathryn shows Will the farm. Horses fill the pastures. Several riders, of varying ages and abilities, ride lesson horses at the direction of trainers, others on their own.

KATHRYN

Three month commitment. You'll work -- hard and without an attitude -- from about 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and for that, you'll get a reduced board rate for Hemingway. You'll get free lessons on him and give lessons to others. Cari can help you find a place to stay but since you don't seem to mind hay, you can also stay in the stalls.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RING - MOMENTS LATER

State of the art. Cari supervises a dressage rider. She glances over, but Kathryn's nod cues her to continue.

KATHRYN

(to Will)

You'll answer to Cari directly but ultimately to me. The truck and trailer are yours to use for transport. I expect you'll need to get to and from another job anyway.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock Area - Moments Later

Kathryn and Will emerge by the stalls. Spacious and well cared for. It's top-shelf living quarters for the horses.

KATHRYN

I saw you ride him at the horse trials last month. As I recall, you placed in the top 40.

WILL

38th.

KATHRYN

Still -- you've worked him from scratch to the two star level, which is a pretty impressive accomplishment. The raw talent is there and Hemingway is what, 10?

WILL

11. Be 12 next month.

KATHRYN

(shakes her head)

Time goes by so fast.

They both take in the majesty of the grounds, contrasted by Will's make-do truck and trailer. Will turns to her.

WILL

I'll do what I can to not disrupt your team.

KATHRYN

This is short term. You've got three months to get something figured out.

WILL

I think Hem's got a real shot for three stars this year.

KATHRYN

Your Mom would be proud. I helped her find him, and I know what she wanted for you when she gave him to you. You have the ability to become an upper level eventer but you've got some hard choices ahead. That window of time is closing.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

The truck's headlights illuminate the entrance sign. 'County Park. Closes at sunset.' Will drives right past it. Enters.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Will unloads Hemingway from the trailer, tacks him up.

WILL

Seems like everyone else is making
deals or rules for us, doesn't it?
Well, tonight, those don't matter.

Will climbs on. Moonlight casts wondrous light across fields. The allure of open space erasing any sense of danger. One press of the leg and Will and Hemingway take off --

EXT. VARIOUS SHOTS THROUGH THE WOODS - NIGHT

Will rides -- finally free.

They jump over fallen trees, dart around rocks and dissect openings in paths with athleticism that makes it look easy.

Will jumps and rides. They finally slow into an open field.

The moonlight casts a single spotlight on the horse and its rider and one thing is clear - they are very much alone.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Will stirs awake by a fizzling iron grill that served as their makeshift campfire. He unwinds the long lead-line around his boot and escorts Hemingway to a grazing area.

As Hemingway digs into the grass, Will pulls out his wallet. One pinch and it's obvious - maybe \$40. Will sighs.

EXT. RANCK HOUSE - DAY

Edward's U-Haul sits. Zach waves as Will's father disappears inside. Bulldozers crawl toward Hemingway's stall.

Zach steps into the driveway to meet Will as he pulls up. Will's eyes burn as he watches the bulldozers level the stall. Zach leans against the truck, a sympathetic ear.

ZACH

I was hoping they'd be done by the time you got here. Can't be easy.

WILL

Listen, about the truck, I --

ZACH

-- Not why I'm here. I'd never wash out the horse smell anyway.

Crushed wood CRACKS as panels collapse. Will winces. He pulls his eyes away as if he himself were being fractured.

WILL

So, why are you here?

ZACH

Terrance has been talking trash, looking to end this once and for all after your little bar fight.

WILL

Does he whistle when he talks now?

ZACH

Watch out for him. All I'm saying. He's borderline crazy, but you of all people know his Dad's money can buy him a lot of outs.

WILL

Thanks.
(nods to bulldozers)
I can't watch this.

ZACH

Your Dad's leaving tonight. I can stay with Hemingway if you want to go in for a bit.

WILL

No. There's nothing to say.

ZACH

(hands Will a paper)
My cell. Just in case.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RIDING RING - DAY

Will exits his truck, walks to the rail to watch Cari expertly handle Yaz through a course inside the ring.

She's a seasoned rider. Balanced. A talented jumper who remains fixated on her ride even as Will stands and observes. After completing a jump, she pats Yaz's neck, and circles closer to Will, who sports a blank look.

CARI

What?

WILL

I'm just standing here.

CARI

Judging?

WILL

Watching.

CARI

What did you see?

WILL

You came off that last jump on the wrong lead and didn't bother to fix it. Maybe you thought no one would notice.

CARI

I asked because I can take criticism. Use it. Make myself better. It wouldn't kill you to offer it in a more positive way.

Will pulls away from the rail, walks toward Kathryn's home. Yaz and Cari continue their circle. Cari stares at him, shakes her head, clucks her tongue and they get back to work.

INT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Will stands alone in the foyer. Several ribbons and trophies prominent on a wall. Will skims the awards.

Blue ribbons from three star events. A visual souvenir of a successful riding life.

KATHRYN (O.S.)

Are you lost?

Will turns. Kathryn clearly pointed the question to make him uneasy. He shuffles back to the foyer, bounces on his feet.

WILL

I've gotta turn you down on your offer. I won't fit in here.

KATHRYN

Sorry to hear that. Anything else?

WILL

Still give me eight for the truck?

Kathryn holds a disdainful look on him until it's clear he's serious. She moves to the window, watches Cari ride Yaz.

KATHRYN

Didn't think you'd give up so easily. What happened to 'whatever it takes.'

WILL

I'm saving you a ton of hassle.

KATHRYN

That I can take. Hemingway has potential, Will. You do too. How do you think your mother would feel to see you not give him the best shot you've got?

WILL

She taught me to take each jump one at a time as if you're seeing it for the first time. The way the horses do. There's no best. There's only next.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Will pulls his truck and trailer onto the main road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A convertible muscle car pulls alongside of him.

The driver, TERRANCE BAUER, 24, tough-guy wannabe, flashes a gap of two missing teeth and gestures for Will to pull over.

Will shakes his head, drives, disregarding the crazy kid. Terrance tries to cut Will off and force him to stop. Will slows, gets his bearings with traffic and what's ahead.

Terrance finally manages to get in front of Will's truck and all but stops in the middle of the road as traffic HONKS.

Will pulls onto the shoulder, passes Terrance's car, then turns onto a side street.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME

Will's eyes flick to his one good side view. Hemingway's trailer safely hitched. Terrance erects the finger to Will with the look of someone not put off easily then speeds away.

EXT. CHEAP BARN - DAY

A converted lean-to with three semi-solid walls and a heavy half-door. The shavings inside are thin and ratty.

This place conjures notions of a last-resort. Hemingway even seems skeptical of stepping into the stall but Will urges him in with a prod and push, then closes the door and latches it.

Will wheels and steps face-to-face with a FARMER.

WILL

How long will fifty buy me?

FARMER

A week. You can use my hay but you're on your own for grain.

WILL

What's the fifty buying me? A roof?

FARMER

And hay.

WILL

I only have \$40 and now I need to buy grain. Three days. Take thirty?

Will holds the cash under the Farmer's nose. He looks at Will -- indifferent. After a beat, he leaves with the cash.

EXT. CHEAP BARN - DAY

Will changes out of a duffle bag in the stall with Hemingway. He dresses alongside the horse into slacks and a button up.

WILL

Don't get too comfortable here at The Ritz, Big Boy. I'm coming back with something.

Hemingway's eyes flick around. Unsettled and nervous.

WILL

Remember the best thing about the future, right? One day at a time.

Will strokes the horse's chest and buries his face in his mane, drinking in his touch and scent. His eyes water.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS JOB SITES - DAY

A parade of Owners and Managers shake their heads or hold up their hands. Offices, docks, warehouses, schools.

Will sits or stands across from each, taking rejection each time. His fuel gauge dropping progressively with his hope.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME

Dejected was hours ago. Now, hungry and desperate, Will rubs his face, kicks himself into gear -- digs through the truck -- behind seats, in the dash-eventually compiles three dollars.

EXT. MCDONALD'S - NIGHT

Will exits his truck, marches inside with a purposeful walk. He doesn't see Terrance, in a Bauer truck, pull into the lot. The engine of the truck is loud. Identifiable.

EXT. MCDONALD'S - MINUTES LATER

Will exits, devours a burger, holds a job application sheet. His shoulders fall upon seeing Terrance perched on his truck.

TERRANCE

Lesson One - say it with me -- 'Do you want fries with that?' C'mon.

Will places the paper inside the door, stands outside the truck. Terrance hops down. They square off - eye to eye.

WILL

You waiting for a dentist?

TERRANCE

I'm done waiting for you to stop your mouthing. Trial's over and I'm cleared, so you can stop your chirping to anyone that'll listen that I had anything to do with what happened that night.

WILL

You try and make yourself believe that. I've got things to do.

Will climbs into the truck. Terrance backs away.

TERRANCE

Yeah, you go ahead and play horsey.

The truck fires up and pulls past Terrance.

EXT. CHEAP BARN - NIGHT

Will approaches with a bag of grain. His eyes adjust to the fading light but -- an awful realization hits. His steps quicken until he breaks into an all out sprint -- in seconds he finds his worst nightmare --

An empty stall. Hemingway and Will's duffle bag are gone.

WILL

(yells out)

Hem? Hey, Hem! C'mon, Buddy.

Will scurries, looks everywhere.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The Farmer rubs sleep from his eyes, shrugs a 'What do you want from me?' that infuriates Will. He dashes off.

EXT. FARM - NIGHT

Alone, Will wanders, looks for Hemingway. His pace slows. Against the Farmer's storage shed is an old 3-Speed bike.

Will kicks aside some tools holding it upright and pulls it free. He rolls it. Functionable. He climbs on, pedals off, continues to call out for Hemingway. His voice strained.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Will powers the pedals through grass and gravel, traversing the same woods they had glided effortlessly through earlier.

His voice almost completely gone, Will calls for Hemingway as often as he can. Occasionally, his tone cracks with emotion.

Near the sign that reads: 'Park closes at sunset,' Will grabs his side - aching from the physical drain of biking.

He catches his breath and pushes off to start again but as he opens his mouth to call out -- a SIREN blips behind him.

Will slumps on the bike as the cop's spotlight shines on him. A COP exits the car, approaches from behind Will.

COP
Step off the bike. Extend your arms
and turn slowly toward me.

Will does as he's told, squints into the light.

COP
You somehow miss that sign over
there? The park closes at sunset.

WILL
I was looking for my horse. Had him
boarded not too far from here.

COP
Got ID on you?

WILL
Back pocket. You want it?

COP
I'll get it.

The Cop cautiously approaches, removes Will's wallet.

WILL
Anyone report a runaway horse?

COP
I'm gonna ask you to stand in front
of my car while I check this out.

The Cop ducks inside his vehicle. Will stands in the cross hairs of the headlights. He looks around, fights off a sob. After a few beats, the Cop emerges.

COP
Will Ranck? I need you to come with
me. People are looking for you.

Will turns to him quizzically.

WILL
What about my horse?

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock Area - Night

Will exits the police car, turns to Hemingway's SNIGGER from a stall. He bolts in that direction.

Hemingway jostles in his stall. Will opens the latch and embraces his horse with heartfelt relief. The cop car leaves.

Kathryn witnesses the tender reunion in the stall. She grabs something from the house, then makes her way to the barn.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - NIGHT

Kathryn leans by the door as Will reconnects with Hemingway. Will, exhausted and frazzled, can barely speak.

WILL
(hoarse)
I... I don't...

Kathryn uncaps a bottle of whiskey, passes it to Will.

KATHRYN
Here. Take the edge off.

Relief scrolls across Will's face. He downs a stiff drink, extends his arm to return the bottle but Kathryn's gone.

Seconds later, from the hayloft, a bundled sleeping bag falls to the ground and rolls near the stall.

Will approaches it, then is startled backward as his duffle bag plummets from the same loft. He smiles.

EXT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE / DECK - NIGHT

Kathryn sips wine and gazes at stars. Will appears.

WILL
I still can't figure how you...

KATHRYN
Your old boss, Zach called me.

WILL
Still, even he didn't...

KATHRYN
Then, I talked to your Dad before he left. He told me where you like to ride. The rest... well, it doesn't matter now.

Will nods acceptance. Kathryn continues to gaze at stars.

WILL
Thank you. All I can say.

KATHRYN

Taking that bike was 'whatever it takes,' Will. You owe it to him to give this a shot.

WILL

Look, I appreciate what you did. And no disrespect but...

KATHRYN

But nothing. Before this I was young, stupid and lonely too.

(beat)

But I was also focused on what I wanted and nobody was going to deny me that, so I took it as part of the territory.

(gestures to Will)

We need to work together.

WILL

Those terms. Cari. I can't...

KATHRYN

Whatever it takes.

Will gestures to Hemingway's barn, extends his arms.

WILL

"We" don't have the same resources.

She dismisses him with a wave, steps down to his level.

KATHRYN

I'm too tired to fight and you need to focus your energy. Work with my trainers. Sleep in the barn and work your tail off, we'll see where we are in three weeks.

Will looks at the barn, turns to shake on it but Kathryn is already heading inside, not turning back.

KATHRYN

Get some sleep. We start at 7.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

ALEXA, 21, long brown hair in a pony tail under her riding helmet, jumps MR. T, a muscular, black Arabian.

Working on footwork by the rail is MORGAN, 20, blonde curls bounce off her shoulder as she trots LUCAS around the ring.

Cari, on Yaz, steps over foot rails in the center of the ring. It appears to be just another morning routine until --

Will emerges from the paddock on Hemingway. The horses and the girls react to the new arrivals with puzzled faces.

Will navigates Hemingway into the ring, feels the heat of the glares upon him. He smiles, plays it cool.

Alexa, to make a point, clucks her tongue and urges Mr. T to resume jumping. She's good and Mr. T has tremendous spring in his leg. Will watches the demonstration but masks his take.

Not to be outshone, Morgan breaks from the rail and canters toward a set of jumps. Will slows Hemingway to a walk and watches Morgan run a flawless set of jumps. She beams.

Cari watches the marking of territory with the hint of a smile but sneaks glances at Will. He gives up nothing.

Kathryn appears and climbs into a booth at one end. She uses a microphone. Her voice pipes through speakers.

KATHRYN

You all know Will. He's going to be joining us for a few weeks, so unbunch your panties and we can all get ready for Jersey Fresh.

The ladies exchange looks. Will squints at Kathryn, runs a gentle hand across Hemingway's neck. Both look relaxed.

ALEXA

So -- we're all going?

KATHRYN

I didn't say that. I said we can all get ready for it.

MORGAN

Wait. Is he joining our --

KATHRYN

(loud and clear)
-- Let's go. Start at the trot.
Nice even spacing. Get moving.

The girls move as told. Will brings Hemingway in line behind Alexa. When their horses are out of earshot from Kathryn:

WILL

Don't worry. It won't come to that.

ALEXA
(without looking back)
I'm not worried.

WILL
I meant that..

But Alexa and Mr. T kick up some footing and trot ahead. Cari rides behind Will, witnesses the brush off.

CARI
Just ride. The rest...
(drops to a mutter)
...will never change anyway.

KATHRYN
To the canter. C'mon, wake up.

Dust flies from the pounding hooves on the footing, creating a surreal, dreamlike atmosphere around the ring.

Each rider presses their horse to Kathryn's calls from the booth. It's not a competition but everyone shows their best.

VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE RIDERS

Each rider exhibits strengths. Kathryn coaches with a keen eye, occasionally enters the ring to demonstrate.

The group completes basic ring work, jumping and equitation. We glimpse highlights of maybe an hour's work that leaves both the horses and riders tired and sweaty.

One thing is clear - these riders are very good and extremely competitive. Will isn't far from the girl's abilities but his presence, like a promising rookie at a team training camp, seems to have raised the bar for everyone.

KATHRYN
Alright, Cari, Morgan and Alexa,
get the other horses ready. Will,
you'll get jobs from the girls.

Morgan and Alexa exchange a grin over that as they file out of the ring. Will pats Hemingway's neck. Both happy.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock Area - Day

THUMP! THUMP! Shovels filled with horse manure fill a wheelbarrow outside a line of stalls. Will cleans a horse's stall with gusto. He shovels, thrusts, digs and keeps moving.

He works in the second stall from the end. Alexa and Morgan lead horses past his area on their way to the riding rings.

As they pass, we see the long line of stalls ahead for Will. He digs into his work, barely notices them as they pass.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / TABLES SECTION - DAY

A cluster of picnic tables provide shade and seating for parents of child lessons and people that attend horse shows.

Cari, Morgan and Alexa use them to eat their packed lunches. They sneak glances at Will, trailing loads of manure to the fields. Alexa checks for Kathryn's presence, then delivers --

ALEXA

If he goes to Jersey Fresh ahead of me, I'm leaving the barn.

Cari's eyebrows rise. Serious statement. Morgan sips her drink, nods as if Alexa just said what she's thinking.

EXT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE / DECK - DAY

Will joins the girls on the deck. Kathryn passes out type-written sheets to each of them. Confused looks all around.

KATHRYN

Obviously, with different people in different circumstances, we have to have different rules. Before you read any of what's on here, know that I fully expect that you'll all qualify for Jersey Fresh, but it's time to start thinking about taking that next step. Planning for Rolex.

All four heads look up. The pinnacle. The only four star event in the United States. The best riders in the world.

ALEXA

What's this?

KATHRYN

It's a promise pledge. Essentially, this says you can't quit on me or this team. If you don't qualify or make the cut, you'll stay on to help the other riders and pay back the money I put up for you to compete. Any questions?

CARI
We all signed contracts. Except--

KATHRYN
--Will. I know. Is there a problem?

MORGAN
Why doesn't he have to?

KATHRYN
That's between me and Will. He'll
sign the pledge.

Bitter glances from Morgan and Alexa. Kathryn ignores them,
hands out pens. Will signs. Cari next. Morgan looks to Alexa
who shakes her head.

ALEXA
Alright, I'm just gonna say it --
He shows up here out of the blue,
and we're all suddenly treated like
eight-year olds? It's not right.

KATHRYN
So don't sign it. We'll miss you.

Alexa's jaw falls open. She collects herself, sneers at Will
and signs the paper. Morgan reluctantly follows suit.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - NIGHT

Will props himself up on one elbow and eyes Hemingway's feet.
Sooner rather than later, new shoes will be needed.

Will turns on his sleeping bag, props himself the other way.
The signed promise pledges hang on the barn wall.

Cari turns out lights in a row of stalls. She's about to turn
out the lights on Will -- then she spies him on the ground.

CARI
You'll get the lights then?

WILL
Sure. Could I borrow your phone?

CARI
Yours break or something?

WILL
Don't have one. Only take a minute.

Cari unpockets her cell, looks perplexed.

CARI
Bring it out in about two minutes?

Gravel crunches under Cari's boots as she ambles away. Will digs in his pocket, pulls out the paper with Zach's number.

WILL
(dials; then into phone)
Hey, Zach.
(beat)
Yeah, I'm fine. I, eh...
(longer beat)
Any chance you could meet me at
Skully's? I've got...
(beat)
..I don't know. Maybe 20 minutes?

He hangs up the phone, heaves a sigh, runs his hands down Hemingway's leg and gently checks his feet.

INT. SKULLY'S BAR - NIGHT

MUSIC blasts from the jukebox. If this place serves anything other than shots and beer, none are visible. Smoke and neon.

Will enters, nods to a few regulars, scans stools until he finds Zach. He bellies up next to him. They shake hands.

ZACH
(pushes cash forward)
Drinks are on me.

Will nods, accepts a mug from the bartender and settles in uneasily. He fumbles with the mug, clearly uncomfortable.

ZACH
You ask to meet. I show up. You don't talk. I buy drinks. You're gonna have to lead, 'cause I don't know this dance.

WILL
You still threatening to paint your house this summer?

ZACH
Whoa. Where's this party going?

WILL
Just asking. That's a lot of work.

ZACH
Yeah. So?

WILL

So, maybe you'll need some help.

Zach un-tips his beer, finally catches Will's drift.

ZACH

Jesus, Will. How much do you need?

Will chugs his beer, fixes an even look back at Zach.

WILL

Buddy's gonna need shoes soon and I'm tapped. You know I'm willing to work for it but I can't wait.

ZACH

Talk to your Dad before he left?

Will shakes his head. Zach pulls a rubber-banded wad of bills from his pocket, drops it by Will's mug.

ZACH

He got what he could for his paintings, and he wanted to leave you something. His new address is on the top dollar.

Will turns over the meager windfall in his hands. It's sad presence causes Will to tap his glass. He gulps his refill.

ZACH

Hey, Will. Take it easy. He --

Will turns sharp. His glare tells Zach to back off. Zach turns up his palms, lets it drop. They sit in silence.

INT. SKULLY'S BAR - HOURS LATER

Rowdier. Will, alone now, stares into a beer. His depleted wad of cash still present. The dollar with Edward's address written on it is set aside.

Drunks get into a shoving match. Will's glassy eyes fixate on the cash. Will taps his glass for a refill. After a full mug arrives, the drunks collide into Will, his beer spills.

Will's fuse blows. He shoves both drunks across the room and sends them sprawling. Bodies gather, looking for action.

THUD! The bartender's bat lands on the bar. He gestures for Will and the drunks to step outside.

Will pushes some cash forward for his tab, pockets the rest. The bill with his Dad's address is left on the bar.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - NIGHT

Hemingway turns as Will tumbles into his sleeping bag. Will pours loose bills into a brown paper bag, scribbles "shoes" on it, then falls onto his back, stares at the ceiling.

Then, alone and hurting, a tear streams down Will's cheek.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - MORNING

Will, still in clothes from the bar, sleeps. Morgan and Alexa talk in his direction as they lead horses out to the ring.

MORGAN

You've got turn out, Will.

ALEXA

The end stalls need to be done
before the night crew comes in.

Will blinks awake, tries to shake his head clear. He props himself up, finds himself eye level with Cari's riding crop.

CARI

You just don't care, do you?

She pushes past him. Her boot heel snags on his sleeping bag and her leg jerks him more upright. Will climbs to his feet. Cari leads Hemingway out. She calls back over her shoulder.

CARI

I'm working your horse today.

Will freezes. Stunned. He tosses his sleeping bag aside and pulls riding clothes out of his duffle.

He unbuttons his shirt, groans from last night's adventure. A silhouette of a woman appears in the opening of the paddock. Hands on hips, it looms larger than life-size due to the sun.

KATHRYN (O.S.)

Will, you'll work the whole day in
the stalls and tonight in the
fields. We'll talk later about last
night but here's the short version--
No one makes me look like an idiot.

The silhouette shrinks away from the stalls. Will resumes changing with slow, pained tugs.

Shirt changed, he grabs his stomach, disappears where the wheelbarrows are kept and throws up gut clutching heaves.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - DAY

Will shovels hard. Knee deep and sweaty from hours of stall work. Hoof clacks draw his attention. He waits to see who is being brought in. He throws down his shovel and scampers out when Cari appears, leading Hemingway into his stall.

WILL
What happened?

CARI
He's off. Kathryn wants him here
until the vet can take a look.

WILL
What the hell did you do?

Cari's head whips around, eyes ablaze with anger.

CARI
Nothing! I took good care of him--
a lot better than you ever did.

Will strokes his horse's leg, feeling for soreness reactions.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - LATER

DR. NIX, a local vet, guides a steady hand along Hemingway's front leg as Kathryn looks on. He applies a hoof tester to Hemingway. The horse jerks, bringing a frown to Nix's face.

NIX
Looks like a sole bruise. Just
notice it today?

KATHRYN
My head trainer was working him. He
just pulled up lame.

NIX
Could've stepped on something. It's
hard to say.

KATHRYN
What do you recommend?

NIX
He needs rest. A week. Maybe more.

Kathryn shoulders sag. Visible concern on her face.

NIX

His shoes are crap. This kid needs
to get a decent farrier.

Nix displays a sad-looking hoof. Kathryn shakes her head.

KATHRYN

He's new. He's...

NIX

Running his horse into the ground.

Kathryn nods understanding, notices Will enter the paddock.
Will spots Dr. Nix and races over. Will glances at Hemingway.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Kathryn and Will meet the girls at the ring rail.

KATHRYN

Barn rest for a week. Nothing that
some time and consistency won't
heal. So, who will step up and
share their ride time with Will?

ALEXA

You're kidding, right?

KATHRYN

Did I force you to sign the pledge?

CARI

Look, I understand we're all in
this together but the same thing
could have happened to one of us
and we'd have to sit out the time.

WILL

She's right. It's not fair.

KATHRYN

Horses go lame. Riders stumble on
great rides. This sport is fair.
Get over it. This is about doing
whatever it takes to be better
riders. There are riders that are
ten times better than all of you
that will never make it to Rolex.
Is that fair?

(MORE)

KATHRYN (CONT'D)

Riding different horses makes you
aware of different things, so I'll
ask again, who's gonna step up?

No one steps up. After a long beat of silence, Will marches to the paddock. Alexa and Morgan steal sideways glances at each other. Kathryn notes their muted happiness.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Will canters on Yaz as Kathryn watches from her booth. Cari stands along the rail, an intent eye on Will's handling.

The unfamiliarity between horse and rider shows. Will looks frustrated as he tries to settle into a rhythm.

KATHRYN (O.S. IN LOUDSPEAKER)

Watch your pacing, Will!

Will nods, clearly out of sorts.

VARIOUS SHOTS OF WILL ON YAZ

Will attempts a jump, Yaz clips a rail. Cari winces.

Will approaches another hurdle, Yaz hesitates. Will pulls up.

Will's head drops. Not his day.

Alexa, on Mr. T, rides to where Cari stands.

ALEXA

There's no way I'm letting him work
Mr. T.

CARI

'Cause there's no I in team, right?

ALEXA

No 'we' either. He's going to ruin
the work we've done. Yaz is a two
star horse. Will's not helping. I'm
getting Mr. T ready for Jersey
Fresh and I'll keep him from
getting messed up any way I can.

Alexa rides off in a huff. Cari watches Will ride Yaz back to the paddock area. She shakes her head and walks away.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Will parks his truck next to Cari's. As he gets out, he notices that she has a flat tire.

Will looks around. No one else is about. Will lowers himself under Cari's truck. A quick look reveals the spare is locked.

He crawls under his truck, unlocks his own spare, rolls it over to Cari's truck and changes the flat.

INT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kathryn sits in her office, watches with interest as Will changes the tire. A hint of a smile appears.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Will works on Lucas. He appears much more comfortable. Lucas clears a jump with ease. Will nods confidently.

Cari canters to the side on Yaz, watches Will from the corner of her eye. She smiles at Will's improvement.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - LATER

Will strokes Hemingway as a FARRIER finishes putting on new shoes. Will opens the brown bag with "Shoes" written on it.

WILL
What's the damage?

FARRIER
Hundred even.

Will counts cash.

WILL
Take ninety? All I got.

The farrier begrudgingly takes the cash, leaves. Will strokes Hemingway's neck. Cari steps in, stops. Allows their moment.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - NIGHT

The girls are huddled near the stalls reading off the screen of Cari's phone. Will returns a wheelbarrow to the stalls. The girls share a grin, nod to Cari - the designated asker:

CARI
Hey, Will. We're hitting The Wagon
Wheel tonight. Wanna join us?

Will freezes, stunned at the invitation. He waits for the punch line or for them to burst into laughter but they simply look to him for an answer. He shrugs a 'Sure, why not?'

EXT. WAGON WHEEL NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

ESTABLISH a popular country-themed nightclub in full swing.

INT. WAGON WHEEL NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

MUSIC kicks. The dance floor jumps. Alexa, Morgan and Cari draw looks from a number of male patrons as they saunter in.

The girls clean up well. They smile at a few guys. Will trails behind, ends up near their bar but still off on his own. His eyes clearly scanning the room for someone.

Like flies at a picnic, guys descend on the girls. They step away from the bar with their drinks and talk with a few guys.

Will grabs a beer and watches the girls. Morgan and Alexa seem like veterans, flirting without teasing. Cari attracts fewer guys but her smile lights up when she talks.

The MUSIC changes and a line dance erupts on the dance floor. The girls beg off their admirers and hit the floor, joining in with the dance steps. They're good. The party is underway.

Cari motions for Will to join them. He waves her off.

INT. WAGON WHEEL NIGHTCLUB - LATER

More crowded and electrified. The dance floor is filled with sweaty, buzzed patrons. Will leans against the bar, watching the girls tirelessly dance. Then, he straightens, puts down his beer and his expression says it all - "Oh, no."

Terrance glides next to Cari and, despite the polite way she consistently turns away from him, he persists after her.

Morgan and Alexa both try to deflect him but he wedges between them on the dance floor and continues making a play.

Annoyed with trying to move away from him, Cari gestures to the girls - 'let's get out of here.' They move to the bar.

Like the dog that he is, Terrance follows them and his devilish grin turns to an full-blown smile when he sees Will standing watch over their drinks. He marches over to them.

TERRANCE
Buy you gals a fresh round?

CARI
Thanks, but we're good.

TERRANCE
(flashes money)
C'mon. My treat. All night.

CARI
Thanks, but -- no.

She turns away from him. Terrance grabs her arm.

TERRANCE
Hey, what's your--

Like a whip, Cari whirls and slaps his hand away. Morgan looks to Will. He's watching every move, hands ready. Suddenly, Alexa steps into the breach, shoves Terrance.

ALEXA
Hey, cowboy - she said 'no.' Now
leaves us the hell alone.

Terrance smiles, watches Will simmer on his back burner - happy to just get under his skin. He puts out fresh bait:

TERRANCE
At least there's one person in here
with some fight in 'em.

Terrance sneers at Will. Cari pushes past Will.

CARI
Thanks for nothing.

Will holds up his hands as if to say "what did you expect?"

INT. WAGON WHEEL NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Alcohol taking effect. Will lets Morgan and Alexa lead him out to the dance floor. They demonstrate the steps for him.

Will's hopeless. Off step and unnatural. Cari moves closer and the three girls continue to try and talk him through.

MORGAN

Don't quit your day job. Oh, wait--

ALEXA

C'mon, Will. It's about timing.

WILL

Yeah. Time I stopped.

CARI

Slow down. Step, cross, hold, step.

(off his miscue)

Don't you have a lower gear?

Everything with you is full-on.

Will gives up, waves them off.

EXT. WAGON WHEEL NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Patrons spill into the parking lot. Will leads the group to the truck but the girls trail several feet behind him. Suddenly, Terrance appears at Cari's side.

TERRANCE

What do you say we go get that drink now? Just you and me.

CARI

Sorry, my night is over.

TERRANCE

C'mon. Mine's not.

Terrance grabs Cari and jerks her back from the girls. Cari can't even utter "Hey" and Will knocks Terrance's hand away.

WILL

I heard 'no.' Leave her alone.

TERRANCE

Oh, you finally grew a pair? I've been looking for a chance to kick you're lying ass.

Terrance charges Will. Will easily deflects him. A crowd circles the men, waiting for a fight. Terrance grabs Will's shirt and delivers two solid punches to his head.

Will lands a few gut punches and the men tumble to the dirt. The girls call for Will to stop but the crowd cheers a fight.

Terrance and Will tussle in the dirt. Bouncers break up the onlookers just as a SIREN BLURPS and the crowd disperses.

The girls eye each other as a cop grabs Will and pulls him beside the police car. A different Cop yanks Terrance aside.

CARI

We need to get our stories straight
before they get to Kathryn.

Will calls out like he's addressing the crowd but locks eyes with the ladies, making sure they get his message:

WILL

Just go home. Nothing to see here.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - DAY

Alexa and Morgan ride past the stall occasionally, working their horses in the main ring.

Cari leads Yaz past the stall on her way into the ring. Kathryn runs her palm up and down Hemingway's hind legs, feels for heat. Will stands by anxiously.

The unspoken looks between Will and the girls all communicate that Kathryn either knows nothing or everything and her silence is keeping them from knowing the right answer.

Finally, Will breaks her concentration and examination.

WILL

Dr. Nix cleared him. I've waited
too long already. Let me get him
ready for Jersey Fresh.

Kathryn stands, faces him. Her look is level but unreadable.

KATHRYN

How'd he seem last night?

Will shuffles his feet under her direct gaze, opts for silence. His eyes plead.

KATHRYN

Okay. Let's see what he's got.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Alexa, Morgan and Cari all ride well. Each canters around the ring in exemplary form. Their jumps are clean, the pace good.

Each girl looks confident. Will is adequate in the ring but falls short of the skills exhibited by the girls.

An occasional sideways glance from each rider scopes for reaction. Kathryn watches with a keen eye on the riding.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - AFTERNOON

Hemingway soars over a jump. Will rides with ease, at home here. He finishes his ride with a clean double jump.

Each girl is steady, but none measure up to Will's natural ability. No spills but plenty of refusals and hesitations.

Morgan curses under her breath as she finishes, looks to Kathryn, tries to get a read. Kathryn gives away nothing.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Will and Hemingway are the last pair in. Kathryn awaits.

KATHRYN

It's been three weeks. We need to talk sponsors.

WILL

I'll find a way to pay my share.

KATHRYN

I can't carry you indefinitely.

WILL

I know. Whatever it takes.

KATHRYN

I'm only taking the girls to Jersey Fresh.

Will looks like he's been hit in the face with a brick.

WILL

I've done everything you've asked.

KATHRYN

In cross country, you do well.
Jumping, you hold your own.
Dressage? It's like you're sitting on a bag of snakes.

WILL

I've been working hard on that.

KATHRYN

And they've worked harder. And longer. They've earned their spot.

WILL
And I haven't?

KATHRYN
Find a sponsor by the end of the
week. Otherwise, you won't compete.

She leaves. Will stares after her. Resolve burns in his eyes.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - DAY

The girls clean tack, look up when Will returns with the wheelbarrow, drenched from what must have been hours of work.

WILL
I'll finish everyone's tack tonight
if you guys let me duck out today.

MORGAN
Skully's serving brunch now?

WILL
Just something I need to do.

ALEXA
So we 'need' to do your jobs?

WILL
I'll do my own work when I get back
-- and your tack. Please.

CARI
What's so important? Hot date?

That gets the girls grinning.

ALEXA
Yeah. What's your deal there, Will?

WILL
Just something I've gotta do.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS BARNS AND TACK SHOPS - DAY

Will, showered and dressed, encounters the same collage of rejection he did on the job site search. Equine merchants politely beg off Will's increasingly urgent pleas.

He sells himself, offering his notebook of clippings showing competition results. Each time he gets a negative head shake, a business card and a sympathetic smile but no deal.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Will prints a new page of equestrian contacts, places on top of the crumbled crossed-out page he had been carrying around.

He types into the library's search engine page: Edward Ranck.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK - DAY

A crushed fast-food bag lands on a freshly-opened Trac Fone box. Will purposefully punches numbers onto the key pad. He heaves a deep breath, winces, presses 'Call.'

WILL

(beat; into phone)

Hey, Dad. How's it going in Philly?

(beat)

Yeah. It has been a while.

(beat; eyes closed)

Listen, I never did get to thank you for leaving me that money. I wanted you to know that I really appreciated it. I meant to..

(beat; nods as he listens)

Yeah. Still getting him ready.

We've got Jersey Fresh coming up.

He's ready. I'm ready. Like I said, we're taking on three star events.

(beat; pinches his brow)

So, the painting's going well. How 'bout you? Are you doing okay?

(beat; this is hard)

I know. So many things remind me of her. It's hard but, you're right..

(beat; shakes out of it)

So, I just wanted to make sure that address still works. I'm thinking after Jersey Fresh, maybe I'll be able to send you a little of it back. I know you took less than those paintings were worth to leave me something. Hey, listen, Dad, I've gotta run. We've only got so much time to get our horses ready.

Yeah, they post the results online. Oh, that's good, I'm glad you'll be able to see how we do.

(beat; winces)

Okay. We'll talk again soon. Bye.

Will sighs as he clicks off, climbs out of the truck.

INT. LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

Will's reads screens, absorbing data on the monitor. We intercut, closer each time, with Will's eyes growing moist.

ON SCREEN

Headlines and captions:(a) Maggie Ranck, 53, Event Rider, killed;(b) Trial in equestrian's death ends in acquittal; and (c) Bauer heir cleared of manslaughter charges.

We close on Will's eyes wet, fiery red. He rubs them hard --

INT. SKULLY'S - LATER THAT DAY

-- and when his hand pulls away, he's deep into drinking. Empty shot glasses in front of his beer. He rubs his eyes. Slowed by alcohol. The bartender approaches, eyes the mug.

Will moves his hand forward to tap his glass for a refill. His finger is poised, then, he pulls it back, walks away.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK - LATER THAT DAY

Will adds an empty coffee cup to his pile of trash beside the crossed-out pages of contacts. Dejected would be an upgrade. The Bauer logo on a business card stands out from the pile.

Will pockets it, taps the steering wheel. Time TICKS loudly away on the dash. The road ahead, like his prospects - Empty.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / PARKING LOT - DAY

Will gathers himself, enters his former place of employment.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / REX BAUER'S OFFICE - LATER

REX BAUER, a bear of a man, gestures for Will to sit.

REX

Sorry things ended the way they did, Will. Terrance is a lot of things but blood covers most of them and the rest, well, we work out for ourselves

WILL

I won't take up too much of your time, Mr. Bauer.

REX

So, what's this 'business proposal'
you have for me?

WILL

I worked for you for four years.
Even through the trial. You know
I'm willing to work hard and earn
my way. Since you let me go,
money's been tight and I've got an
opportunity coming up.

REX

I can't give you your job back.

WILL

I don't want it. But I do need some
money and I think you should see it
as a business deal.

REX

(smiles)
I'm listening.

WILL

Entrance fees, transport, training.
I figure I'll need about three
grand to show at Jersey Fresh.

REX

And with that money, I get what?

Will clears his throat, shifts uncomfortably.

WILL

Goodwill. Exposure. Spin it however
you want. It's a new market for
Bauer to tap into. And it would go
a long way toward helping me get
past what's happened.

REX

Meaning you'll stop calling my son
a killer?

That rocks Will's head back with the force it was intended
to. Will looks away, rises. Sullen at overplaying his hand.
Rex lets him get half-way to the door, then stops him with:

REX

Suppose I write you a check. Call
it severance. Call it sponsorship.
Whatever. Play it out for me.

Will steps forward, leans on the desk. Assertive.

WILL

It gets me through Jersey Fresh. If I don't finish in the top group, I won't have a chance at Rolex this year and you're off the hook.

REX

And if you do?

WILL

That would show I'm worth the investment.

REX

Which means?

WILL

Continue to sponsor me for the year until I either don't qualify for it or I make it into Rolex.

Rex sighs, shakes his head. Will looks despondent -- until Rex pulls a checkbook from a desk drawer, begins to write.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / TABLES SECTION - NIGHT

Alexa, Morgan and Cari are dressed for going out. Will exits the paddock area, holds up an arm's worth of clean tack.

ALEXA

See ya, Mystery Man. We're off to a party that doesn't end with cops.

WILL

Give me fifteen minutes? I've got something better than line dancing.

CARI

We're not going to Skully's.

WILL

No. Seriously. Guaranteed fun time. And -- there's a riding bonus.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

DING. Lights flash, illuminate a child-like smile on Will as he works magic on a Captain Fantastic pinball machine. The old-fashioned arcade holds a classic collection of machines.

Alexa and Morgan personify boredom as some older gentleman and their very young kids gawk at the presence of females.

MORGAN

You can take the boy out of middle school but...

ALEXA

We are going somewhere else, right?

WILL

Afraid you might learn something?

CARI

Like when to say 'no thanks?'

Will shrugs that off, uses his wrists to keep the ball alive. His fingers move fluently yet his hands barely reposition.

WILL

It helps. You've gotta try it.

INT. ARCADE - LATER

SPLASH. Quarters spill across the glass. Will pumps them into machines, positions the girls at each one. Will demonstrates but the girls look as lost as Will did with line-dancing.

WILL

Wrist and fingers. Shoulders back.

They instinctively thrust their shoulders back like riders.

WILL

Think of the ball approaching as if you're timing a jump. Adjust. Flex. Give it its lead, then ask.

He flicks his wrist, shows how his hand-eye training mimics how he uses the reins. The girls fumble awkwardly but Will's skill and enthusiasm are intoxicating to watch.

Cari watches Will's eyes fill with genuine passion and joy. Maybe it's the flickering neon or the MUSIC or the youthful environment but she's witnessing a different side of Will.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Will's wrists flex the reins. He jumps Hemingway across a tall fence. Kathryn watches, nods, occasionally points and gestures to him as he circles back. A work in progress.

Cari glides over jumps, refining what is already terrific form. She seems completely focused on her work.

She moves her wrists like Will has shown. After clearing the jump, she nods. Gets it. She pulls into a walk alongside him.

CARI
How's you pick that up?

WILL
Spent a lot of time in bars.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RIDING RING - DAY

Alexa practices dressage. She's elegant and controlled. Beauty in motion. Morgan works Lucas through movements with steady hands. She's working at it but Alexa looks top-shelf.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Will leads the girls in a sprint up the side of the hill. They're all HUFFING, running hard up the steep terrain.

Will's natural ability has him in the lead but the girls are close behind and gaining. The girls are in better condition.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RIDING RING - DAY

Will leads Hemingway in to work on dressage. Will pulls him to a halt, facing the mirror. Hemingway stares. Will sighs.

After a long beat, Will simply pats his neck.

WILL
That's enough dressage today, Bud.

And leads him right back out.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - NIGHT

Will looks at the white board. Kathryn's fluid script reads -- 'Pulling out at 5 a.m.'

Will's formal riding clothes hang by his duffle bag near the stall. Reminiscent of the opening. Now, sober and anxious, Will steps closer to Hemingway, gently strokes his head.

WILL
I told you. One day at a time.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - MORNING

ESTABLISH acres of grounds buzzing with equestrian activity as riders exercise horses and haul trailers into the grounds.

INT./EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / VET TENT - DAY

A VET examines Hemingway. Will looks on anxiously. Kathryn stands by the door, concern evident on her face.

VET
Seems warm. He been off lately?

WILL
He's been fine. He is... fine.

The Vet's eyes flick to Will, backing him down. The Vet turns to Kathryn who suddenly finds her boots extremely compelling.

VET
OK, then.

The Vet marks his chart. Will leads Hemingway out. Kathryn falls into stride beside him.

KATHRYN
I know you went through a lot just to get here, but has he?

Will walks purposefully toward the dressage area.

WILL
He's been great. Let's do this.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

Spectators gather to watch the first dressage competitors.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
First out is James Whitfield on
Sirus. We'll get a chance to see
how these riders set the table for
this three day event. No one can
win it today but they certainly can
lose it with a poor dressage score.

This male rider makes Will look like a beginner. This is a whole new level of talent.

Alexa helps Morgan get ready. Cari looks around. No sign of Will. APPLAUSE as Whitfield finishes. He tips his hat.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 Excellent scores for James
 Whitfield to open the competition,
 setting a high bar for the riders
 this morning. Next up, we have
 Morgan Otto from Newtown on Lucas,
 a fifteen year old Thoroughbred.

Morgan trots out. Something pulls his attention away. Morgan corrects it inside the ring but the judges make note.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

The scoreboard shows names and scores for several riders. The tally for each rider changes during the timed competition.

Riders in formal riding attire. Horses groomed to perfection. Classic equestrians presenting their best.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Cari falters. Awkwardly changes leads on Yaz. Cari shows well. Disciplined and graceful. Her weakness is how she handles a falter. The smile disappears. She looks rattled.

Will doesn't look rattled but should. His performance is a train wreck of errors that he glosses over with showmanship. Clearly uncomfortable with such measured riding, Will simply goes through the motions and tries to make each look good.

Alexa stuns the audience into hushed appreciation. She expertly works Mr. T through the routine with grace and perfect form. LOUD APPLAUSE salutes her impressive turn.

After dressage, the scoreboard shows Alexa in the top five.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Kathryn leads her riders on course a walk. They approach a jump that resembles a fallen tree with a drop off just before the rider would have to launch. Tricky.

KATHRYN
 So, we're half way through the
 course here and they're going to be
 feeling winded from the first five.

Kathryn points to the drop off.

KATHRYN
 Keep that in mind when they're
 asking 'what's the question?'

Will's eyes flick up. He glances at the approach.

WILL
The question?

KATHRYN
Yes. What's expected of me here?

Kathryn holds a look for a beat. Galloping hooves THUNDER --

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

As James Whitfield guides Sirius expertly across that jump. Communicating with his horse on the approach and asking for his commitment at the right time. APPLAUSE from the crowd.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
An impressive run for James
Whitfield, taking the log jump with
ease and heading into water works.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Jump after jump, these top riders dazzle and amaze. Cari lets Yaz graze. Her wrist flicks, as if mimicking pinball play.

Alexa passes Will as she straps on her helmet.

ALEXA
It's one thing to get here. Another
to belong here.

Will sprints across the field after the cart. A rider approaches a jump nearby and the ropes are raised. Will runs further down the course, tries to cut the angle.

Cari stands with Yaz, mentally preparing, oblivious to Alexa's parting jab. Will pulls Hemingway closer to her.

WILL
I didn't have a hot date that day.

Cari turns, only now aware of Will's presence. Her frazzed nerves look interrupted. Mission accomplished by Will.

CARI
I didn't think so.

WILL
What did you think?

CARI
Truthfully?

Awkward silence. Interrupted by:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Our first rider after the break is
Cari Saunders from Frederick,
Maryland on Yaz.

WILL
Well?

CARI
I thought you were gay.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Cari advances out of the gate and storms the course with an aggressive ride. She gallops Yaz through the first few jumps and takes off like a rocket for the next grouping.

KATHRYN
(to herself)
Easy. Pace.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

Cari attacks the remaining jumps. She rides hard, pushes Yaz, who clearly tires early.

Will watches. Concern evident. Kathryn winces as Yaz's heel grazes a late jump.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / ALONG WITH CARI RIDING - DAY

Only now glancing at her watch, Cari seems to ease up.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
(filtered)
Cari Saunders and Yaz look to be under optimum time with a couple of rough spots over a generally good ride in our early stages. It's a three-day event and we'll see how much Yaz has left tomorrow.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Morgan's ride on Lucas seems pedestrian. What she lacks in skill can't be masked but she rides with grit and determination to not make a crucial mistake.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

RODDY TUCKER, a flamboyant and vocal rider, expertly handles a difficult water jump. As the horse teeters on losing his footing, he makes a split-second decision to use an alternate jump and makes up the time by angling out.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Truly remarkable recovery by Roddy on the water jump. It's sometimes a fraction of a second difference in the jumps that separate the leaders in a world class event like this.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

Kathryn gathers her riders around. Cari and Morgan already in casual attire. Alexa and Will still dressed to compete.

KATHRYN

Cari, you looked like you were after the course record rather than have a clean ride and Morgan, you looked like you were happy to not fall off. We're not here to just show up. We're here to compete.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Alexa urges Mr. T toward the log jump. Kathryn watches.

KATHRYN

He's asking ...

Alexa advances. Mr. T refuses. Miraculously, Alexa stays on. She circles, takes the alternative jump, gallops away.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Alexa Hall and Mr. T make it through the log jump and now it'll be interesting to see if she can regain her optimum time.

Yes she can. Alexa nails successive jumps and separates herself from the others. She's clearly the best of them all.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

The scoreboard shows Alexa move up to third place. No other Cross Meadows riders show. Zach appears, approaches Kathryn.

ZACH
How's Will doing?

KATHRYN
We'll know soon. He's next down.

REX
But, how's he doing so far?

KATHRYN
He's still in it. So far.

Zach ambles to the ropes. Kathryn raises her binoculars --

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / ALONG WITH WILL RIDING - DAY

Adrenaline. Pure energy as Will and Hemingway explode onto the course and head toward the first sequence of jumps.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

INTERCUT Will's ride with posted scores. Morgan is in the middle group. Roddy surpasses Alexa, bumps her to fourth. Cari nears the top group as Will clears a difficult jump.

Kathryn uses binoculars, watches Will approach the log jump. His eyes fixate on the question. Hemingway runs hard, making minute adjustments with every stride at Will's urging.

KATHRYN
(to herself)
Ask...

Will asks and Hemingway delivers. Will scales the jump better than most riders. He pats Hemingway's neck with enthusiasm.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

Afternoon sun tilts. People gather at the scoreboard. Alexa at 4. Cari and Morgan in the Top 30. INTERCUT the end of Will's ride with:

CARI
He's still got show tomorrow.

KATHRYN

There's four riders after him.

CARI

But if he finishes?

Kathryn's eyes flare at her. Don't jinx it. They both turn back. AND we're with Will, racing toward the last jumps.

He's breathing hard. Hemingway charges. Will leans hard over a jump and displaces himself on the landing. He's running too fast, letting his rides in the woods supplant his approach.

Will charges toward the finish line. The leader board shows his time. He's in the bottom group of riders.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

Kathryn addresses her riders with scores in her hands.

KATHRYN

You're all in qualifying range.
It'll be jumping that settles that.
But it's not gonna be enough to
just stay on. If you want to
qualify for Rolex, you'll need to
finish in the top grouping.

INT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / Paddock - NIGHT

Will grooms Hemingway, turns as Zach enters.

WILL

Did Rex send you over to check on
his investment?

ZACH

It's a weekend. Gimmie some credit.

WILL

What'd you think?

ZACH

It'd be great if I knew what the
hell I'm watching. Can you win?

WILL

Win? Ha! I'll be lucky to finish.
This guy gave me everything he had
out there today. I hope he can dig
a little deeper tomorrow.

Zach spots a golf cart, plastic bins and sponsor signage posted everywhere. Wheels turning. Will notes it.

WILL

Those carts we have at the plant
would be nice to have here.

ZACH

Everybody bring their own?

WILL

Nope. Whatever the facility has on
hand -- which sometimes isn't much.

Zach strokes his chin, clearly mulling a thought. Kathryn posts scores for the day. Zach glances at the bottom.

REX

Twelve spots to the top group?

WILL

Can't worry about numbers. Just
gotta run a double clear and hope
for the best.

Will's confident expression succumbs to a hint of concern.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS - DAY

Dawn breaks. Kathryn walks her riders toward the paddock.

KATHRYN

Any of you ever see "That Thing You
Do" from back in the nineties?

Shakes of 'no.' Curious glances.

KATHRYN

Good. So you won't know I'm
stealing this line: It's very
important that you not suck today.

Soft chuckles are overwhelmed by THUNDEROUS POUNDING --

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / JUMPING ARENA - DAY

HOOVES POUND as riders approach high jumps spread across the ring. APPLAUSE as a veteran female rider completes her ride.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Alexa Hall now with a chance to
move up in the overall standings.

Alexa rides exceptionally well. Overconfident, she clears the first five jumps then knocks down rails on the next two.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Alexa Hall and Mr. T. We'll see if
she'll remain a top-five qualifier.
Next, Morgan Otto on Lucas.

Morgan also rides well. She clears the jump that caused Alexa her first fault but then has a refusal on the next jump. After clearing that, she knocks down a rail on the next jump.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Finally, Will Ranck on Hemingway.

Will acknowledges the judges, starts well. Half-way through, he falters but rights himself, clears a jump in the middle.

On the last quarter of the course, he clips a rail then knocks down the next one. Kathryn sighs. Zach slaps his program. Cari looks down, tugs on her gloves.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We'll have a better idea of Will's
standing after Cari and Roddy take
their final runs. It will be close.

Will shakes his head as he leaves the ring and Cari rides in.

Cari lights up the course with a flawless run. At one point, she makes an adjustment on her approach -- the slightest flick of her wrist. Will, watching from a distance, smiles.

Kathryn's eyes follow Cari as she closes out the course. The last jump nears -- Yaz barely touches the rail -- it wavers slightly but remains in the cups. Kathryn pumps her fist.

EXT. JERSEY FRESH GROUNDS / KATHRYN'S TRAILER - DAY

The crew gather their gear and load things into the trailer. Kathryn approaches with the scores and a somber face.

CARI

It can't be that bad. I killed it
in there. We all finished.

KATHRYN

Three of you finished in the Top
40, so with good scores at another
three star, you'll make Rolex.

She pats Will's shoulder. Will stares at the score sheet. Unreadable. He folds it and shoves it into his tack box.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAWN

ESTABLISH activity as Cari, Morgan and Alexa approach the barn. Will wheels manure from the paddock. No days off here.

INT. OFFICE / LOADING DOCK - DAY

Zach marks papers. Terrance strolls past with other workers. They wait in line for coffee, Terrance vaults the counter, helps himself to the administrative coffee machine.

Rex holds a meeting in his office. A mock up of a Bauer cart on a projection screen with plastic tubs for water and hay.

Terrance vaults back to his cronies, confused by the items.

EXT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE / DECK - DAY

Will deftly untangles a quagmire of lead lines, looks over Kathryn's shoulder as she enters data on a laptop program.

KATHRYN

Lesson there. Never leave six pre-schoolers with lead lines.

WILL

Fell off a horse for the first time in pre-school.

KATHRYN

Your Mother made you get back on?

WILL

Made? Couldn't stop me.

KATHRYN

She told me you were the only one keeping you from Rolex. Said your Dad might have bought into it if you'd been a little less reckless.

Will fixates on the tangled mess in his hands.

KATHRYN

Was she right?

WILL

I need to find a new sponsor but Rolex could still happen for me. Leaving town was the first thing my Dad did for himself in years. Mom and I never bought into his art.

Will pulls two lead lines free and now the task comes easier.

WILL

He let us take the reigns and
riding became everything until--
(beat; that wince again)
You fall off and no one's there to
make sure you get back on.

KATHRYN

Have you talked since Jersey Fresh?

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - DAY

Will's finger is poised over speed dial for 'Dad.' He's irritated, hacking atop a restless, Appaloosa lesson horse.

In frustration, Will pockets the phone, charges into the fields to burn out the horse's motor with a 'Oh, you wanna run?' look on his face.

As they charge up a hill, the Appaloosa bucks, sends Will flying through the air. His thigh lands hard on a rock and he SCREAMS in agony as he limps after the horse's halter.

INT. EDWARD'S CONDOMINIUM - SAME TIME

Edward paints in the cramped space. His lost expression seems more defined now. He stabs at a canvas with purpose. Vision.

Other items in the room are a television and computer. Beside the computer are recently printed pictures of Will, Maggie and Edward. The before shots of a happy life cut short.

The Jersey Fresh results are on top of the printer. Will's scores are highlighted in yellow at the bottom of the page.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - DAY

Hemingway's rear foot is raised. He stands in mild discomfort. Cari and Morgan wrap his leg. Will limps in, fighting through pain.

CARI

What happened to you?

WILL

Tried to teach a lesson horse a
lesson. When did he seem off?

Will pushes past Alexa, practically shoves her away from his horse. Kathryn flares her eyes at him in warning.

KATHRYN

The vet at Jersey Fresh said his
leg felt warm. Did you push him
through?

Will whirls on her.

WILL

You think I'd do that to him?

Will wraps Hemingway's leg, pats his chest. Alexa steps outside, flings the door with more force than she needs to.

ALEXA

I do. You're a selfish jack ass
sometimes and this poor horse
suffers because of it.

WILL

Think what you want. I'm no threat
to you but you couldn't beat me bad
enough at Jersey Fresh. You think I
don't belong? It's all about Alexa.

Kathryn fumes. She looks to Cari who looks at the ground. She marches to the barn wall, tears down the promise pledges.

KATHRYN

Meet at the house when you're done.

INT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE / STUDY - NIGHT

Kathryn and the riders sit apart. Thick tension in the air.

KATHRYN

This ends now. We're either all-in
or there's gotta be some changes.

ALEXA

Cari and Morgan have been here
longer than me. I think this is a
great barn and I feel like we all
made each other better but since
Will came, it seems like we spend
more time working around him than
we do getting to the level of the
other riders at Jersey Fresh. I
mean seriously, what does he bring
here other lame pinball tricks?

KATHRYN

Hunger, for one. All of your families make what you do here happen pretty easily. But I'm not here to defend, Will or what happens to this group, especially not knowing how Hemingway's leg is going to heal.

Alexa steps forward. Pissed. She stands in front of Kathryn's collection of championship ribbons, arms folded, defiant.

ALEXA

How many more decisions are going to be made around Will?

KATHRYN

'Around Will?' He made his own way to Jersey Fresh. Got a sponsor...

ALEXA

He's a charity case. To everyone. You can all think I'm a cold-hearted bitch for seeing it that way but I'm not gonna waste all my years of work so you all can feel better about how tough things are for poor Will.

Will rises. He locks eyes on Alexa but speaks low to all:

WILL

I'm gonna step outside. I'm fine with whatever you guys decide.

Will leaves. Cari and Morgan stand as well. Kathryn gestures with a shrug that says, "well, have it out." Alexa steps up.

ALEXA

I'll stay if he's out.

CARI

C'mon, Alexa. He's trying...

ALEXA

In or out?

Cari's eyes harden with that brush back. She makes it clear.

CARI

In.

Alexa grins at Morgan but she dissolves it with her anxious eyes. She knows she holds the tie-breaker and Alexa awaits.

MORGAN

Let him stay.

Alexa shakes her head, marches to the door.

ALEXA

That's it. I'm done.

BANG. The door slams. Kathryn watches her taillights leave a few seconds later. Cari and Morgan look outside. Will stands on the porch -- once again very much alone.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / STALLS - LATER THAT NIGHT

Will downs a long swig from a flask, ices his thigh. He stares down the row of stalls, accentuating his solitude.

He doesn't turn around to face Cari when she enters.

CARI

So that's your answer? Drink.

WILL

What do you want me to do? Dance?

Cari huffs resigned disappointment, turns on her heels.

CARI

Whatever.

She pushes open the barn door. Before she can shut the door:

WILL

Cari.

(she holds; waits)

When he's better and this is better. Help me with dressage?

Cari gives the faintest hint of a nod before leaving.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - DAWN

Will's flask lays beside his passed out body atop his sleeping bag. Hemingway fidgets in his stall nearby.

With a THUD, the melted bag of ice drops on Will's head. He turns, startled back by a rack of ribbons that drop next to his face. He blinks awake, squints into the sun at Kathryn.

MINUTES LATER

They sit on hay bails. Kathryn's awards between them.

KATHRYN

Had my best season that year. Never made Rolex but came damn close. Maggie and I had to share a ride on this gorgeous Warmblood, Royal Flush. He was the only three-star horse at the barn. Something had to give. Obviously, your Mom gave up her ride. We made a deal that the following year, it would be Maggie's turn.

WILL

But?

KATHRYN

That was the year you were born.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS - DAY

Rex eyes prototypes of his equestrian line of products. Zach comes in with pages of reports and spreads them out.

REX

How's it look? Can we do it?

ZACH

Maybe not this quarter. R & D on an equestrian line would set us way back on our numbers for the year. Even then, it'd be two more years until we'd be able to make a dent.

Rex's eyes never leave the plant floor. A pure visionary.

REX

Yes or no, Zach. Can we do it?

Zach shuffles his feet, rearranges the papers.

ZACH

We don't have to sponsor Will but he's our 'in.' We'd be hanging our hat on him advancing in these things to get any kind of exposure.

The waver in Zach's voice molds confidence on Rex's face.

REX

Last time. Can we do it?

Zach scratches his head, struggling with the numbers.

ZACH
It's your company. Feet to the
fire, yeah, we can do it.

Rex smiles, finally turns to Zach, beams with determination.

TERRANCE
What's this all about?

Zach and Rex see that Terrance has heard everything from the doorway. He steps in. Zach looks to Rex: Tough talk ahead.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RIDING RING - DAY

Will struggles on Hemingway. Tentative and frustrated. Cari emerges from the observation room, cringes at Will's dressage. She covers her mouth as he makes another mistake.

CARI
It's like that line dance. You've
got to find a lower gear.

WILL
He's not quite back yet.

CARI
Don't blame him.

Will dismounts, offers the reins. Cari accepts the reins and flashes a 'watch this' grin at his challenge.

She climbs on and instantly has Hemingway moving better than Will had. He shakes his head, knows he's being schooled.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - DAY

Will trains on Hemingway. Works on all the disciplines.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Will rides Hemingway. Something less wild in his style. More control. More focus. Change is evident.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / INTERIOR RIDING RING - DUSK

Cari and Morgan practice dressage in front of the mirror. Training hard. Kathryn has them change horses. Try again.

Will steps in with Hemingway and the difference is noticeable improvement but he's still a work in progress.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Terrance paces, fuming with rage. He pushes over a stack of 'Bauer' prototype feeding buckets.

REX

You know, if you put half as much energy into thinking and working as you did into fighting -- you'd be running the place by now.

TERRANCE

We finally wash our hands of this guy and you go digging dirt piles.

REX

We've got nothing to hide. It's actually a good PR turn-around.

TERRANCE

It's finally over and you want to open it all back up again?

REX

I'm making a business decision. My name is on every thing we make.

Terrance kicks a bucket across the room. Boiling.

TERRANCE

Mine too!

(off Rex's curious look)

I don't want any of this.

REX

It's not your decision now, is it?

TERRANCE

Through that whole trial, you sat beside me. Family first. We go the distance. Together. Then, when our 'name' is cleared, you want to tie it to the one guy who holds me responsible?

REX

Grow up, Terrance. I'm not choosing Will over you. I'm trying something different. Same way I built this business. Fact is, like you heard Zach say, this whole line might not happen if Will falls on his face.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

Will works his pinball machine, wrist and body English. As his game ends, he strolls away, looks for another machine.

He turns a corner, finds Cari working a machine. He approaches from behind. She works, unaware Will's watching. Then she sees him in the glass reflection.

Will pumps quarters into the machine beside her with the slightest 'I see you' nod and goes about his business.

Cari feeds her machine and gets back to work, side by side with Will. They work and play on their own but together. When it's clear Will is going to let things go, she grins.

EXT. CRESCENT LAKE - DAY

Will trots Hemingway, inspecting a new found place. He arrives at a plateau of grass. He takes a quick look then, just before he's about to leave, something catches his eye.

He dismounts, ties Hemingway and approaches a rocky ridge that overlooks the tranquil lake below. Soothing view.

Cari faces away from him, earbuds in. As Will draws closer, he notices her eyes are closed, forcing concentration.

He squats in front of her, maybe twenty feet away. He stops looking to announce his presence and enjoys the view himself. Cari blinks and finds him there. She tugs out her earbuds.

CARI

What're you doing here?

WILL

I was gonna ask you that. But you had those things in. Whatever.

Cari puts away her iPod. All business and ready to leave.

CARI

Just taking some time.

WILL

Nervous?

That freezes her. She holds a look on him.

CARI

What?

WILL
Nervous. This your safe spot?

Will looks for some small stones and casts a few into the water below. He becomes transfixed by the ripple effect.

CARI
I guess.

WILL
What're you worried about?

CARI
You've been at the barn months now
and never asked me anything
personal. Why now?

WILL
You put yourself out for me. Took
me awhile to get used to that.

CARI
(after a long beat)
This is a make or break year for
me. I'm almost 24. Everyone has
some expectations riding on me.

WILL
That's a good worry to have.

CARI
Letting people down?

WILL
At least you know people want you
to succeed.

CARI
You're not gonna feel all sorry for
yourself now, are you?

WILL
Not at all. Just telling you, there
are worse problems.

Cari draws next to him. The sun dips lower and it's harder to see the ripples. Will runs out of rocks and faces her.

CARI
I started here when I was nine.
Just taking lessons. Started
working here at fifteen. All of a
sudden, this is my life.

WILL
It's Fair Hill. It's just another
competition. It's not your life.

EXT. FAIR HILL / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Kathryn walks the course with Morgan, Cari and Will. She carries a note pad. They approach an intimidating water jump.

KATHRYN
OK. We're a little more than half-way through approaching a second water jump but this is where there will be separation from the other riders. There's really no alternative on a refusal here.

Kathryn marches toward the jump and stops short, leaving her body wavering precariously in front of a pond of water.

The riders draw near, look around. Will backs straight up.

WILL
It's not ideal but if you ease straight back, take it like a stadium jump and crush the exit to try to erase the time fault.

KATHRYN
So, what's the question here?

Will turns, points back to where they walked from.

WILL
Charge hard. Approach straight on. You'll have to push because they'll be winded.

Cari and Morgan watch, attentive. Kathryn suppresses a smile.

KATHRYN
Then?

WILL
Press for a direct approach. If you swing out, they'll start to think and this question is 'Can you handle this height this late?' And if they have a chance to think, they'll waffle. Just take it.

Will marches his approach and gestures with his arms they both sail across. No hesitation. No wavering.

INT. EDWARD'S CONDOMINIUM - NIGHT

A customer hands Edward a check as she accepts a painting.

EDWARD

You know, my son rides.

(raises check)

This commission will go toward
going to see him compete. I really
appreciate your business.

He beams a smile. A contented man being paid to paint.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rex extends a check to Will, complete with the Bauer logo.

REX

Legal should be done with the
paperwork by the time you get back.
This is an advance.

Will examines the check. His finger grazes the Bauer name.

WILL

Terrance know?

REX

Yes and he's not happy about it.

WILL

Is that why we're meeting out here?

REX

Will, I don't ride and don't want
to but it seems to me that you're
looking a gift horse in the mouth.

Will pockets the check, fixes a firm gaze on Rex.

WILL

You are not buying me off.

REX

You're damn right I'm not. And if
you don't want that Bauer name in
your pocket -- walk away.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

ESTABLISH a bustling downtown. Honking cabs and crawling
traffic. People crisscross crowded streets. Nightlife alive.

Morgan and Cari, dressed to impress, walk along the sidewalk. Will walks with them but lags behind. He's dressed much like he was at The Wagon Wheel. Dressing up only for riding.

MORGAN

I'd love to live in a city.

CARI

Not enough places to ride.

RODDY WILL (O.S.)

Can't ride all the time.

Roddy trots up and joins them. The girls smile, familiar with his extremely extroverted personality.

RODDY

(shakes Will's hand)

Roddy Tucker. You must be Will. Hemingway's got balls. Well, not really, but he must be a helluva good time to ride.

MORGAN

We were just doing some shopping. Wanna join us?

RODDY

I thought I already did.

Morgan pulls Cari into a shop. Will and Roddy wait outside.

EXT. STREET / OUTSIDE BOUTIQUE - MOMENTS LATER

Will watches the girls browse jewelry through the window. He sees his reflection in the glass, looks beyond it to Cari.

RODDY

Don't see you around much on the circuit. You play for Whitfield's team?

WILL

What?

Cari tucks her hair behind her ear as she leans over to examine a bracelet. She looks up, catches Will watching her. She hesitates briefly, not offended. Touched.

RODDY

Doesn't matter. We'll both be lucky to sniff Nichol's boots. He and Avalon are killing it in Europe.

Morgan bounces from item to item. As Cari trails her, she steals another quick look toward the window. Will watches.

EXT. STREET / OUTSIDE BOUTIQUE - NIGHT

Morgan and Cari emerge.

MORGAN

Roddy, I heard there's a killer DJ
at Zanzibar. You up for it?

Roddy loops an arm through hers and they march off together. Will and Cari exchange a look: I guess we're excused? Will nods back, leads Cari in the opposite direction.

WILL

Who does Whitfield play for?

CARI

Play for?

WILL

What do you know about him?

CARI

Great rider. Nice guy. Gay.

Will nods. Realization hits. Cari looks at him, curious.

EXT. OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

The vast city twinkles lights below from high atop the roof.

CARI

Makes you appreciate how small we
all are in the big picture, right?

WILL

What's the question?

Cari nods. Like her horse on a course, she's positioned - looking at a challenge for the first time and needs to figure out what's expected of her. She stares at the city:

CARI

You need to see it all before you
can focus on any one jump.

Will moves beside her, shares her perspective.

CARI

It's a huge course and it's easy to get caught up going from jump to jump but there's only so much time and the course is only one part of the event. You can't win it all here but you can lose it all here.

Will nods. Cari lifts her chin. Will draws close. Then -- a SECURITY GUARD appears with a flashlight, ruins the moment--

MORGAN

Closing time. Gotta move out.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Kathryn makes a point of holding up her watch to Will, Cari and Morgan as they file in. She hands each rider itineraries.

KATHRYN

You've all got fairly early ride times. Given the field, I'm happy you'll be watching the top riders and not following their scores.

CARI

The grass is slick from dew. I went off on the fifth jump last year.

KATHRYN

I never made it to the first jump my first year.

Kathryn opens her laptop photo journal. The riders gather around images of Kathryn at Fair Hill years earlier.

CARI

No crowd. Hardly anyone is there.

KATHRYN

It wasn't the event it is today. And people just couldn't afford it.

MORGAN

Which horse is that?

KATHRYN

That's Phinnias. He was bold. Never liked other horses much but he never met a course he didn't like. Six foot jumps were nothing to him.

WILL

Why didn't you make the first jump?

Kathryn's voice softens and nostalgia fills every word.

KATHRYN

I pushed him too hard. Trained 'til he got so sore, I had to will him past the inspection. He stiffened up the morning of the event and I never got out of the gate.

WILL

Did you ever take him back?

KATHRYN

He died the next year. Lyme disease was awful that year. Freak incidents all over the place.

WILL

But you did go back. I've seen the ribbons. You placed at Fair Hill.

Kathryn still looks at photos of Phinneas even though the others have stopped. She zooms in on his face. Determined.

KATHRYN

Yeah. I came back. Smarter.

Cari rubs her arm with empathy.

CARI

We all make mistakes.

Kathryn snaps out of it and puts away the laptop.

KATHRYN

And you should make more.

(beat)

Make a lot of mistakes. If you're not making mistakes you're not trying. Make lots of mistakes. Life's messy and it'll feel awful when it happens but it gets better.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

Will, dressed and sipping coffee, carries new Bauer bags to the elevator. He knocks hard on the doors next to his room.

WILL

Let's go!!

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SAME TIME

Cari reacts to the knocks. Already dressed. Morgan completing a text on the bed. Cari puts away her phone - she was watching a picture of her spot atop the rocks.

MORGAN

Roddy and I are hitting Zanzibar again tonight. Wanna bring Will?

CARI

Ball's in his court.

EXT. FAIR HILL / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - DAY

Will rubs Hemingway's ears. A FARRIER peers in.

FARRIER

Hey! Morning. Noticed his leg there. Want me to take a look?

WILL

No thanks. We're good.

FARRIER

You sure? It's not a problem.

WILL

We're fine. Just taking it easy.

The Farrier shoots one more concerned look at Hemingway's leg then shrugs and pushes off. Will strokes Hemingway's chest and keeps his eyes away from his hind legs. Soothing voice:

WILL

It only comes one day at a time.

EXT. FAIR HILL / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Kathryn waves to her riders as they lead their horses to the warm up area. Morgan climbs on her horse.

MORGAN

Have a good ride, guys. Did you see who's here?

They turn to look. Alexa warms up Mr. T across the field. Horse and rider look full of spit and vinegar.

Morgan trots off, leaving Will and Cari still walking their horses. Cari flexes her wrists, mouths things to herself.

WILL

Relax. It'll be fine. Big picture.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And a good morning to you as we get ready to open the field to competition today at Fair Hill. The judges are in place and it should be a spectacular day of jumping.

EXT. FAIR HILL / VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE COURSE - DAY

Many of the same horses and riders from Jersey Fresh display tremendous skill as they jump and gallop across the course.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Roddy Tucker completes another fantastic run, building on his recent success at Jersey Fresh. He looks to be a serious contender this season.

EXT. FAIR HILL / START GATE - DAY

Alexa tosses a smug look at Will as she tightens her gloves. Her eyes revert to laser focus on the course as she explodes out of the gate on Mr. T.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

If Roddy Tucker is the up-and-comer on the men's side, Alexa Hall and Mr. T are just as hot for the women. Alexa's coming off the highest first-time score for a three-star event.

EXT. FAIR HILL / VARIOUS SHOTS OF ALEXA'S RIDE - DAY

Alexa's ride makes Roddy's look slow. She and Mr. T power through an impressive run that draws positive reactions from the growing crowds. One thing is for sure - she creates buzz.

Kathryn positions herself near a middle jump, binoculars in hand. She watches, writes notes and takes everything in.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And now at the starting gate, Morgan Otto and Lucas looking to raise the bar they set at Jersey Fresh and move into the top 40.

EXT. FAIR HILL / RIDING WITH MORGAN - DAY

She dashes out of the gate, cantering toward the first jump. She rides clean, clears the first two jumps with ease.

LATER -- She's in control of Lucas but faces an inclined approach to a jump, followed by a landing on a decline.

Lucas looks uncertain on the jump, then -- an awkward landing causes him to stumble, throwing Morgan to the ground. Lucas follows quickly afterward and rolls on Morgan's leg.

Morgan writhes on the grass, clutching her leg. She SCREAMS as attendants arrive. Someone leads Lucas away. He's limping.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

That did not look good. Morgan started off well but fell on that difficult jump. It appeared Lucas pulled up lame as well. We'll try to get you an update as soon as one becomes available. Our thoughts are with her and her team.

EXT. FAIR HILL / WARM UP AREA - SAME TIME

Cari and Will exchange a worried look - already warming up.

WILL

Do we go?

CARI

Can't. We're the next two spots.

EXT. FAIR HILL / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Kathryn drives a golf cart hard. Clearly upset and oblivious to all else. She hops off and runs to the people tending to Morgan. Kathryn breaks through. Morgan wipes away tears.

MORGAN

LUCAS! Oh, God. How is he?

KATHRYN

Shhhh. Not now. Lay back.

Morgan's leg is twisted in an ugly, contorted way.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Our thoughts are with Morgan and Lucas. There's big things on the horizon for these rising stars.

EXT. FAIR HILL / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE / START GATE - DAY

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Leaving the start gate now, Cari
Saunders and Yaz. And she's out of
the block strong, riding well...

VARIOUS SHOTS OF CARI'S RIDE

She concentrates, breathes, fights off the adrenaline of the audience to maintain a composed, controlled ride.

She clears the early jumps well. Will keeps his eyes down, circles on Hemingway. Waiting.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Little stumble off of jump five but
otherwise Cari is sailing through
the first half of the course,
toward her first water jump.

Cari adjusts in her saddle, tightens her grip on the reins. She flexes her wrists, clucks her tongue to cue her horse.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And Cari Saunders' run continues
with an impressive turn at jump
eight and she's well on her way
toward the leader board with only
six jumps remaining.

Alexa cups her hands over Morgan's in a sign of support as Morgan is loaded into an ambulance and attendants make her wrapped leg as secure as possible. Tears flow freely.

Roddy tries to rally her with a spirited thumbs up that she struggles to return.

Cari clears the final jump, gallops to a triumphant finish. As the time clock freezes on her score, she pumps her fist. Jubilant. Kathryn lowers her binoculars, relaxed and proud.

KATHRYN
Good girl.

EXT. FAIR HILL / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE / START GATE - DAY

Will charges onto the course.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And now, Cari's team mate, Will
Ranck with Hemingway and another
upstart tandem looking to make
their mark at the three star level.

RIDING WITH WILL

And time seems to slow as Will passes people cheering.

He turns his focus and, magically, he and Hemingway are alone
in the woods and it's just the two of them on a joy ride.

As they clear the first jump --

THUD. With the mighty hooves landing, we're jolted back to
the competition and Will bears down on the approaching jumps.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Aggressive ride from Will as he
nears jump number four. Early on,
it seems the course is fast and the
riders are ahead of optimum times.

Will sprints in the open area, urges Hemingway to press on.
Kathryn mouths instruction as she follows with binoculars.

Cari, off her horse, locks her arms and strolls alone with
her head down, listening to the narration of Will's ride.

Alexa passes her on her way to the hospitality tent.

ALEXA

Cari, his cross country isn't the
problem. His dressage is shit. With
Morgan down, you're Kathryn's best
shot at Rolex. Don't waste too much
of your training time on him.

VARIOUS SHOTS OF WILL'S RIDE

He has improved, answering questions with deft adjustments on
each jump and riding with the confidence of a seasoned rider.

The leader board shows Cari's numbers and name. As Will
crosses the finish line, he's tenths of a second behind her.

They're both behind Alexa and Roddy.

EXT. FAIR HILL - MOMENTS LATER

The fans turn their attention back to the next series of
riders. Cari and Will meet by the rider's hospitality tent.

WILL
Any word on Morgan?

CARI
Broken leg.

Will winces, looks up to see Kathryn approaching.

WILL
What about Lucas?

CARI
Don't know yet. Kathryn thinks just
strained ligaments.

Someone stops Kathryn and chats. Will glances at the board.
Cari's name and time atop his by several spaces.

WILL
You had a good ride.

CARI
So did you. It's not over.

WILL
Not likely for me to ever have a
clean round. Just not gonna happen.

CARI
You don't know that. You would have
said the same thing about standing
here right now a few months ago.

Kathryn bids a farewell wave to the person and leads both of
them into the tent. She dabs at her eye a bit.

WILL
Can we see Morgan?

KATHRYN
She's at the medical center. We can
go over at the lunch break. Her
family are on their way there now.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And now, the top performers from
this morning session, Alexa Hall
and Roddy Tucker lead the top group
with Cari Saunders safely within
qualifying range and Will Ranck
nearing the top 40 overall.

EXT. FAIR HILL - DAY

Will paces by the scoring tent. Numbers flash.

EXT. VARIOUS SHOTS ACROSS FAIR HILL

Jubilant riders contrasted by horses and riders nursing injuries and broken hearts.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Advancing after their performance
today in cross country, Roddy
Tucker on Arsenal and James
Whitfield on Sirius.

Track workers dismantle jumps and grooms tend to horses and their battle scars. The scene is very reminiscent of soldiers being led away from a field of battle. Joyful and remorse.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Closing out the field of forty with
a chance of qualifying for Rolex is
Erin Callahan on Trader Nick and
Meagan Wheatley on Commodore.

Will paces, head down. He stops and just listens with his eyes closed as the final names are read:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Cari Saunders on Yaz and Trent
Michaels on Sir Alex. And the last
rider to qualify, Will Ranck on
Hemingway.

Slow, solid fist pump and Will collapses to one knee and relaxes with the weight of his shoulders that much lighter.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - DAY

Hemingway grazes. Things are tranquil and quiet.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / PARKING LOT - DAY

Rex and Terrance arrive, approach a news van parked nearby.
DEAN OWENS, field reporter, approaches with a microphone.

DEAN
Dean Owens, Channel 4 news, can you
give us a statement on Bauer's
sponsorship of Will Ranck?

Rex steers Terrance toward the office, walks forward.

REX
Not at this time.

DEAN
Isn't it true that, even though the
court ruled otherwise, Will still
attributes the death of his mother
to your son?

TERRANCE
He's a liar.

DEAN
So why then? Guilt? Blood money?

Terrance lunges toward him but Rex intercepts and hurls his son into the building. Rex extends a 'stop' arm to the aggressive reporter and slams the door shut behind them.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Morgan, perched in a cast, keeps notes. Cari and Will ride in circles just like they dance around the real subject at hand.

WILL
Do you want to go to Rolex?

CARI
Absolutely. It's the only four star
event in the US. Who wouldn't?

WILL
Yeah. Once in a lifetime stuff.

CARI
That night at the observatory.
Before Fair Hill. What did...

She's cut off. Kathryn sprints toward the ring hoisting a bottle of champagne.

KATHRYN
Final rankings are in. We're going!

Cari and Will break their training trots and come together for a celebratory high five that ends with a hug to help keep each other on balance. It lingers. They pull apart awkwardly.

Kathryn pops champagne. Morgan can't hide her disappointment, she climbs to her feet, hobbles away on her crutches.

EXT. SKULLY'S - NIGHT

Will reaches for the door, then pulls his hand back. A drunk staggers out. Will steps out of his way.

He walks back to his truck, punches his cell phone.

WILL
(beat; into phone)
Hey, Dad! What're you doing on
April 24th? Think you can make it
to Kentucky?

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - INTERIOR RIDING RINGS - DAY

Will and Hemingway practice dressage. Will's face shows focus. Kathryn and Morgan review tape of his previous try.

Hemingway gets antsy. Will fails to keep him under control. He seems casual about his correction.

Cari vaults from behind the mirror -- on fire.

CARI
How many times?

WILL
I know I'm correcting it.

Kathryn and Morgan stop reviewing tape, watch the exchange.

CARI
You're coasting. Costing us time.

WILL
Calm down. I'm getting better.

CARI
Good for you.

KATHRYN
Cari?

Cari cups her hands over her head. Stretches out frustration.

CARI
I've got my own stuff to work on.

She stomps away. Will sits atop Hemingway, watches Cari disappear into the barn. He starts his dressage work again.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DUSK

Cari leads Yaz to the paddock. Her attention is drawn to a nice car pulling into the parking area. Morgan, in nice attire, waits nearby, then hobbles on crutches to the car.

Cari's shoulders slack when Roddy exits the car to assist Morgan. A kiss on the cheek from Roddy. Morgan looks happy. Roddy helps her in the car, they ride away.

Cari's head drops. She walks Yaz to the paddock, tries to mask that punch to the gut.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Kathryn leads a mare into a stall. Cari does the same with Yaz, but then lingers, her back against the outside of the stall gate. She dabs at her face with the back of her hand.

KATHRYN (O.S.)

Allergies?

Kathryn leans against the stall next to her.

CARI

Something like that, yeah.

KATHRYN

Saw Morgan leaving with Roddy.
Something going on there?

CARI

--Couldn't tell you. She certainly didn't tell me anything.

KATHRYN

So, it's not allergies...

CARI

Seriously, it's just not fair.
Morgan breaks her leg and she can go out, have fun... have a life!
Meanwhile, I'm stuck here all hours and I might as well end up marrying Yaz because she's the only one I spend any significant time with.

KATHRYN

Really? You feel held back? This is not a hobby. You knew you would be missing out on a lot of things when you signed on here.

(MORE)

KATHRYN (CONT'D)

You want something different for yourself, don't blame me. Go hang with Alexa and Morgan, but if you think that you're being held back because you're dedicating yourself to being the best rider you can be, then that's on you.

Cari looks away, wipes tears from the corners of her eyes.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - CONTINUOUS

Will stands just inside the entrance. He hears this with confusion etched across his face.

CARI (O.S.)

It's... I've missed out on so much.

KATHRYN (O.S.)

Maybe. You've also accomplished something few people will ever experience. Reaching the top of your field by the time you're 23.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - CONTINUOUS

Kathryn leans against a fence railing, crosses her arms.

KATHRYN

Do you remember why you first started riding?

CARI

I remember riding a horse before I could ride a bike. My parents had me riding before I was six. Natural ability was all they talked about. Every afternoon I'd come home after school and ride until supper, never got to have the fun my friends could. All those weekends at competitions while my friends were hanging out and having sleep-overs. It was lonely and exhausting.

KATHRYN

But you stuck with it.

Yaz whinnies. Cari gives her a reassuring pat on the neck.

CARI

I always thought riding would open doors, maybe get me a scholarship. My parents thought riding would be a means to an end. And then one day I was riding Yaz, just she and I alone in the ring, and I realized riding was the end. It's hard to explain, but being out there with her is the thing that makes me come alive. I guess it's that feeling of connection that makes it worth it.

KATHRYN

With passion comes sacrifice. But it doesn't have to be all-consuming. This barn is my life but I've found other outlets.

CARI

Do you regret never marrying?

KATHRYN

I never felt like my life had to be defined by whether I was in a relationship. But that's me. You might benefit from spending some time away -- go out, have some fun. Sew your wild oats, so to speak.

CARI

I'm not Amish, you know.

KATHRYN

Just saying... any prospects?

Cari looks around, makes sure no one is within earshot.

CARI

Sort of... I've seen Will watching me sometimes. I've wondered whether there might be anything there.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - CONTINUOUS

Will reacts to this bombshell by running a hand through his hair. It's hard to tell whether he's pleased or terrified.

The sound of footsteps approach from the entrance. Will makes a dash, quickly scrambling to get near Hemingway's stall.

Cari and Kathryn enter the paddock. Cari spots Will obviously trying to seem oblivious. Her head ducks, a hint of a smile.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - NIGHT

Will leans on one elbow in his sleeping bag. Hemingway sleeps nearby. Cari eases in, steps quietly toward Yaz.

CARI
Sorry. Just needed to see her.

WILL
No problem. Everything okay?

Cari hesitates, strokes Yaz's nose.

CARI
Yeah. Now it is.

She continues her moment. Will allows it, turns away without lingering. Cari stands with her back to Will's. Hopeful --

WILL
I don't play on Whitfield's team.

CARI
(almost laughs)
Good for you?

Will turns, rises from his sleeping bag. He steps into her. Again, she raises her chin. He telegraphs a kiss, then --

THE ELECTRONIC CHIRP of Will's cell phone crushes the mood.

CARI
Are you kidding me right now?

WILL
What the hell?

He scans the number, shrugs ignorance. Cari folds her arms, nods he may as well answer it. Opportunity lost. He answers:

WILL
(into phone)
Will Ranck.
(beat; listens)
Now? Can't it wait 'til...
(shrugs; beat)
Yeah. I can be there.

EXT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Will steps out of his truck, meets Rex and Terrance by the gate. He looks around, confused by the odd hour and isolation.

WILL

I don't get it. I was supposed to pick up my check in a few hours. Why couldn't we...

REX

There's not gonna be a check. We're pulling the sponsorship.

Will freezes, practically knocked off his feet.

WILL

We had a deal. I signed a contract.

REX

Well, you didn't read it. I can pretty pull out at any time.

WILL

But I made it into Rolex. The biggest event in North America. You were gonna launch you're..

REX

And now we're not. End of story. The PR angle isn't as favorable as I envisioned and our company is stable. Why risk the loss?

Will visibly crumbles.

WILL

What brought this on?

TERRANCE

Go ask your news boy, Dean. Always thought you guys made a cute couple during the trial.

WILL

Dean? What's really going on?

TERRANCE

Tell you what. You go down to Channel 4 and sit with your boy, Dean. You tell him that you're proud to have the support of a great local company and you've finally come to accept the verdict from the trial and move on -- you don't really think I had anything to do with the accident that night.

Will's eyes harden and form daggers on Terrance's face.

WILL

That won't happen and you know why.

TERRANCE

Then we've got nothing else to say.

Rex and Terrance saunter over to the familiar Bauer truck.

WILL

I won't do it. You did it, you know you did. I'll get another sponsor.

REX

Good luck with that. There was a pretty strong non-compete in the contract you didn't read.

Rex and Terrance pull away, leaving Will very much alone.

He hurls himself against the chain-link fence, thrashes it with his arms, venting frustration until he's exhausted. He lowers to an all-is-lost squat, isolated under a streetlight.

INT. SKULLY'S - NIGHT

Will, now isolated under a neon light, throws back a drink. His eyes pan across the dingy bar. Heavy. Dangerous.

The bartender approaches Will's empty glass, awaits Will's tap for refill. Will glares ahead, something clicks. No tap.

INT. WILL'S TRUCK (MOVING) - LATER THAT NIGHT

Outside Skully's. Will pulls out, dials his cell. We see only the dark winding road ahead illuminated by Will's headlights.

WILL

(beat; into phone)

Dad?

(long beat)

Yeah. Sorry to call so late.

Listen, don't book those tickets for Rolex just yet, okay?

(long beat)

Yeah, something's come up. I'm not sure I can work it out in time.

(beat; listens)

I know she would have. I'll be in touch. Congrats on selling another.

Will hangs up and stops, fixates on the damaged oak tree ahead. The base scarred by strong impact from a car.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / LOADING DOCK - DAY

Terrance wanders through a busy floor, he pulls the keys to a Bauer truck, checks for Rex then calls to a floor supervisor:

TERRANCE

Dad wants me to head over and take
back any of the Bauer stuff from
that poser's barn. I'll be back.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / EXTERIOR RINGS - DAY

Cari and Morgan's sullen faces reflect that they're trying to digest the bad news. Kathryn tosses aside Will's contract.

KATHRYN

He wasn't kidding about the non-
compete. That leaves me out. But
don't worry, I've got lawyers too.

WILL

Look, it sucks. No doubt about it.
But it sucks that Morgan broke her
leg too. Cari's still got a four
star to get ready for, so let's go.

Will shows Cari how he keeps his legs, contrasts his style to hers. Cari tries Will's method -- looks awkward.

LATER - Kathryn walks a horse alongside Will and Cari as they hack around the ring, past the jumps.

KATHRYN

You need to be confident but if you
overly drive your horse to the
fences and lose a balanced canter,
you'll make them pull up. At this
level, your horse has the ability
to make the decisions at the
fences, so create balance and
rhythm, not interference.

They exit the ring, the vast fields in their line of vision.

KATHRYN

If a question throws the horse,
there are places for a good gallop
to make up time but make sure
they've got enough to complete the
questions at the end of the run. If
they're gassed, they won't listen.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - NIGHT

Moonlit. Wind whips through trees. Serene, until --
Headlights pull over in the distance. The headlights go off.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - CONTINUOUS

Cari and Will watch a movie on Cari's laptop. Cari moves closer, pushes her hair back. Will turns from the screen. Cari sets the laptop aside. This time -- no interruptions.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - CONTINUOUS

Terrance hops out of the Bauer truck outside the split rail fence. He spots a Bauer cart in the lane between pastures.

Terrance climbs through the fence and approaches the cart.

He spots lights on inside the paddock, removes a can of spray paint. He sprays black, makes the Bauer logo unrecognizable.

Then, he removes a long strip of fireworks, snakes a coil of them along the grass as he moves back to the truck.

As he climbs into the cab, he tosses a match toward the fireworks. He starts the Bauer truck engine, pulls away.

INT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

SNAPS and POPS. Sparks fly. Kathryn moves to the window.

KATHRYN
What the hell?

She bolts for the door.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - CONTINUOUS

Once again the POPPING ruins the moment. Will and Cari turn.

They break into a run toward the exploding fireworks. The horses in the barn clamor -- spooked in their stalls.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - NIGHT

Seconds later, Will, Cari and Kathryn stomp out embers. Kathryn's flashlight finds the spray-painted cart.

KATHRYN
Who would do...

Will reacts. His heightened sense of hearing, finely tuned now to pick up the slightest nuance from a thundering horse, tunes in - The faintest sound of the Bauer truck engine.

He eyes the now deserted paddock, quickly scans the adjacent pasture. A few horses are turned out for the night.

CARI
What're you..

Will races away, leaves them to contain the firework chain.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - ADJACENT PASTURE - CONTINUOUS

Will races to a horse and hops on bare back. He reverts to his old ways, races across the pasture, urging the horse toward the paddock area, charging directly at the fence.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock AREA - SAME TIME

Terrance eases toward the stalls, produces a switchblade. Hemingway backs into his stall as Terrance draws closer --

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - CONTINUOUS

Will expertly guides the horse at a full gallop with no reins or stirrups. He grabs a handful of the horse's mane and navigates it toward the fence -- in essence, its a jump.

Will sits low, calculates, braces -- jumps the horse over the pasture fence and scrambles to the side of the paddock.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / PASTURE - NIGHT

Cari and Kathryn stomp out embers, run toward the paddock.

INT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / HEMINGWAY'S STALL - CONTINUOUS

Terrance reacts to the voices growing closer. He opens the gate to the stalls, extends his arm with the switchblade --

Seconds later, from the hayloft, Will jumps, lands on Terrance. They roll out of the stall. Hemingway bucks.

The blade flies out of Terrance's hand. They trade punches. Terrance delivers a roundhouse kick that knocks Will over.

Terrance advances, swings wildly and Will ducks each one. He holds himself differently - he's got balance and discipline.

WILL

Trying to make it look random. Who would destroy their own name? Who does that? Just like the accident.

Terrance misses another punch. This time Will collects his arm and subdues him from behind as Kathryn and Cari rush in.

WILL

I was at Skully's that night. I saw how drunk you were when you left.

Kathryn advances, gets in Terrance's face.

KATHRYN

Will. Don't be stupid.
(to Terrance)
Get the hell off my property.

Will releases him with a rough forward shove. Terrance pockets his knife and fixes a menacing glare on Will.

TERRANCE

You watch your mouth.

INT. CHANNEL 4 NEWS ROOM - NIGHT

Will sits opposite Dean Owens. A camera is set up. Dean checks the settings, hits a button and clicks his pen.

DEAN

April 18. I'm with Will Ranck and he's consented to an interview about what he thinks happened the night his mother was killed.

Will draws a breath. Cari cups a hand over his for support. As Will talks, we see the following:

INT. SKULLY'S - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Will drinks. He sees Terrance, drunk, about to leave.

WILL (V.O.)

It a payday Friday at Skully's. I closed the place.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Maggie drives along the familiar deserted road we saw earlier. Headlights, erratic and swerving, approach quickly.

WILL (V.O.)
 We lived here our whole lives. My
 Mom knew the roads. Never drank.
 She did not fall asleep. No way.

Those headlights bear down too quickly, clip Maggie's car. It swerves, slams into the oak tree we saw was damaged earlier.

WILL (V.O.)
 He ran her off the road. At that
 hour? No other cars pass by there.

DEAN (V.O.)
 During the trial we saw all the
 evidence though. Terrance worked
 late. Came in early. Time punches.
 Witnesses. No damaged car.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Quick series of shots shows how things really played out: (a) Terrance doesn't punch out, he winks to his cronies, hops over the counter as we saw him do earlier for coffee.

(b) He pulls the damaged Bauer truck into the loading dock area, works magic with their body shop tools, spray paints, buffs out the evidence. Looks like he's just working hard.

WILL (V.O.)
 Nobody questions the boss's son. He
 has access to everything. Anytime.
 He knows how to fix damaged parts.
 Had access to all the equipment. No
 one would know. He looks like the
 model heir to the family business.

INT. CHANNEL 4 NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Dean snaps off the tape. Will squeezes Cari's hand.

DEAN
 'Preciate the story. Don't know how
 much good it'll do. He can't be
 retried, Dad employs half the
 county. Still, all during that
 trial, he was so smug. If nothing
 else, please know - I believe you.

Will shakes Dean's hand, leaves with Cari.

INT. BAUER INDUSTRIALS / REX BAUER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rex slams down the phone, marches toward Terrance.

REX
What the hell were you thinking?

TERRANCE
I was taking back what's ours.

REX
You sabotaged the Bauer name. My name. On a business I built.

TERRANCE
For now. I'm no kid.

Rex fixes him with a cold stare.

REX
You're right. I want you out of the house by this weekend. You can pick up your last check from Zach. Your work is finished here.

Terrance is practically shoved out the door by his father.

EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM - DAY

Kathryn demonstrates something to Cari in the ring. Will leads Hemingway to the barn. A car drives up, draws looks.

WILL
What the...?

Edward steps out with a grin, luggage is visible in the rear.

EXT. KATHRYN'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Kathryn pours drinks for Will, Cari and Edward. They sit on the deck. Edward looks vibrant. The opposite of the opening.

EDWARD
(continuing a story)
Bottom line, I've sold more paintings in the last four months than I did in the past ten years.

WILL
Must be the condo.

EDWARD
Sold that too. Hell, I can paint
anywhere. Maggie always preached
the things really worth doing can
be done anywhere.

WILL
So, you're moving back?

EDWARD
Somewhere. Haven't decided on a
place but, yeah, it'll be around
here. Thought you could use some of
that money since you lost your
sponsor.

Will falls back against the rail. Blown away. Kathryn steps
forward, puts an arm around Edward.

KATHRYN
I'll say what he can't. That would
be incredible. He's worked his butt
off and I know he'll make you
proud. And if Maggie were here,
she'd tell us all to quit yapping
and start packing.

INT./EXT. CROSS MEADOWS FARM / Paddock Area - Afternoon

SERIES OF SHOTS

Will packs freshly pressed dressage clothes.

Hemingway paws the ground. Morgan, still on crutches, grooms.

Cari leads Yaz into the trailer. Will leads in Hemingway.

Will throws his duffel into his truck, tosses in Cari's.

Tack is packed. Supplies are packed. Yaz darts over a jump.

Will refines his dressage. Cari excels with her flat work.

Edward watches it all in amazement. Kathryn beams. Proud.

KATHRYN
Let's do this.

Kathryn climbs into the trailer. Will opens the door for
Cari. She smiles. Will climbs in and they're on their way.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK - DAY

ESTABLISH the grand scale. The pinnacle of the sport captured within the fences of the largest horse park in the country. Over 100 acres of thoroughbred heaven. Buzzing with activity.

A media tent is set up just outside the main stadium. A female TV HOST records a closed circuit promotional spot.

TV HOST

We're just outside the show ring where hours from now the Rolex will officially get underway with the top riders from all over the world. This is the only four-star event in the United States and riders come from as far as New Zealand to compete with the best in the sport. Last year's winner, Martin Nichols, will be back to defend his title and try to become the first back to back winner in Rolex history.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK - LATER

Kathryn shows Will and Cari the park, greets acquaintances. A networking pro. She works people like Will works pinball.

They enter the main arena. A few riders mill about.

CARI

I can't believe I'm actually here. I've watched it on TV, but it looks much larger in person... it's kind of intimidating, to be honest.

KATHRYN

Nerves are common, even with the most experienced riders. The key is to use it to your advantage -- Channel it into a focused ride.

WILL

You have our schedules yet?

KATHRYN

Not officially, but it'll work just like Jersey Fresh and Fair Hill -- First day is dressage, followed by cross country on the second and jumping the third day. You're competing with the best of the best. It's easy to be intimidated.

(MORE)

KATHRYN (CONT'D)

But here's the thing -- Forget about winning. Forget about the crowds. Just focus on doing your best. The rest will come.

Kathryn shepherds everyone to the exit. Will turns for one more glance around. Determination etched on his face.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / MUSEUM - NIGHT

Edward marvels at the statue of Warhorse. He takes it in with an artist's eye, gaping at the size of the animal.

Will appears behind him, seems to allow the minute and appreciate that his father is actually looking at a horse.

WILL

Mom always thought we'd be here one day. You can bet she's happy.

Edward turns, shrugs. He continues to size up the statue.

EDWARD

You know, it'd take an awfully big canvas to paint this fella.

Will nods, approaches. Hands in pockets. Awkward and tender. Finally, Edward gives Will a gentle arm rub of affection.

EDWARD

Proud of you, son.

Will melts. Water fills his eyes. He stares ahead.

WILL

When you said you were leaving, I..

Will hugs his Dad. Edward shakes his head.

EDWARD

You know what they say about museums. They only hold the past.

WILL

Yeah, but the future comes one day at a time and works its way back here. We can walk away. Create history. Come back and relive it.

EDWARD

I'd like that.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock AREA - DAY

Large crowds have gathered on the sides of a strip near the paddock area. Packs of photographers await at the far end.

Near a tented area, riders emerge in dress clothes with their horses. Horse and rider groomed for presenting the horses in front of the crowd and the vets. They walk, then run next to them as they trot them and turn them in front of the panel.

Roddy Tucker trots Arsenal to rousing APPLAUSE. Roddy eggs on the cheers with gallant confidence.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock AREA - SAME TIME

Will, Cari and Kathryn watch Roddy on a closed circuit TV.

WILL

And Morgan's not there, why?

CARI

Broke up. Look at him. He's a world-class player. Morgan kind of knew but still had to find out for herself. She's fine about it.

Kathryn hands Will his sport coat. He tugs it on, looks uncomfortable. Cari extracts a silk scarf from her box.

WILL

Whoa. I'm not wearing a scarf.

CARI

Hey, we're supposed to make mistakes, remember?

As Cari tries to adjust the scarf for Will, he notices Kathryn's face tighten as she watches the closed circuit screen. Will's eyes follow to the screen, where he sees--

Alexa lead Mr. T down the presentation lane. She appears confident, almost cocky, as she shows Mr. T.

Cari shrugs it off. Kathryn doesn't appear to take it as well. She turns from the screen, focuses on Will's outfit.

WILL

(to Kathryn)

I see the scarf bothers you also.

Kathryn ignores the comment. Applause in the background lets everyone know that Alexa has presented well.

CARI

Kathryn, you knew Alexa had the scores to make it here. It doesn't matter whether she's here with--

KATHRYN

--It does matter! It does matter, because a lot of time and energy was spent crafting her into the rider she turned out to be! She showed no loyalty to me, and certainly not to the two of you! It was never about the team, it was always about Alexa.

(beat)

Reminds me of myself at her age. Hopefully she grows out of it.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / PRESENTATION LANE - MOMENTS LATER

Will is introduced over the loud speakers. Polite applause as Hemingway saunters beside him. Spectators point and comment.

Will trots the lane wearing his sport coat and -- an ascot. He looks self-conscious but more confident with each stride. A vet eyes Hemingway's leg, notes something on his chart.

KATHRYN

Damn.

CARI

Maybe he liked the ascot.

Kathryn can't suppress a chuckle. Cari watches Will finish presenting Hemingway, then backs away to get her horse ready.

MARTIN NICHOLS, 38, is up. A gangly Aussie with the total package. The crowd CHEERS. Fan favorite. Regal and debonair.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(filtered)

Will Ranck has been asked to visit the judges tent with Hemingway.

Everyone watches Martin present his world-class horse. Will brings Hemingway over. A vet gestures for Will to turn him.

On the heels of Martin's showing, over the applause fading--

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Will Ranck and Hemingway are cleared for competition.

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Another fine showing by number one
ranked Martin Nichols with Avalon.

INT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / INTERVIEW LOUNGE - DAY

Will fidgets in a chair, adjusts to having media focused on him. Kathryn and Cari stand off to the side.

A small crowd gathers near the tent. The feel is of something grand going on and this is just a link in a massive chain.

The TV Host completes her introductory remarks, gestures to the microphone on the interview couch for Will to use.

TV HOST

Will, you just made the cut to be here this weekend and only a year ago you were competing in novice events. Has it sunk in yet that you're competing here this week?

WILL

Honestly? No. I'm sure it will when I enter the ring that first time.

TV HOST

So, do you feel added pressure by being a rookie at Rolex?

WILL

It's easy to feel the pressure that comes with being a first time rider, but I have a great support team. Kathryn Brooks, owner of Cross Meadows Farm, Cari Saunders, my teammate, and my Dad. I'd really like to dedicate this weekend to my Mom. Her support and encouragement was there from the start and now, with my Dad here, I just want to go out and have a great ride. For her.

TV HOST

What's your goal here this weekend?

Will grips the microphone. As his words come out, his eyes drift across the landscape of how far he's come and it seems he's talking about himself rather than answering a question.

WILL

My goal? You know, it changes every day.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

I was thinking about Hemingway and how I took him on that course at Fair Hill and he had to answer that first question. He sized it up and took it but no sooner did we clear it than he had to answer another one and twenty more after that. He didn't have any goal other than answering the next question. So, he taught me that important lesson -- only focus on the next question. If you don't handle that one - the rest don't matter, so don't get ahead of yourself.

Will looks over to Kathryn. She nods appreciatively.

WILL

One of my favorite quotes of all time comes from Abraham Lincoln -- He knew a lot about questions. He was never in a comfortable place in his life -- but he was an optimist and he maintained that the best thing about the future is that it only comes one day at a time. Last year, my future was anything but where I'm at right now but it came one day at a time and I'm hoping I have the answers for the questions that are in front of me.

The TV Host shifts to her parting comments as Will sets down the microphone. Kathryn and Cari nod, awed. Who is this guy?

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock Area - Day

Not new and certainly not pristine, the aura that comes from the historic venue is that of a classic, worn playing field. This is Madison Square Garden or the Indy 500 brickyard.

Will walks among the handlers. Alexa greets him with a played-up pose of astonishment. Will shakes his head, keeps moving.

ALEXA

Don't piss your pants in that dressage ring tomorrow. The judges won't like that.

Will passes her, turns. Extends his open arms.

WILL

That it? That the best you got?

ALEXA

I hope Cari does well.

She walks away. Will turns, walks on but is forced to pull up quickly as a cart stops suddenly in front of him.

Martin Nichols steps out. The top rider in the world and his sudden presence in front of Will seems to freeze him.

Will steps forward. Martin looks up, extends his hand.

MARTIN

Martin Nichols.

WILL

(shakes)

Will Ranck.

MARTIN

Yes. Riding...Shakespeare, is it?

WILL

Hemingway

MARTIN

Right. Well, I'm sure you'll learn something here at least.

Will's smile fades. He pulls his hand away, looks off.

WILL

Learning more all the time.

MARTIN

Right. Well, give it the old best shot, eh? I'm just about to check out the footing at sixteen.

Martin pushes past. Will looks deflated. Then, he sees Martin's path, shakes off hurt feelings and trails behind.

A few spectators ask Martin for his autograph. He graciously signs. One poses for a picture. He plays the total gentleman, smiles and makes the spectator the focal point.

Will stands to the side - waits for Martin. When Martin finally gets to the course, he studies a dip before a wide jump. Will draws closer, watches Martin march off steps.

Martin, aware he's being watched, goes into teacher mode:

MARTIN

Done a course walk yet?

WILL
No. Later. My team...

MARTIN
Do it in phases. At different times
of day until you know your time
draw. Gotta catch the sun angles.

WILL
Do you remember your first time?

MARTIN
You always remember your first
time.

WILL
Any advice?

MARTIN
Enjoy the lack of pressure. Come in
dead last, no one will remember
anything other than it was your
first time. If I don't win, there
will be chatter the whole year.

Martin eyes the sun and the footing and makes mental notes.

WILL
Have a good ride.

Martin barely acknowledges his departure, intent on his
scouting. Will strides away. Resolution firming in his eyes.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK - DAY

Establish the stadium, barely filled for dressage.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Good Morning to everyone arriving
for the opening competition of
dressage. The first of the three
day events held here. We welcome
Jordan Groot and her Thoroughbred
cross Winslow to the ring. Jordan
comes to us from the Netherland and
has taken high marks in both Fair
Hill and Jersey Fresh in dressage.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS

Everything is bigger and better than the previous shows --
The quality is unsurpassed. The audience is awed.

The Announcer fades in and out -- Roddy delivers an amazing performance -- only to be outdone by Martin.

There are tears and blunders too. A young female rider's horse spooks on its way to the ring and she is thrown off.

Then, just when the bar seems set at its highest point. Alexa and Mr. T put on a clinic of top professional dressage.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Alexa Hall and Mr. T are quickly establishing themselves as early favorites in this her first Rolex experience. Remarkably, Alexa switched trainers months ago and seems to have found her ideal match. Highest score of the morning goes to Alexa Hall and Mr.

Alexa tips her hat to the judges, and burns a 'take that' grin at Will and Kathryn as she exits the ring.

Kathryn can't hide her disapproval, looks away. Will meets it evenly, not phased. He applauds with the audience. Nods.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / SHOW RING - DAY

Cari and Yaz work through their dressage test. She's in control - doing well but obviously tenuous. Kathryn mouths coaching. Will watches Cari, can't help but smile.

She is all focus. Stiff and calculated. APPLAUSE as she ends and touches her cap to the judges. Kathryn pats Will to move.

KATHRYN

She'll make up for it in cross.

WILL

Any suggestions?

KATHRYN

You can't win it here but you can lose it here. Stay on and get through it. Don't do anything fatal and we're onto our strengths.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / SHOW RING - LATER

VARIOUS SHOTS of amazing dressage. The Announcer carries us through stellar performances but none better than Alexa's.

The scoreboard flickers numbers and names and the event really becomes more about the competition now -- it's real and there's a lot at stake. The pageantry takes a back seat.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

After the break, we'll have the second half of dressage. Will Ranck is set to lead things off.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock Area - Moments Later

Will paces nervously. His face registers something. He looks up, Roddy stands in front of him.

RODDY

Saw you with Cari earlier. If she's anything like Morgan, she ain't gonna help your dressage.

Will laughs. Tension eased. Roddy looks puzzled, hadn't meant it to be funny or to be a compliment.

WILL

'Cause it's all about Roddy, isn't it?

RODDY

In there? You're damn right. Out here? It's about drinking up every last drop life has to offer. No regrets.

WILL

Morgan's fine by the way. Excuse me.

Will leads Hemingway past him. Roddy blinks, shakes his head.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / SHOW RING - DAY

Will bows to the judges as the bell rings for he and Hemingway to begin their dressage test. Kathryn leans forward. Cari and Edward next to her.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Will Ranck and Hemingway making their first Rolex appearance. There's a bit of a dip in male riders this year and Will's first time is a bright spot for the future of the sport for young men.

Will navigates the last turns, holds decent control. Worlds better than we've seen from him do at Cross Meadows Farm.

Will slightly hurries the last turn and an audible sigh can be heard from the informed audience. Edward turns to Cari.

EDWARD

What? What'd he do?

CARI

Same thing I did. It's adrenaline.
Hard to stop. He's still come a
long way.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Will and Cari lead their horses to the field to warm up.
Kathryn reviews the schedule as she walks.

KATHRYN

You're both in the morning session.

CARI

Time to watch the water jump?

KATHRYN

No. It's too far from the start.

CARI

That's the one I need to study.

WILL

Let's go there now.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / WATER JUMP - MINUTES LATER

Will and Cari measure steps as they approach the historic jump in their boots. Kathryn observes from the bleachers. Cari walks the path as she describes it:

CARI

If the line from across the road
brings us straight to here, it
seems like we'd be going too fast
for this dip. I'm thinking of going
wide, showing her the question and
taking it more measured over the
first part into the water.

Will counters, walking a slightly altered course:

WILL

But getting into that water from almost stopping is going to slow you down so much for the second question. Take some of that rush -- remember there's going to be people here cheering and yelling. More than we've ever seen -- and she's going to think she's a pretty big deal and want to show off -- She'll have plenty of jump for the question but don't steer so wide.

Cari traces Will's path, then they traverse the water.

CARI

(after a beat; slow)
We're at friggin' Rolex.

WILL

How cool is this? Right?

She stops, eyes the lunge it will take to jump out of the water. Will inspects the depth as well, after eyeing the question, he lets his vision take in the crowd watching.

WILL

Best thing about the future.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

FOLLOWING WILL. He darts from the gate, attacks the course.

He rides, focused and energized, and the crowd forms a swirl of surreal background. Present but not intimidating.

Will's vision is locked straight ahead. His body positioned to balance off Hemingway's long, fast strides.

He clears the first three jumps and with each one the Announcer raises his voice noting Will's speed and alacrity. We see Martin watching from the sidelines.

Will's focus stays on the course -- a broad grin lighting his face like a Christmas tree.

Kathryn watches, fingers pursed over her mouth. Cari watches with anxious eyes.

Will clears the next few jumps. We get play-by-play from the Announcer. He's doing well. There's a close call but as he completes the first half of the course - still a clear round.

The Announcer gives us the summary of what Will needs to do and Cari departs for the start gate, gets ready.

Edward watches from the log jump. Will's line of vision is narrow like a pinball machine. Between the bumpers.

Will rides with pleasure. For a moment, there's the empty woods and pure silence -- but then, just as quick --

Will approaches the water jump. He moves Hemingway onto the track that he walked with Cari. As he moves through the jump--

WILL (V.O.)
(as if to himself)
What's expected of me here?

He takes each progressively harder jump in the water complex. He barely makes the second and a loud CHEER erupts as he emerges from the water in slow motion -- clear!

Will explodes toward the last few jumps. He checks his time. Martin puts on his helmet, continues to watch Will's ride. Less confidence in his gaze.

Cari closes her eyes, clears her mind before mounting. Edward moves toward the finish area.

Will charges hard. Only three jumps to go -- He clears the first, second then - looks up to take in the crowd - the third jump is close but clear. Only time now --

Will finishes with a glance at his watch and a fist-pump.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Will Ranck finishes just a few
ticks off the optimum time with one
of the highest-scoring first rounds
for a rookie horse-rider
combination in Rolex history.

The scoreboard shows Will in second, behind Martin Nichols.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

FOLLOWING CARI. She digs in and shows poise and control as she clears the first few jumps. No smile. Pure determination.

Will accepts well-wishes from his father but pushes toward the television to follow Cari. He's stopped by Martin.

Martin extends his hand. Will shakes it, continues to the TV.

MARTIN

Looks like we might meet at the stadium tomorrow. No pressure there.

WILL

(off Martin's wink)

I'm just happy to be through my round today. Excuse me.

Will pushes away, speaks to the television showing Cari.

WILL

(to TV)

C'mon, Cari. Easy. Clean lines.

INTERCUT - CARI RIDING WITH WILL WATCHING

Cari approaches the water jump and Will talks her through the approach. As she nails it - Will fist-pumps her success.

Cari sprints toward the last portion of the course. Kathryn makes her way to the finish gate.

Finally, as she clears the last jump, Cari breaks into a smile that reflects the contentment in her heart.

Will greets her as she dismounts. He has his arms up in a victory salute, so she marches forward toward a high five but their arms end up missing each other and they end in a hug.

Alexa passes them as she leads Mr. T out for her run.

ALEXA

Nice ride, Cari.

She rides away, turns her nose from Will. He shakes his head.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / CROSS COUNTRY COURSE - DAY

Alexa bursts onto the course. A wild CHEER from the crowd.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And that ovation is for Alexa Hall who's in a position to challenge Martin Nichols and Will Ranck for the lead going into Day Three with a double clear here.

Alexa surges across jumps and charges the lanes with wild enthusiasm. A pure show woman.

Kathryn stands along the course perimeter. She watches Alexa with her binoculars. Cari and Will ease in next to her.

Now halfway through the course, Alexa pushes Mr. T hard towards a difficult water jump. A surge by the horse, then--

Mr. T slams to a halt before the jump, sending Alexa sprawling into the water. Unhurt, except for her pride, she sits up in the water. Kathryn lowers her binoculars.

KATHRYN

The bigger the talk, the harder the fall...

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

..That refusal eliminates Mr. T from competing in show jumping...

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK - TRAILER AREA - DUSK

Will watches Alexa pack up her trailer. Dejection would be too mild. She's devastated. She slowly tosses tack into her trailer, dabs consistently at her eyes.

If he chose to, he could call out. Will simply walks away.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

Everyone that was spread out over the event is now here. All eyes will be on the horse and rider in the show jumping.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Show jumping day has a majestic feel. Only the top riders have made it through the first two rounds and now, the ultimate goal is within grasp. The first of the Grand Slam victories to the grandest prize in equestrian sports.

Trophies surround the show ring. This is the biggest stage.

INT. RIDER'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Kathryn fixes Will's show jacket and turns him to face the mirror. As she's done since they met, she stands behind him as he examines himself and what he has become in the mirror.

KATHRYN

When we get back, you have to wear this into Skully's.

WILL

I just want to run a clean round.
If I can do that? At this level?
I'll know I have a shot.

INT. CARI'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Cari dresses alone, examines her show clothes in the mirror. She takes a photo from her bag and holds it at her chest.

She stands at the mirror and positions her camera phone to take a selfie. She holds, clicks, then examines her photo --

Six-year old Cari with a blue ribbon from her first horse show on a pony that shows just how young and small she is.

INT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

Will spots Edward scribbling onto a tablet. Martin approaches and taps Will's shoulder, flashes that wink and a grin.

MARTIN

Like I said -- No pressure, eh?

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

ESTABLISH the final test of the event. Horse and rider in harmony through a series of escalating difficult jumps.

Some riders fall as their horses refuse a jump. Others knock down rails. Nerves are evident in some, seemingly not in Roddy as he lights up the ring. Once again, the scoreboard flashes with names and scores and the competition ramps up.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Roddy Tucker has thrown down the gauntlet and challenged the rest of the field to raise their game. With only a few riders remaining, he takes the early lead into this final round. Everyone else will have to be on top of their game if they want to overtake him.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

Cari salutes the judges and navigates the course well. She is calculated and showcases her skills at adapting after a jump. She navigates jumps with ease, seems on track to score well.

Will and Kathryn watch from different perspectives. Both hopeful. Both anxious. Will can't suppress a grin as she nears the end but then, almost as if he jinxed her --

She knocks down a rail, stumbles badly afterward and ends up with a time fault as well.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

A very strong ride from Yaz and Cari Saunders, disappointing at the end but still, I'm sure we'll see this combination back here again. Only three riders remain. The first is James Whitfield on Sirus.

James enters the ring as Martin and Will look on. Will takes in the moment. He's side-by-side, going toe-to-toe with the best rider in the world. He flicks his wrists as we've seen.

Cheers in the background for James. A cue for Martin to leave. A challenging tip of the hat from Martin, and he's off. Will nods, returns a confident smile.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

We now welcome to the main ring, the reigning champion of Rolex, Martin Nichols.

CHEERS, as Martin displays his brilliance on the course. Each jump is fluid, the pacing perfect. An oxer is precise, and he nails the final jump to come in well under optimal time.

Will mounts Hemingway, glances at the scoreboard. Martin sits at the top.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / STADIUM - DAY

Edward puts more work into his drawing. Only now we see it is Will atop Hemingway. He puts it away as Will enters the ring.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And it comes down to this. Rolex first-timer Will Ranck on Hemingway looking to become the youngest winner ever of this prestigious event, but he'll need the ride of his life to overcome our reigning champ, Martin Nichols.

Will nods to the judges and starts off to a hushed crowd. He circles, gathers momentum and approaches the first jump --

Hemingway looks stilted and awkward, almost refuses the first jump then finally clears it with a wobble on the pole.

Collective groans. Kathryn bites her lip. Cari mouths encouragement. Edward fixates on Will, caught up in it.

Will clears two and three but the crowded ring is clearly not suiting Hemingway well. Will adjusts, leans forward.

WILL

(soft)

It's just you and me in the woods.
We're okay.

Hemingway clears the next jump with ease, then the next.

Cheers seem to ignite a fire under Hemingway and he jumps quicker. Will reigns him in a little to avoid jumping early.

And there, in those moments, we see Will help Hemingway with each question -- it's finally not about what happens to him.

Cari claps wildly at an exceptional adjustment. Kathryn's eyes swell with tears of relief and joy.

Will circles the ring with showmanship and poise -- not only a completely different rider but a completely different man.

He attacks these last three jumps with pure determination. The first he soars over -- has only a stride to adjust.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

An exceptional ride from Will Ranck
and Hemingway. Only two jumps left.

The clock and leader board show in real time how dangerously close Will is to a time fault. The next to last jump is cleared then time slows as Will approaches the final jump.

WILL (V.O.)

(as spoken earlier)

If I can do that, I know I'll have
a shot.

Will locks in on the last jump. The crowd rises. Will positions Hemingway. Cari steps forward. Edward leans in.

Kathryn closes her eyes as Will launches and --

The pole teeters, rolls in the cup, almost out then -- it falls back in as Hemingway lands. The crowd ROARS.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And there it is - a double clear
from Will Ranck and Hemingway. Such
a fine showing from this young man.

Will fist pumps then pats Hemingway's neck in stride as they circle toward the paddock area. Bliss on Will's face.

INT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock AREA - DAY

Cari charges him and, awkwardness aside, goes right for a kiss. Will embraces her, then Kathryn joins the group hug.

INT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / SHOW RING - DAY

MONTAGE. The announcer lets us know that Martin edges Will out as the winner of the Rolex Three Day event.

We intercut with shots of the celebration in the Paddock Area. The awards ceremony goes on. Top riders are lauded.

Backstage, the riders converse. Trophies are presented. Martin receives a Rolex for his win. Will and Martin embrace.

As Will stands, with Hemingway behind him as always, Cari and Kathryn beside him, as they have been, and Edward -- off in the distance but still in the picture -- a snapshot is taken.

The picture taken, Will looks at Cari. Her smile lights up the ring. Will's eyes brighten.

INT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / Paddock AREA - LATER

Will, Cari and Kathryn gather the last of their tack. The photographer comes over and shows them the picture taken earlier. This is prize enough. A snapshot of the day a dream was realized -- a life was changed and new chapter begun.

EXT. KENTUCKY HORSE PARK / MUSEUM - DAY

Kathryn's trailer pulls onto the road, revealing that Will has posted this picture on the area where future awards await. His gesture to the moment and a ride well taken.

FADE OUT.