

JOCKEY

Written by

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EXT. RACETRACK - PRE-DAWN

Turf Paradise. A racetrack that has seen its glory days come and go. The starting gates are rusted. The grandstands need paint.

But at sunrise, the track is filled with life. Jockeys exercising horses of every color at every speed. Trainers watching from the rails, gossiping.

Off by themselves, two older jockeys -- JACKSON SILVA and LEO BROCK -- watch it all from the rail. They're admiring the horses, critiquing the riders. Other jockeys go out of their way to greet them.

LEO

Man, they got a bunch of horses out here this morning.

JACKSON

Yeah they do.

LEO

Early too. I think these trainers trying to be slick. Work these horses in the dark.

Jackson laughs.

A horse gallops by so smooth it catches Leo's attention.

LEO (CONT'D)

Look at that one there. Looks like he's running downhill.

They admire the horse as it passes.

JACKSON

Hey, you seen that new kid that's been training over at Jerry's barn?

LEO

Nope. Can he horseback?

JACKSON

Yeah, he can ride all right. Name's Gabriel.

Leo considers what Jackson might actually be asking.

LEO

You'll be alright. You know them young ones, they come and they go. They don't hang around too long.

Jackson looks away down the track.

LEO (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

JACKSON  
It's just, you know it just ain't  
the same anymore, Leo.

LEO  
Yeah, you're getting old.

JACKSON  
We're both getting old.

LEO  
Yeah, but I'm like wine though. I'm  
getting better.

Jackson laughs. He starts walking away.

LEO (CONT'D)  
Where you going?

JACKSON  
We've gotta start work at some  
point, Leo.

But Leo just turns back to watch the track.

TITLE CARD

EXT. RUTH'S BARN - SUNRISE

Jackson is walking back through the barns as the sky turns slowly to day.

His limp is rough as he walks toward Ruth's barn and he slowly corrects it, brings it smooth.

Jackson steps up to Ruth's barn. The horses sticking their heads out to greet him. He pulls a single cigarette from his shirt pocket and lights it.

RUTH WILKES appears down the shedrow, carrying an empty feed tub, shaking out a saddle pad.

RUTH  
Morning.

JACKSON  
Mornin' Ruth.

RUTH  
You got one more of those?

He offers her the smoke.

JACKSON  
Go ahead and finish it.

RUTH  
You sure?

JACKSON  
I was just warming my lungs up.

We get a good look at Ruth now, taking stock of her barn as she talks. She's someone who can keep track of ten horses while talking to a jockey. Someone who looks to be in her 50's or her 30's, depending on the light.

RUTH  
Did you watch the replay of the  
7th?

She starts cooking some oats in a bucket.

JACKSON  
I did.

RUTH  
And? What do you think's going on  
with Jupiter?

She walks into the tack room as she talks.

RUTH (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I'm listening...

JACKSON  
You're right, that's what's going  
on.

She sticks her head out and smiles.

RUTH  
I was what?

JACKSON  
You were right, he's just lazy. He  
should've at least hit the board.

She disappears again.

RUTH (O.S.)

I knew it! That horse is a barrel horse. He's got no business on the track.

JACKSON

Or a pony horse.

She steps out with a cup of coffee.

RUTH

But he bites! Do you want any coffee?

JACKSON

Did you make it or did Benny make it?

RUTH

I did. Fresh pot yesterday.

JACKSON

I'm good.

She smiles.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

So what are you gonna tell the owner? Is that a Caldwell horse?

RUTH

Yep. I've tried to tell him as many ways as I know how that his horse can't run. But he's an expert.

(yells across the barn)

Benny!

(to Jackson)

So I'm going to say, tough break, Tanner. How about we try him in the 250 next week?

Jackson laughs.

Ruth steps back into her tack room, pours some coffee and steps out as Benny (17) appears out of nowhere.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(to Benny)

How's Rambo?

Benny speaks in *Spanish* as Ruth talks to him in English.

BENNY

*He's fine. Ate all his alfalfa last night.*

RUTH

Good. Did Angel come to work today?

BENNY

*No. He got arrested last night.*

RUTH

Arrested? What for this time?

Benny shrugs. She sighs.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I guess I'm cleaning stalls today.  
Who's ready first?

BENNY

*Dublin and Penny both left a little feed in their tubs.*

RUTH

Got it. Is Cisco still coughing?

BENNY

*A little.*

RUTH

So just the walker for him today.  
Just ten minutes. How about the others?

BENNY

*Still eating.*

RUTH

Alright. Get Dublin ready.  
(to Jackson)  
Another day.

Jackson pulls on his helmet.

JACKSON

Could be the one we make our millions.

She smells the air.

RUTH

Nope.

They laugh.

She checks her whiteboard that has the day's plan for each horse. Jackson follows.

RUTH (CONT'D)

So just jog Dublin two times today.  
But wait until I get out there this  
time. I wanna take a look at that  
right leg.

JACKSON

All right, I'll gallop him just a  
little.

RUTH

No. Not yet.

JACKSON

He's pretty solid on it. He feels  
good.

RUTH

I'm still worried about that  
pastern.

JACKSON

Yeah, but if we don't start pushing  
him at some point--

RUTH

(sharp)  
Jackson. Just... Keep him tight,  
okay? I'll be right out.

He nods. Takes the direction.

EXT. TRACK - MORNING

Jackson is on the back of Dublin now, walking toward the track. The horse is excited in the early morning -- fidgeting, tossing his head. Jackson calms the horse, speaking softly as they walk.

EXT. BARNS - A LITTLE LATER

After morning workouts, Jackson walks through the backside, greeting other jockeys, trainers.

The barns are bustling now with movement, almost a small town contained in itself. Jackson is greeted like a legend by almost everyone who passes.

JACKSON  
How you doing this morning?

Someone passes on a golf cart.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Another day in paradise, ain't that  
right?

An old friend rides a horse over to Jackson. He has a new horse he wants to introduce him to.

Jackson talks to the horse as much as the rider.

CUT TO:

EXT. RACETRACK / STARTING GATES - AFTERNOON

Now in the starting gates -- the tense final moments before a race. The horse is jostling: nervous, excited.

Jackson stares straight ahead down the track. Completely still atop the horse.

Next to him a young jockey is not so still. He steals a quick glance at Jackson, then looks ahead.

Then all is still. Quiet for just a moment.

GATE MAN (O.S.)  
Locked up!

The gates slam open, a bell rings and the horses fly away down the track.

INT. JOCK'S ROOM - LATER

The race is over now. The tenor of the jock's room (*the locker room for the jockeys*) is calm, relaxed.

The jockeys from the last race strip their muddy silks (*racing uniforms*) while other jockeys lounge, waiting for their next race. Each prepares in their own way: wrapping wrists and ankles -- praying -- puking to shed a few more pounds.

We move through the jock's room and finally land on Jackson at his locker, regaling five other jockeys with an old story.



JACKSON

...so we're coming into the final stretch and there's Jerry Lawhorne, far and away ahead of all of us. This is his race, no doubt about it. The rest of us are just hoofing for second. But he was on a horse called Diamond Dash and I knew a thing or two about old Diamond Dash -- I used to breeze that horse when he was a two year old for--

SCOTT

--Was that Pete Williamson's horse?

JACKSON

You know Pete never had a horse of that caliber.

(thinks)

It was Rooney Garcia. Down in Houston.

SCOTT

Ah yeah...

JACKSON

(back to his story)

So the thing with Diamond Dash -- you couldn't use a stick with that horse. As soon as you did, he'd just stop. Right there on the track.

Jackson smiles.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

So I was on a horse called Luna Bonita and I get her to give everything she's got to get up there close to Jerry and when I get within earshot, I yell... GO JERRY! I'M COMING FOR YOU! And without even thinking he popped that horse once and that was all she wrote.

All the jockeys laugh.

CARL

(now in a new silk)

But wait, I thought you said you won but you lost.

JACKSON

So check this. Now the race was mine. Wide open. I'm pushing Luna and she was a smart horse, but she wasn't a winner. By the time we hit the last furlong she was just about gassed and I had three others coming up on me. I knew if I had it, it was gonna be by a nose. So we get right up there, not ten yards from the finish... and boom, Luna stumbles. She righted herself but I was ready for anything but that. I went flying off right at the finish... In the photo it looks like I'm running across the line ahead of the damn horse.

More laughter.

CARL

Bullshit. No way.

LEO

He ain't lying. I've seen the photo.

SCOTT

So how'd you land?

JACKSON

*How'd I land?* Landed my picture in the Cincinnati paper.

The other jockeys laugh.

INT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Jackson's home -- such as it is -- is an RV trailer just outside the gates of the racetrack. Not a lot to speak of inside. The only PHOTO on the wall is one of him as a baby, his grandfather holding him up on a horse.

He prepares his dinner for the night: a few baby carrots, half an apple.

He steps into the living room and sits down for the last nightly ritual before he sleeps. He hooks his chest up to a muscle stimulator with electrodes, wires running to a machine.

Then he covers his knees and his shoulder with ice packs and eats his dinner.

INT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - PRE-DAWN

Jackson wakes slowly. He sits on the edge of his bed. Stretches out each arm painfully. His shoulders. His neck.

His right hand is moving slower than anything else. He takes up his riding stick and works it through the air. But nothing's clicking.

His right hand is TREMBLING like palsy. He takes it in his other hand to stop it.

He looks around. As if there might be someone to tell his worries to.

INT. VETERINARIAN OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Jackson stands in a dark office while RONNIE -- the track veterinarian -- examines him with a portable x-ray meant for horses.

RONNIE

Stand very straight and still. Take a deep breath and hold it.

Jackson breathes in deep. Ronnie clicks a button, sets the portable x-ray aside.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

OK.

Jackson exhales.

An image of Jackson's spine takes form on the laptop. Ronnie stares at it.

JACKSON

Well? Is it a boy or a girl?

Ronnie doesn't smile.

RONNIE

You've done some damage here, Jackson. You need to get yourself to a doctor.

JACKSON

You are a doctor.

RONNIE

You know what I mean.

JACKSON

Look. You know what bones are supposed to look like, right?

RONNIE

Yeah, that's why I...  
(considers how to say it)  
How many times have you broken your back?

JACKSON

I don't know. Three... I think.

Ronnie lets Jackson's own answer settle on him.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Ronnie. Listen. I know it's bad, ok? I just need a gut check from you. Is it real bad? Or just normal bad?

RONNIE

If this was an x-ray for one of these horses, I'd tell the trainer to load him up and let him live out his days in a pasture.

JACKSON

Yeah, but--

RONNIE

I wouldn't clear him for another race.

Jackson is quiet now.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Listen. I have a friend, a good doctor, a spinal doctor. If you're having trouble with finances or whatever he can help out. But I need you to go.

Jackson is still quiet.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Jackson.

JACKSON

No, it's not your fault. Here you go.

Jackson offers him a twenty.

RONNIE

No. It's fine. Don't worry about it. We're good.

JACKSON

Alright, doc. Whatever you say.

RONNIE

Take care, Jackson.

JACKSON

(to another jockey)  
You're up, A.J.

A.J. (O.S.)

Take it easy, Jacks!

EXT. RACETRACK - DAY

A deep rumbling sound grows. An ancient sound. Like thunder. It gets stronger, closer. Then a group of horses flies by camera in a race.

MOMENTS LATER.

All the jockeys walk back toward the jocks' room after the race. Most are covered in mud. Valets take their saddles as they pass.

A young jockey passes Jackson, walking fast.

JACKSON

(annoyed)  
Careful with them gaps, you're gonna clip heals.

The young jockey ignores him.

Ruth steps onto the track and falls into step with Jackson.

RUTH

That's alright. Dublin hates being on the outside. How was he on the turns?

JACKSON

A little soft. Still stutter-stepping in the gates like friggin Fred Astaire.

RUTH

Yeah, I don't think we're ever gonna break him of that.

JACKSON

China Cat's up next?

RUTH

Yeah. You're going to have a time with him today. He almost kicked out my fucking teeth this morning.

She smiles a bit at that for some reason.

JACKSON

At least he's keeping it interesting. I like 'em feisty.

RUTH

Well, he'll have the energy. If you want to get him out first I think he'll last.

She stops him. Asks him something she doesn't want to.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Listen, Dublin's owners are here and she really wants to meet you. Would you just come and say hello?

JACKSON

Ruth...

RUTH

Come on man, she's been on my case for like two weeks. Just say hi.

JACKSON

Fine...

Dublin's owners wait for them by the rail. Dressed better than anyone else out here. They're all smiles as Ruth approaches with Jackson

RUTH

Here he is!

OWNER

Hey what happened out--?

JACKSON

Howdy.

Jackson doesn't even slow down, just waves as he walks past. Ruth tries to save face.

RUTH

He's gotta change right now. He's got another race...

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson sits at his locker, pulling off his silk and sliding into some jeans.

He sees the young jockey from the last race across the room. The young jockey's leg is bouncing as he stares at the floor, nervous for another race.

INT. TRACK RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

All the races are run. The restaurant back by the barns is full of jockeys eating their one big meal at the end of the week, talking shop with their agents and trainers.

Jackson walks in, looks around. Nods to a few people he knows. Accepts some congratulations.

Then he sees the young jockey sitting in the corner by himself, a heaping plate of food before him. Jackson steps over.

JACKSON

Hey. Mind if I sit down?

GABRIEL

Sure.

JACKSON

You're Gabriel, right? Boullait?

GABRIEL

Yeah.

JACKSON

How's your season going?

GABRIEL

Pretty good. Got a couple good mounts. I'm just trying to get some wins under my belt. Get me a agent.

JACKSON

Ah, I wouldn't worry about getting yourself an agent.

(MORE)

JACKSON (CONT'D)

When you're ready for one, they'll come find you. Right now, you just focus on a good trainer, do right by 'em, you'll be just fine.

Jackson calls over his shoulder for the waitress.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Gina. Hey Gina, can I get--

But she doesn't respond.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

(to Gabriel)

Her name's Gina right?

GABRIEL

I don't know.

The waitress shuffles by.

JACKSON

Gina...

No response.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I guess not. So whereabouts are you from anyway?

GABRIEL

I was born in the south, but I'm from outside of San Diego really. Why?

JACKSON

It's just... I used to know someone with your last name. What are you doing here?

GABRIEL

I'm hungry.

JACKSON

No, that's not-- Here in Phoenix. What are you doing here in Phoenix?

GABRIEL

I know a trainer. He said he'd give me work if I--



JACKSON

--But didn't I see you in Remington  
back in June? And then in Houston  
before that?

Gabriel is quiet.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Look I'm not trying to bust your  
balls. I'm just trying to  
understand, you know, the chances  
of us riding in the exact same  
circuit...

GABRIEL

What's the question?

JACKSON

I'm just saying, if you need help,  
fine, but when I got trainers  
saying that you're asking about me  
and I see you at one track after  
another, but you never talk  
directly to me, then that makes me--

GABRIEL

You're my dad.

JACKSON

Do what?

GABRIEL

I'm... I'm your son.

This stops Jackson cold.

Gabriel just stares at him, like he didn't mean to let it  
slip.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)

I didn't know how to say...

Then Jackson starts laughing hysterically.

JACKSON

(still laughing)

Oh, man. Shit. Boy you stopped my  
heart there for a second. Hey did  
Leo put you up to this? He did,  
didn't he?

But Gabriel is silent. It's not a joke.

Jackson slowly stops laughing.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
(sober)  
Kid. You serious with me?

Gabriel's silence says yes.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Your mom's Ana Boullait?

Gabriel nods tentatively.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Look, I don't know what she told  
you... but that's not possible. I'm  
not gonna get into the particulars  
of it, but you and I, we are *not*  
related.

GABRIEL  
My mom doesn't know that I came to  
talk to you.

JACKSON  
I don't care if she does. That's  
not the point.

GABRIEL  
I just wanted to meet you. I wanted  
to talk--

JACKSON  
Okay you wanted to talk? Talk about  
what?

GABRIEL  
I don't know. Talk about, like we  
both--

JACKSON  
I don't have anything to give you.

GABRIEL  
I'm not asking you for anything--

JACKSON  
I barely have enough money for  
myself. I'm sure you probably  
caught wind of my winnings and came  
to some conclusions, but if you'd  
been doing this for any amount of  
time you'd know that by the time  
your earnings get carved up,  
there's not a whole lot left for  
the jockey.

GABRIEL  
I'm not asking for money.

JACKSON  
Good. Cause I ain't got nothing  
else to give you. I can't tell you  
which tracks you can and can't go  
on, and I really don't care, but  
don't go around here telling people  
you're my kid. It makes me look  
like an asshole. And you know what  
I don't need?

GABRIEL  
...

JACKSON  
To look like an asshole.

Gabriel is just staring at him. Somewhere between wounded and  
angry.

GABRIEL  
(insistent)  
I'm not asking for anything.

JACKSON  
Good. Then we're on the same page.

Jackson stands and drops some cash on the table.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Here, kid. Breakfast is on me.

Jackson walks out of the restaurant without saying goodbye to  
anyone.

EXT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - SUNSET

Jackson sits outside his trailer, watching the sun go down,  
smoking a cigarette.

The stars are peeking out between the trees. He sighs heavy.

EXT. RUTH'S BARN - MORNING

Jackson comes back from exercising his last horse of the  
morning: Rio Bravo.

Ruth meets him at the barn entrance before he can slip away.

RUTH

Hey! You got one more in you? I've got a new one I want you to look at.

JACKSON

That roan gelding from JB's?

RUTH

Nope. Brand new.

JACKSON

Can it, uh, wait until tomorrow?

RUTH

I've been wanting to tell you about her so bad, but I was worried I would jinx it if I talked to you about her.

She's having trouble containing her excitement. He smiles a little.

JACKSON

Sure.

EXT. EXERCISE PEN - MOMENTS LATER

In an open pen a horse is wheeling freely. No reins no halter. The horse jumps and rolls in the soft sand.

It's a beautiful creature. A horse that would've been painted on cave walls long ago.

Jackson stops when he gets close. He can only stare.

RUTH

I just brought her out from the farm. This'll be her maiden year.

JACKSON

...

RUTH

Well?!

JACKSON

I mean... she's perfect. She looks like she knows it too.

RUTH

She's always had that look.

JACKSON

Who told you about this horse?

RUTH

She's mine. I bought her at a yearling sale for next to nothing. Nobody wanted her. Her legs were too long, her head was way too big. But I saw her in the stall and I just knew, she was...

(loses the words)

It was the way she watched the world. Everybody said I was crazy for spending anything on her, they said I should send her to the rodeo.

JACKSON

(almost to himself)

But you knew...

RUTH

Well, we'll see.

JACKSON

What's her name?

RUTH

Dido's Lament.

JACKSON

Out of Russo's Lamentation?

RUTH

And Dido's Mercy.

Dido's Lament stops a moment to look out across the track, as if she's waiting for something. Then goes back to pawing the sand.

JACKSON

Well can she run?

RUTH

Only one way to find out.

Jackson smiles. Pulls on his helmet.

JACKSON

(to Dido's Lament)

You ready?

EXT. RACETRACK - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson runs Dido's Lament around the track in the late morning light. We experience this all through his POV: gliding down the track as if on another plane of reality.

If there's any way to convey the magic that he feels in this moment, the music and the light and the poetry of slow motion come close.

EXT. RUTH'S BARN - A LITTLE LATER

Ruth washes Dido's Lament with a sponge, talking softly as she does. The horse doesn't seem tired in the least.

Jackson just stares.

RUTH

Okay, Benny.

Benny leads Dido back to her stall.

JACKSON

She's like a swan with teeth.

Ruth laughs.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I haven't been on a horse like that... in a long time.

RUTH

I know she can run... But is she a winner?

JACKSON

If there's any justice in this world... What race are you putting her in first? Mile and an eighth?

RUTH

No, I don't want to take her that long. Not on her first one.

JACKSON

She'll win it. I guarantee you.

RUTH

Yeah, but I want her to win it by a mile. Give her confidence at seven furlongs. And then we'll stretch her out. Build her stamina. And then...

JACKSON  
Futurity.

RUTH  
(smiles)  
Futurity.

Jackson's mind is running. It seems to go somewhere dark.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
What?

JACKSON  
Ruth. You know as soon as I clock  
out you're gonna have every young  
jockey lining up outside your barn.  
I don't wanna...  
(thinks of how to say it)  
I don't have any expectations. I  
know you've been waiting a long  
time for a horse like this.

RUTH  
Jackson. We've come this far  
together, right?

Jackson tries to stifle a smile.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
But we gotta be serious about it.  
You and I've gotten a little...  
comfortable these last few years.

JACKSON  
Yep. I've got some weight to work  
off. But I swear I'll get it down.  
Don't worry about me.

RUTH  
If we're gonna do this, we can't  
leave anything to chance.

JACKSON  
No ma'am.

EXT. RACETRACK / GRANDSTANDS - LATE AFTERNOON

It's the long part of the afternoon where most jockeys are  
napping, trying to forget they're hungry.

But Jackson is on the stairs of the grandstands, running  
stadiums. One after another.

When he gets to the top of another round, he trips and catches himself just before he face-plants.

He turns over and sits there, trying to catch his breath a moment. Then he notices: HIS HAND IS TREMBLING AGAIN.

It takes a while to stop this time.

He stares out at the empty track. It feels like a lonely place.

Finally he stands, pushes himself up the stairs again.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

A tall scale from another era stands next to the showers in the jocks' room. Jackson steps onto it, waits for the numbers to settle.

When they finally do, he fiddles with it. Like it might be stuck. But the scale is true. He steps away, shaking his head in disgust.

INT. TRACK CHURCH - LATER

Jackson steps into the church on the back of the track. A group of jockeys sit in a circle, talking. Having coffee. They've been here a while.

They give Jackson a hard time about being late.

He settles into the group and they resume their conversation, It slowly reveals itself to be a support group of sorts where they talk about the joys and struggles of their lives.

***The following was not written but was spoken by real jockeys in their own words.***

MARTÍN

I think the quarter horses are gonna run with twenty-eight--

MIKE

One twenty-eight, yeah. Because they were saying that because there's so many taller riders now and bigger riders that have to cut weight -- they're cutting so much weight that when they do go down there's nothing protecting their bones. And that's why so many of us are getting hurt now.



SCOTT

Yeah. You know, when that gate opens... we got one job and that's to try to win the race. And if I feel like I'm on something that I can't try on, then I don't want to ride it.

Martín speaks haltingly.

MARTÍN

I got dropped in a quarter horse race. Shattered my femur, my right femur, broke all the ribs on the front and back, broke three more on the other side. Punctured both lungs. And that's what took me exactly nine months to come back.

SCOTT

That's a long time to be living on the disability. The two hundred a week.

MARTÍN

Yep. Especially when you have kids, you know. And you have to... Even though the first two or three months I was hurt, especially the little ones, they're three and five, they didn't want no part of me going back and ride.

SCOTT

They don't want their daddy hurt.

MARTÍN

No.

MIKE

I was on a quarter horse, rode her before the race I had just won on her... Came out of the gates, was in front, and as we were coming on to the main part of the track she stumbled and, well, she had a really sensitive mouth. So when I go to pick her up she just tosses her head and jerks me right over her head.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

Runs right over the top of me and broke my nose in three places, my left eye socket, my upper jaw on both sides, fractured the back of my skull back here and I had a bleed on my brain. I can't smell or taste anything now because of that.

The jockeys all nod to each other on the shared pain.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Yeah, the only thing I can smell is like a fire, and I can taste something that's burnt. I can't taste nothing else.

SCOTT

Do they think it could come back?

MIKE

They said it could, but it's gonna take another hit to my head to make it come back. So I was like, I'll live without it.

All the jockeys laugh.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I figured the best way to get over my fears was to get back on the same horse. I got back on her and worked her and then rode her in a race. Everything went smooth. I didn't ride her again after that...

The jockeys laugh again.

Jackson can only listen. Not ready yet to open up.

EXT. JERRY MEYER'S BARN - ANOTHER DAY

Jackson is walking on the backside and sees Gabriel pushing a wheelbarrow out of a rundown barn, adding to a manure pile the size of a shed.

Jackson argues with himself over approaching him.

Then finally decides to walk over to him.

Gabriel sees him approaching and stops. Steels himself.

JACKSON  
 (casually)  
 Jerry's got you cleaning stalls,  
 huh?

Gabriel pushes the wheelbarrow right past him.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
 Make sure to count every dollar he  
 gives you. He was counterfeiting  
 bills a few years back. Tens  
 mostly.

Gabriel pauses.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
 Listen. About the other morning. I  
 don't... I'm not really... It's  
 just not true, you know. I don't  
 know what your mama told you but  
 she was... ah hell, we were all  
 pretty wild back then, you know.  
 And that timeline just wouldn't add  
 up.

Gabriel just looks back at the barn, trying to hide what he's  
 feeling.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
 How many, uh, how many stalls you  
 got left?

GABRIEL  
 About a dozen. Then I have to rake  
 down the shedrow and spray it down.

JACKSON  
 Well listen, I've got to work out.  
 I'm carrying a little extra weight.  
 You want to join me?

After some hesitation...

GABRIEL  
 Yeah, sure. Let me just finish up  
 here.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - LATER

Gabriel sits on an equicisor (*a fake horse used for training*)  
 with Jackson standing beside him. The TV is playing races in  
 front of them. A race is about to begin.

JACKSON

Alright get ready. Let's see your stance.

Gabriel crouches into his racing position.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

OK hang on hang on. Let's just start back down.

Gabriel sits back on the fake horse.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Let me see your grip.

Gabriel takes the reins.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Is that your starting position? That's the one you like?

Gabriel nods. Jackson adjusts his grip on the reins.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

You want to make sure you have enough space to grab that mane. Then you're not falling back on the jump. And then if you double up these reins, you'll have more control. Won't have to fidget with the reins so much.

GABRIEL

Got it.

JACKSON

OK. Let's go.

Gabriel stands back in racing position and Jackson starts to move the neck of the equicisor up and down as if it's picking up speed. He guides Gabriel through an imagined race.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Get ready, you're gonna come into that final turn! Lean into it. Let him feel that weight on that left shoulder, there you go, not too much, cause he might throw ya. There you go.

Gabriel's entire body starts to tremble from the pain.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Make sure you get low. Use that head to block that air coming across. There you go. There you go, Coming down the final stretch! Let him feel you pushing on his neck. Tell him to move. And crossing the finish line! Boom!

Gabriel collapses back onto the fake horse, catching his breath.

GABRIEL

Ahh shit.

JACKSON

How was that?

GABRIEL

Alright.

JACKSON

Be that easy on the day.

Gabriel laughs.

GABRIEL

My fuckin' knee.

JACKSON

You riding with a bum knee? I won't tell nobody. Everybody's got something around here.

GABRIEL

It's just my ACL, I tore it. It pops out of the socket sometimes.

Jackson just nods. Nothing to say to that.

EXT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - EVENING

Jackson and Gabriel are exercising back at Jackson's trailer, jump rope first.

This is easy for Gabriel. He jumps rope forward, backwards. Double-time, triple-time.

Jackson is trying to keep up. His feet get caught in his rope.

JACKSON

I'm taking a break.

Jackson rests in his chair while Gabriel keeps jumping rope. He pulls out a weathered deck of cards.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
You play poker?

GABRIEL  
Yeah.

JACKSON  
You any good?

Jackson shuffles the deck.

GABRIEL  
I'm alright.

JACKSON  
Well here's another game for you.

Jackson shoots the whole deck out onto the ground.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
There. Pick 'em up. Keep your back straight. 52 cards.

Gabriel, back straight, squats down, picking up one card at a time. His focus matches what we saw on the equicisor.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
There you go. One at a time. Keep your back straight. When you're on that horse you're gonna be doing the exact same thing.

Gabriel gets through as many squats as he can. He trembles as he stands up straight.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Alright. Good. Looks like you're ready to run now.

EXT. TRACK - EVENING

Jackson and Gabriel jog the track.

Jackson falls behind. Gabriel looks back, still jogging.

GABRIEL  
What happened?!

INT. JOCKS' ROOM / STEAM ROOM - LATER

Jackson has dragged an exercise bike into the steam room. He times Gabriel on the bike, both pouring sweat.

JACKSON  
Works better when you keep them  
legs moving.

Jackson is jogging in short circles, watching his stopwatch.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Alright, you're good.

Gabriel practically falls off the bike. Jackson hops on and starts pedaling furiously.

GABRIEL  
I'm gonna go get some water.

JACKSON  
Nope. Nooo.

GABRIEL  
???

JACKSON  
You drink some water, you're gonna  
undo all that work you just did.  
You wanna do that?

Gabriel groans.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Suck on some ice cubes. Spit em out  
when you're halfway done.

Gabriel groans collapses into the floor. Grabs a handful of ice cubes from a bucket.

A LITTLE LATER.

Finished now, Gabriel steps onto the tall scale in the jocks' room. Jackson watches. Gabriel smiles.

JACKSON  
Oh yeah? How'd you do?

GABRIEL  
I cut three pounds.

JACKSON

Three pounds... That's a good  
afternoon.

Gabriel steps off, heads to the showers.

Jackson steps on the scale, watches the numbers float around  
and finally settle.

**122.4**

GABRIEL (O.S.)

How'd you do?

Jackson stares at the scale.

JACKSON

Not so good... Well, see you around  
kid.

Jackson leaves without another word.

INT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Jackson has just showered. He's drying his hair with a towel,  
looking in the mirror. He inspects his hairline. The skin on  
his cheeks.

He sees the toilet bowl behind him in the mirror. He  
considers it.

Then he bends down and in one smooth motion, forces himself  
to throw up.

It comes easy. But painfully.

He retches everything up. Mostly water.

He hangs on the toilet bowl a moment.

INT. TRACK RESTAURANT - ANOTHER DAY

Jackson finds Ruth pouring over her TRAINING LOG. What horses  
are fit. What vitamins they need. It's a maze of information  
that only she could understand.

She has a half-eaten plate of breakfast next to her papers.

Jackson sits down.



RUTH  
(of the food)  
Hey! Sorry, you want me to toss  
this while we talk?

JACKSON  
Naw. I still like the smell of it.

Ruth smiles.

RUTH  
(of Dido's Lament)  
How was she this morning?

JACKSON  
She's from another planet. The good  
news is we're not gonna have to  
teach her anything. You just keep  
her healthy and point her down the  
track.

RUTH  
What's the bad news?

JACKSON  
The bad news is, we're not gonna be  
able to take all the credit when  
she wins the futurity.

She laughs.

RUTH  
I can be ok with that.

Jackson is quiet. His mind elsewhere.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
How you doing, Jacks?

JACKSON  
Real good. I'm feeling good.

Ruth looks for how to ask more.

RUTH  
Is there anything else going on?

JACKSON  
I don't... What do you mean?

RUTH  
I mean, are you feeling all right?

JACKSON

(getting testy)

Why don't you just tell me what you're driving at?

RUTH

I just... You're leaning off to your left in the saddle. You're fidgeting with your reins more than I've ever seen you. You seem tense when you're in the gates--

JACKSON

Tense?

RUTH

Benny said you tripped the other morning coming out of a stall.

JACKSON

Well fuck Benny. And you've never tripped?

RUTH

Man, just tell me what's going on.

JACKSON

Look, I'd tell you if there was something to tell. It's just... It's just wear and tear.

RUTH

We've always been straight with each other.

JACKSON

(sharp)

Then why are you riding me?

(calmer)

Look, I know I'm not in the same shape as these young cats. And I don't have any illusions about how long I can keep this up. But I still got a good couple years left in me.

RUTH

I don't give a shit about those younger jockeys. I'm not comparing you. Nobody knows a horse like you do, Jackson. I just, you know, if I see something, I gotta say it, so...

Ruth stops pushing. Sees it's going nowhere.

RUTH (CONT'D)	JACKSON
Hey, I just want to know	(sharp)
you're alright--	Know what?

Jackson softens. They both sit there awkwardly a moment.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
 Alright then. I've got some errands  
 to run.

RUTH  
 (sharp)  
 OK.

Ruth watches him walk out.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM / STEAM ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Jackson sits woozy in the sweatbox. Leo's voice is fading in from the background.

Jackson tries to blink into focus. Leo is speaking but his words are OUT OF SYNC with his mouth.

Leo is saying something about his time in jail. What it taught him.

Jackson dozes in and out.

LEO  
 Jackson. Hey, Jackson!

Leo tosses an ice cube across the room. It snaps Jackson back to reality.

LEO (CONT'D)  
 You up? You gotta go get yourself  
 some potassium or something. You're  
 gonna get someone hurt out there if  
 you fall off cause you're too weak  
 to ride.

EXT. TRACK - EVENING

Jackson stands alone in the middle of the track. It's just him, the birds, and the fading light of day.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - RACE DAY

Jackson is sitting at his locker. His hand starts shaking. He watches it, trying to will it to stop, then he grabs hold of it.

He wraps his wrists in med-wrap for the next race.

The TV is piping in races live from the track. A few jockeys stand around watching it.

The race starts, all the horses flying down the track.

But then something goes wrong. Two horses bump each other. A rider is thrown and goes under the running horses.

The jockeys all groan, then the room goes silent as they stare.

The jockey that fell lays still on the ground.

RAMON  
Was that Martín?

MARTÍN  
No, I'm here.

SCOTT  
Was that Jesús?

MARTÍN  
No that was Leo.

They all go silent. Watching the TV as the ambulance pulls out onto the track.

Jackson steps closer to the TV. His face drained.

EXT. JOCKS' ROOM - EVENING

Jackson steps out of the jocks' room: just showered, hair combed. He sees Gabriel chatting up some local girls.

GABRIEL  
Hey, Jackson! Want to go have dinner with us?

JACKSON  
I'm not hungry. Thanks.

GABRIEL  
Well, hold on. These girls know who you are.

Jackson looks beyond Gabriel. Considers the girls.

JACKSON

Yeah, thanks. I've gotta take care of something.

GABRIEL

Where you gotta go? You didn't hear me? One of em's French. They're trying to hang.

JACKSON

They took Leo to Sima.

GABRIEL

Oh shit...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Leo lays in a hospital bed, hooked up to all manner of tubes and wires. His hips and mid-section are encased in a brace.

Leo's eyes are closed so Jackson just sits next to him quietly.

LEO

(eyes still closed)  
How's that filly doing?

JACKSON

She's gonna be alright. It's gonna be just fine.

Leo opens his eyes and turns his head to Jackson.

LEO

This never should have happened. I should have never tried to run that filly. She was too young. And then I just put myself in a bad spot...

He stops. Can't think about it.

LEO (CONT'D)

The doctor already came in and told me that my pelvis and my hip's shattered, they're tore up.

JACKSON

Listen Leo. You're gonna get up again. I know it. You're gonna get up again and--

LEO

Stop. Don't lie to me, Jackson. I don't wanna hear that right now.

Jackson just listens now.

Leo looks up at the TV. The local news.

LEO (CONT'D)

Here I am. My whole life gone. Didn't even make the news.

Jackson just listens now.

LEO (CONT'D)

You remember when Randy Bennett flatlined on the way to the hospital out at Remington?

JACKSON

You know death is... You can't be afraid of death. Any more than a baby can be afraid of being born. It just takes us to whatever's next. And then we go to wherever after that. And we got no say on when our ticket's up.

LEO

I ain't afraid of death. I'm just afraid of not being able to ride. Out of all the things you do in life, everybody's always criticizing the good and the bad and all of this, but there's that one minute that you feel like you're the most important thing in the world because everybody's watching you.

Leo gets quiet a moment.

LEO (CONT'D)

You need to go out there and talk to Mr. Willie. He's the one that's sending all these good yearlings and two year olds out this year. You got to make investments. You got to look out for you. Because these trainers don't give a fuck, all they wanna do is run us through there. We're expendable to them.

JACKSON  
(trying not to cry)  
Well you ain't expendable to me.

LEO  
Well fuck you, Jackson. You're so  
full of shit.

They both laugh. Leto gets quiet again.

LEO (CONT'D)  
Thank you. For coming to see me. It  
means a lot to me.

Jackson just nods.

LEO (CONT'D)  
Now you think you can go get me  
something to eat? I could eat the  
asshole out of a skunk right now.  
Just get all kinds of shit, man. I  
don't have to flip no more. I can  
get fat like you.

Jackson laughs.

JACKSON  
Alright. I'll go get something  
good.

EXT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Jackson drives back to his trailer. It's dark out now and  
there by his door is Gabriel, holding a styrofoam tray of  
food.

Jackson steps out to him.

GABRIEL  
Figured you might be hungry.

Gabriel hands him the tray.

JACKSON  
Thanks. I'll save it for later.  
Where's your French girl?

GABRIEL  
Ahhh...

He waves his hand like it's too long a story.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)  
How's Leo?

JACKSON  
Leo's done in.

Gabriel is quiet at that.

GABRIEL  
You ever been hurt bad?

JACKSON  
I took a bad spill in the nineties.  
Got run over. Broke my back,  
cracked my head open. Put me in a  
coma for a few days. What about  
you?

GABRIEL  
I've cracked both my collarbones, I  
broke my right arm, I broke both my  
ankles. Broke my nose so many times  
I can't even count anymore... But  
never hurt bad.

JACKSON  
You talk to your mama much?

GABRIEL  
(scoffs)  
For what?

Jackson considers saying a few things. Lands on...

JACKSON  
You know, people try to do the best  
they can as they go along. And I  
remember your mama having a pretty  
tough time of it when she was  
young.

GABRIEL  
At least she was able to pass that  
along.

JACKSON  
My folks are both gone. I wish I  
could have been a little more  
forgiving of them when they were  
around is all.

Gabriel just takes that in.



JACKSON (CONT'D)  
You're a good kid, Gabriel. You're  
gonna be alright.

Jackson pulls his keys out of his pocket.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Hey, you need a ride?

GABRIEL  
Naw thanks. I sleep in Jerry  
Meyer's tack room.

Jackson watches Gabriel walk back toward the barns.

INT. TRACK RESTAURANT - DAY

Jackson sits at a booth on the phone. Leaving a message for a  
trainer named Willie. Asking about a couple colts out there  
on his farm he'd like to see about buying.

EXT. HORSE FARM - DAY

Jackson goes to a horse farm outside of town. It's a series  
of pastures with young horses, yearlings and two year olds,  
in relative freedom to the horses at the track.

He's greeted by an old trainer, WILLIE.

JACKSON  
Boy, I had a tough time finding  
this place.

WILLIE  
Oh, really?

JACKSON  
Yes sir. You're quite out here.

Willie looks out at the suburban stretch of houses in the  
distance.

WILLIE  
Yeah we're out in the boonies all  
right. But it's building up. Pretty  
soon they'll be right on top of us.

Willie walks him over to see the young horses out in a small  
corral.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
So you're looking to buy one?

JACKSON  
Yessir. Can't be a jockey forever.

Willie smiles.

WILLIE  
Them two right there are decent horses.

JACKSON  
I like that gray one.

WILLIE  
Well, they run in all kinds of colors. I had an old man helping me when I was first starting out and I asked him, I said what color you like best, Mac? He says, I like them fast colors.

Jackson laughs.

JACKSON  
Yeah that's the same color I'm looking for.

They watch the horses a moment.

WILLIE  
Well, come on I'll show you another one. Might be just the one for you.

A LITTLE LATER.

Willie shows Jackson a few other horses. Talks about the better qualities of each one.

EXT. HORSE FARM - SUNSET

They're quiet as they're walking out toward Jackson's truck.

WILLIE  
So how's Leo doing?

This catches Jackson by surprise a bit.

JACKSON  
He's uh... You hadn't spoken to him?

WILLIE

No, I haven't talked to him in,  
man... close to a year.

JACKSON

He's uh... He's resting.

They stop. Willie knows what this means.

WILLIE

Well. Tell him I said hi. And I'll  
get his phone number from you and  
give him a call.

JACKSON

I think he'd appreciate that. He  
spoke highly of you.

INT. RUTH'S BARN - ANOTHER NIGHT

Ruth and Jackson are standing at the entrance of her barn,  
waiting on someone.

Benny sits on a chair nearby, cleaning his fingernails with a  
pocket knife.

Ruth checks her watch again.

RUTH

Come on man, I gotta go pick up  
shavings before I come back here in  
the morning--

JACKSON

He said he was on his way.

They wait awkwardly.

RUTH

Well if he his yours, punctuality  
runs in the family.

JACKSON

I'm always on time.

RUTH

You're on time when there's a check  
with your name on it--

GABRIEL (O.S.)

Sorry guys! Sorry!

Gabriel comes running up, panting.

JACKSON  
What the hell happened to you?

GABRIEL  
The farrier came. Mr. Meyer had me holding horses and they were talking more than they working.

RUTH  
Which one?

GABRIEL  
Ma'am?

RUTH  
The farrier?

GABRIEL  
Martinez.

RUTH  
(annoyed)  
Mart--. I called Martinez three days ago. And he goes to Jerry's barn first...

JACKSON  
Well. Ruth. I wanted to introduce you two. This is Gabriel, I was telling you about.

Ruth sighs. She takes stock of Gabriel.

RUTH  
Jackson says you've got light hands.

GABRIEL  
Yes ma'am. Thank you.

RUTH  
You don't have to ma'am me.  
(shouts out)  
Carlos! Bring Jolene around.  
(back to Gabriel)  
So how long you been riding?

GABRIEL  
(proudly)  
Since before I could walk.

RUTH  
How long have you been a jockey?

He wilts a little.

GABRIEL

Three years.

RUTH

Cause I looked you up. I couldn't find much on you.

GABRIEL

Well I just lost my bug last year. Been exercising horses for everybody. I'll do whatever you need me to, I don't mind the work.

Ruth looks Gabriel up and down. At his t-shirt, his tattered jeans.

RUTH

Well. Let's see what you got.

GABRIEL

Now?

RUTH

Right now.

Carlos leads a horse to them, saddled.

It takes Gabriel a moment to process, then he steps to the horse. Greets it. Jackson gives him a leg up.

GABRIEL

You want me to do anything or...?

But Ruth just watches him. She can tell everything she needs to know by how he sits the horse.

RUTH

Hop down.

GABRIEL

That's it?

RUTH

5 a.m. tomorrow. And you tell Jerry first. You don't leave him hanging.  
(quietly, to Jackson)  
He even mounts a horse like you.

Jackson smiles a little. She walks away.

Gabriel hops off the horse. Jackson waits until Ruth disappears into the barn.

JACKSON  
Can you believe that?

GABRIEL  
(confused)  
What?

JACKSON  
She loved you!

INT. JOCKS' ROOM ENTRANCE - LATER

A group of jockeys stand in a circle, GABRIEL among them. The CHAPLAIN in the middle, finishing up a devotional and a prayer before the race.

Jackson stands on the edge, watching Gabriel.

The jockeys all leave the room, some crossing themselves on the way out. Jackson walks next to Gabriel.

JACKSON  
(quietly)  
See that guy in the four silk? He's going to cut inside as soon as he leaves the gates. Everybody in the first three holes is fucked. Give yourself some time on the outside before moving in and you'll be alright.

Jackson keeps walking before Gabriel can thank him for the advice.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson stands watching the TV with the live race feed. Not many other jockeys are paying attention to this race.

The horses are loaded into the gates.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
...And loading in at number 5 is Rio Bravo from trainer Ruth Wilkes. Ridden for the first time by a newcomer, Gabriel Boullait.

Jackson watches intently. Even a little nervous.

The gates BURST open and the horses sprint out into the race.

Jackson watches every detail of the race. Silently cheering Gabriel on, willing him to win.

Gabriel starts back in fifth place. Then slowly starts to climb out of the pack.

By the time they get to the backstretch, Gabriel has taken second place and is fighting for the lead.

A smile emerges on Jackson's face as Gabriel crosses the finish line. In first place.

Then he hides the smile and walks back to his locker.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - AFTER THE RACE

As Gabriel steps back into the jocks' room most of the jockeys erupt into applause for him. They're congratulating him as he walks to his locker.

Then a helmet SLAMS into a locker. Everyone goes silent and turns to see Scott, striding toward Gabriel.

SCOTT

Were you on the seven horse?

GABRIEL

Yeah...

Scott steps up and PUNCHES him -- Gabriel folds.

SCOTT

Don't you ever cut me off again you little shit. You'll get somebody hurt out there.

No one says anything. Scott calmly starts to walk toward the bathroom.

The Jackson appears behind him and SLAMS him into a locker.

JACKSON

You throw another tantrum like that and I'll kick your fucking teeth in.

Scott stares back at him. But doesn't fight.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

This ain't Houston.

Scott looks around at everyone watching him.

ELI

Gabe won his first stakes race! Ice  
him!

That jockey and a few others swarm Gabriel and carry him to the ice baths in the back of the jocks' room and drop him into an ICE BATH.

Jackson and Scott are standing there, watching Gabriel get carried off.

SCOTT

How you been Jackson?

Jackson is quiet a moment, still stewing.

JACKSON

I'm alright. You been good?

SCOTT

Yeah, hanging in there.  
(loosens up a little)  
Haven't had a great year. But I  
think Los Alamitos'll be better.

JACKSON

You always had good luck on that  
track.

They're quiet a minute longer.

SCOTT

Well. Take it easy.

JACKSON

You too. Be careful out there.

They part ways as if they came together just to catch up.

EXT. TRACK / INFIELD POND - NIGHT

A bunch of jockeys are partying at the pond in the middle of the racetrack. Drinking and grilling fajitas and stoking a bonfire.

GABRIEL is sitting off to the side with JACKSON, who's half-drunk on tequila. Gabriel is drinking a beer, eating a fajita.

He's watching A YOUNG WOMAN, his age, with pink hair over near the water with her friends.

He's half-listening as Jackson gives him advice.



JACKSON

...and you also need to be combing your hair between races. Doesn't have to be perfect, but you need to look like every race is your first one of the night. Gives the owners confidence. Otherwise you make your trainer look bad. And if you make Ruth look bad...

GABRIEL

Oh Ruth already got pissed at me.

JACKSON

What about?

GABRIEL

About watching the crowd too much on the parade.

JACKSON

She doesn't want you getting distracted.

GABRIEL

But if I run a good race--

JACKSON

Listen. You ride the horse, Ruth rides you, the owner rides her. That's how it works. Don't take it personal. But you better take it seriously.

Gabriel is quiet a moment like he doesn't buy it.

Someone yells out from near the grill.

RYAN (O.S.)

Hey Jackson, you gonna dance for us tonight or what!?

JACKSON

Nah, man. Maybe next time. I'm all stove up.

RYAN

Stop it, you lost.

JACKSON

Man, I'm gonna go get me a tequila. You gotta come meet Carl. He's a weirdo.

GABRIEL  
(watching the girl)  
I'll be there in a sec.

Jackson walks away.

A LITTLE LATER.

A MONTAGE of Gabriel flirting with girls, Jackson drinking with old friends, giving younger jockeys a hard time, all as the glow of a fire dances around them.

The jockeys finally convince Jackson to dance -- a routine that seems familiar to them all but still special.

Jackson grabs a few errant BOTTLE CAPS off a nearby table. He puts them on the ground upside down and steps on them so they're lodged into the sole of his boot.

Jackson starts to tap dance.

The music and the sound of the party slowly fades out and Jackson's dance feels more lyrical, he seems lighter.

He is happy.

He finishes and all the sound rushes back: applause and whistling and calls for more.

He looks over and sees two seats empty: Gabriel's and the girl's.

Jackson pretends not to care and reaches for another drink.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - ANOTHER RACE DAY

Jackson is on the equicisor in the jocks' room. The room is cold, empty. Jackson is having trouble settling into position. Everything aches.

Even the reins seem stiff.

Yet slowly he loosens his body up, fighting past pain.

His limp is glaring as he walks out of the jocks' room. But when he gets to the door, he takes a deep breath, straightens up, and walks out with barely the hint of a limp.

EXT. PADDOCK - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson waits with the other jockeys for the horses to be brought around. Ruth stands with him.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And finally, rounding out the card,  
Dido's Lament. Trainer Ruth Wilkes,  
ridden by Jackson Silva. This is  
her maiden race and her current  
odds are nineteen to one.

Ruth and Jackson share a smile at those odds.

RUTH

Wish I'd made a bet.

She sighs.

JACKSON

You nervous?

RUTH

First day of school.

JACKSON

She's about to skip two grades.

INT. STARTING GATES - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson is in the gates, bringing his breath under control. Talking softly to Dido's Lament.

His ankle is trembling, but soon he brings that still too.

The gates pop and they launch out into the race.

EXT. RACETRACK - IN THE RACE

In the middle of the race, we're in Jackson's perspective. The only sound is that of the wind. All else is silence.

His view floats in slow motion like he's flying over the dirt.

No other horse comes into the periphery.

No other horse ever contends for the lead.

EXT. WINNER'S CIRCLE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth and Jackson pose with Dido's Lament for the winner's photo.

Jackson is hiding the pain under a smile for the camera.

Ruth turns to Jackson as the flashes stop.

RUTH

I don't care how much weight you  
gain tonight, we're gonna  
celebrate.

EXT. RODEO BAR - THAT NIGHT

Ruth and Jackson sit in the stands of a rodeo bar: a bull ring before them, bar behind them. They nurse beers, watching the show. Laughing. Arguing over whether they should cheer for the rider or the bull.

INT. RODEO BAR - NIGHT

Ruth and Jackson stand at a bar: two shot glasses and a bottle of tequila between them. They're playing a drinking game, quizzing each other.

RUTH

Dash For Cash, Special Effort, Barb  
Phenomenal...

JACKSON

(thinking)  
Ahhh....

He's hitting his head to remember.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Roan horse out of Illinois...

RUTH

Yep.

JACKSON

It was Special... Shit. I can't  
remember.

He pounds his shot. Pours another.

RUTH

Dashing Phenom.

JACKSON

Alright. This one had Seattle Slew on one side. First Down Dash on the other--

RUTH

(quickly)  
Fisher King.

JACKSON

Nope. California horse. Owned by a coffee company.

RUTH

Houndstooth! Can't believe I needed the hint on that one.

She downs her tequila. She gets quiet, thinking.

JACKSON

No Canadian horses...

RUTH

(as revealing a secret)  
I want to win it all.

Jackson gets quiet.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Dido. I want her to win.

Ruth searches for the words.

RUTH (CONT'D)

You know, it's the claiming races, and the asshole owners, and the last barn on the backside. And it's okay, you know. It's enough. You make it enough. But then she shows up and she is...

Ruth just smiles thinking about her. Thinking about all of it.

RUTH (CONT'D)

And you remember. You want it all. I want her to win, Jackson.

JACKSON

So do I.

Gabriel appears. He takes Jackson's shot and downs it.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Whoa!

GABRIEL

Can I borrow 20 bucks?

JACKSON

To pay for that shot you just slammed?

GABRIEL

They're charging twenty dollars to get on the bull. No, no, hold on, I need forty dollars cause I need the helmet and the vest. I need to protect myself.

RUTH

I'll spot you twenty.

GABRIEL

Yeah?!

RUTH

But as soon as you get on that bull you're fired.

GABRIEL

Come on. It's good practice. I ride that bull, I can ride anything.

JACKSON

The kid's got a point.

RUTH

(to Jackson)

OK, I'm dancing. Who's gonna dance with me?

GABRIEL

I can't...

Ruth downs her shot and steps out with Jackson to dance around the bonfire with other locals.

INT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The dance from the fireside flows into Jackson's trailer as the two of them sway to an old song on the radio.

They laugh and joke together, slurring their words.

RUTH  
I've got time for one more.

Jackson looks around for clean glasses.

JACKSON  
Are those shot glasses clean?

RUTH  
They're filthy.

Jackson laughs.

JACKSON  
I got more over here.

Ruth starts to roll a joint on some old CDs.

Jackson reaches up into his cabinet for clean glasses. He wobbles a little, but catches his balance. He brings a glass down, inspects it.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
I think I got a real clean-ish  
glass right here.

He reaches up into the cabinet for another glass but stops. Lowers his arm.

Something felt weird. Ruth doesn't notice.

He cranes his neck. Rolls his right shoulder.

He tries to take a step away from the counter and DROPS TO THE FLOOR.

RUTH  
Jackson!

She rushes to help him.

JACKSON  
I'm alright. I'm alright.

RUTH  
What happened? Is it your heart?

JACKSON  
No, nothing like that. I just can't  
exactly feel my right side. Just  
need a minute.

He tries to get up but can't.

RUTH

Jesus man. Do you want me to help you move or...?

JACKSON

Yeah, let's try it.

She helps him sit up and lean back on the cabinet. She settles in next to him.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Alright. We're good. It just happens sometimes. It'll come back in a second.

They've both sobered up quick.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I might be in a little worse shape than I thought.

RUTH

(sarcastic)

Geez you think so?

He laughs a nervous laugh. Then he gets quiet again.

JACKSON

I do. Yeah...

RUTH

Oh Jackson... Can you feel that?

Jackson nods as Ruth runs her hand up his arm.

JACKSON

No. But it'll come back. It just... I'm sitting here...

Searches for the words.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I just can't stop thinking about Billy Parham, the night he got thrown out in Pompano. He said he heard birds singing in the jocks' room. Kept saying, is there birds in here? Did somebody let a bird in? He didn't even make it to the hospital. You remember that?

Ruth just listens.



JACKSON (CONT'D)  
I've never been scared before,  
Ruth.

Jackson accepts that he just said this out loud.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
There it is...

RUTH  
Hey. What's she like out there?  
Dido. What's she like?

JACKSON  
Dido is like a... a horse I never  
thought I'd get to ride. You know,  
I never... I never felt worthy of a  
horse like Dido.

Ruth tears up.

RUTH  
She's the first horse I've ever had  
that made me wish I was a jockey.

JACKSON  
(smiles)  
Well, hey. There's still time for  
you.

Ruth laughs.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
You know, you get older and you  
start to realize, that you and your  
body, they just ain't the same  
thing. You know what I mean?

They're both quiet now.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
I think this might be my last  
season, Ruth.

RUTH  
No shit, Jackson.

She takes his hand.

JACKSON  
Alright. I think it's coming back.

RUTH

You want me to help you get up on  
the couch?

JACKSON

No... Let's just sit here for a  
while longer. Can we?

RUTH

Sure we can.

They sit quietly. Even the radio seems to offer them silence  
now.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

JACKSON lays on a table in a blank room -- shirtless, arms  
up. The table starts to move and he's run legs first through  
a CT scanner.

It's clear that his thoughts are far away. All the sound is  
murky, compressed, as if he's underwater.

A LITTLE LATER.

Jackson sits on a paper-covered examining bed. A doctor  
stands over him, speaking.

We can't hear the doctor. All the sound is gone now.

But from the look on Jackson's face we know that the news is  
terrible.

EXT. BARNS - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Jackson walks back behind the track, watching the daily  
ritual of the afternoon work go on. Horses are bathed and  
walked. Shed rows are raked smooth.

All irrespective of him.

EXT. INFIELD POND - AFTERNOON

Back at the small pond lies in the infield of the track, a  
fountain in the middle. Gabriel sits by himself on the bank  
with a fishing pole.

Jackson comes walking up behind him carrying a DUFFEL BAG.

JACKSON  
Catching anything?

GABRIEL  
Some catfish. Nothing else really  
out here.

JACKSON  
There's some carp out there too.  
But you don't wanna eat them. Got  
fertilizer for blood.  
(hands Gabriel a coffee)  
Here.

GABRIEL  
Thanks. Got a burger in that bag  
too?

They both take a seat in the grass. Jackson hands him a  
cigarette.

JACKSON  
A couple sips of that coffee and  
one of these will get you through a  
meal every time.

They stare out at the water a minute and smoke. Sip some  
coffee.

Jackson passes Gabriel the DUFFEL BAG.

GABRIEL  
What's that?

JACKSON  
Open it.

Jackson helps Gabriel unzip the bag, trying to hide his  
excitement.

The duffel is filled with new jockey tack: expensive riding  
pants, new goggles, a gorgeous pair of boots.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Those boots should fit ya good and  
snug. If they don't I'll take you  
to Booker's and--

GABRIEL  
This stuff is nice, Jackson. I  
can't take this...

JACKSON

It's a gift. I'd be offended if you didn't take it.

Gabriel stares at the boots. He looks to Jackson. Jackson is watching the lake.

GABRIEL

Thank you. You know there's a lot of people that say they want to help, but they're looking for something. I haven't met a lot of people that just--

JACKSON

I know... Just don't start losing. There's nothing worse losing a race in new gear. It's like you're trying to buy the part or something.

Jackson lays back on the grass and sighs. Closes his eyes.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I love this time of day...

Jackson gets quiet, like he might have fallen asleep. Then...

JACKSON (CONT'D)

You know what I said about that timeline. About how it wasn't possible...

GABRIEL

...

JACKSON

Maybe I was wrong. My dad was a great jockey, for a little while. His father too. My granddad met the President of Mexico, that's how good he was.

Gabriel finishes his cigarette.

GABRIEL

I just wish I'd told you sooner. In Ruidoso. Or Oaklawn. I just didn't know what to say.

Jackson is quiet a moment.

JACKSON

(without opening his eyes)  
You know my first memory of my  
pop... It was him leaving. There  
was a big fight with my mom, me  
grabbing his leg, trying to stop  
him. Him kicking me...

Gabriel doesn't cast his line.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

It was raining and I remember  
sticking my nose against the glass.  
Watching him... Cold glass...  
(gestures with his hand)  
...Threw his bag in the car. I  
always loved the rain. Not sure  
why.

Jackson laughs awkwardly.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I ain't thought about that in  
twenty years. Not sure why...

Jackson gets quiet. Clears his throat.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I wish I'd known you growing up. I  
feel like I've robbed myself of  
something wonderful. I just want  
to... I'm sorry.

Gabriel sits quietly. Unsure how to respond.

But by the look on his face it's clear it meant the world to  
him.

GABRIEL

I've ate some fish out of here.  
They taste kind of good.

INT. JACKSON'S TRUCK - LATER

Jackson is driving down the road in his pickup truck. Nervous  
for where he's headed.

He practices a conversation he's driving toward.

JACKSON

Hello, Ana. It's me. It's...

And again, this time with a smile.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Hello, Ana. It's nice to see you. I met our son...

He stops. Shakes his head. Tries it again and again as he drives along.

Jackson rubs his forehead.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Fuck.

EXT. ANA'S HOME - LATER

Jackson steps out of his truck in front of a house in suburbia that looks like every other around it.

He looks down at a piece of paper with an address scribbled on it, checks the number against the house. Tosses the paper in the truck.

He starts to approach the house. Stops. Untucks his shirt. Looks at his reflection in the truck window.

Tucks his shirt back in. Rolls his sleeves up. Checks himself again.

It'll have to do.

He steps onto the porch and rings the doorbell.

No answer.

So he sits on the porch and waits.

EXT. ANA'S HOME - EVENING.

Hours later, as the sun is setting, a car pulls into the driveway and a woman steps out, wearing a hardware store apron. This is ANA, Jackson's age, home from a long day at work. Carrying a purse and some groceries.

Jackson stands.

Ana stops, stunned. Wave after wave of recognition washes over her face.

JACKSON

Ana.

It takes her a moment to recognize him.

ANA  
(confused)  
Ummm. Hey. What are you... doing here?

JACKSON  
I was just passing through. I had a match race outside of Del Mar and I heard you was... Can I help you with that bag?

ANA  
No, I'm... What are you doing here?

JACKSON  
I just... Can I talk to you a minute?

INT. ANA'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson stands awkwardly in the kitchen as Ana unloads her groceries. He looks around at the things that fill the house. The decorations. Keepsakes. All the little things collected in a life in one place.

JACKSON  
So uh, you look good. How long've you been here?

ANA  
About... thirteen years. Fourteen. I don't know.

JACKSON  
And you're working at a...

ANA  
What?

JACKSON  
(of her apron)  
You working at a grocery store?

ANA  
Hardware Store. I'm a manager.

JACKSON  
That's great. I bet you're a good boss.

Jackson is looking for things to talk about. Ana is making minimal effort. So he just says it.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
I met Gabriel.

For the first time, Ana stops unloading groceries a moment. She turns to look at him.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
He's a good kid. You did real good by him.

ANA  
Where is he?

JACKSON  
A track out in Phoenix.

She thinks.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Why didn't you... You know, I woulda... I woulda liked to have known that he was out there... I wish you would have told me.

ANA  
(lost)  
Why?

JACKSON  
Look, Ana, I know I fucked up with you. I fucked up real bad. But I'm here to own it. And I'd like to at least think that I would've been there for the kid.

ANA  
*Been there for him?*

They're both getting frustrated with each other. Glimmers of what drove them apart are bubbling up.

JACKSON  
Yeah. Like I could've taught him a thing or two. Something different, ya know something to keep him from, you know, becoming a jockey.

Ana is silent. She's piecing it all together. Why he came. What he wants.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
Okay look, I know I wasn't around. I admit that, but you didn't tell me he was here neither--



ANA  
He's not your kid.

Jackson stops cold.

JACKSON  
What?

ANA  
He's not yours. I got pregnant  
after you left.

This washes over him. He's trying to catch up. Trying to  
process.

ANA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry you came all this way. I  
know that's probably not what you  
were wanting to hear.

JACKSON  
...

ANA  
Listen, I gotta wake up early in  
the morning...

Her voice recedes into the distance as Jackson reels from the  
news.

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S TRUCK - LATER

Jackson drives in silence. No radio. Window down. His body is  
still but monumental feelings play across his eyes.

He exits onto a small state road.

EXT. SALT RIVER - EVENING

He steps down to a river. Sits on the bank.

He starts to light a smoke. But stops.

And then...

A small group of WILD HORSES step out of the trees on the  
other bank. They walk into the water. Drink from it. The  
yearlings splash around.

They do as they please. Their presence is a blessing to him.

The river whispers. The sun fades.

EXT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A squalid party. A man is playing some strange song on a saxophone. Jackson has a six shooter and belt on and is performing for two women like a cowboy.

Someone knocks on the door.

Jackson opens it to Gabriel.

JACKSON  
(slurring already)  
Well I'll be... Look who it is  
ladies!

They don't seem interested.

GABRIEL  
Sorry. I didn't realize you were  
having a party.

JACKSON  
Come on in!  
(to the ladies)  
It's my son! Right?! My son.  
(back to Gabriel)  
The one I abandoned so many years  
ago. Come hang with us.

Gabriel takes stock of him. Knows this look.

GABRIEL  
I'm gonna talk to you later.

JACKSON  
Talk to me later?! Talk about what?

GABRIEL  
Nothing. I'll just--

JACKSON  
No, no. Talk, talk, talk -- so much  
talking. Come here. Why don't you  
come in here and tell us all a  
story with that beautiful  
imagination of yours?

Jackson has turned dark.

GABRIEL  
I'm gonna go.

Gabriel turns to leave.

JACKSON

Go?! Wait. Hey! I talked to your  
mama.

Gabriel turns back.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I went all the way over there, to  
apologize of all things. And... Why  
in the fuck would you do that to  
me?

GABRIEL

Do what?

JACKSON

Come on. I mean, I'm not your  
fucking dad. It's... I'm still  
trying to figure out what the fuck  
is going on.

This jars Gabriel. The saxophonist has stopped playing. The  
ladies are quiet now too.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Oh I know what it is. Look, if it's  
money you need. I'm gonna hook you  
up.

Jackson digs out whatever bills and coins are in his pockets.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

... I got six dollars and thirty--  
Look it's all yours.

He tosses them at Gabriel.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Keep that, you don't owe me shit.  
Just come on in here and have some  
shots with us man.

GABRIEL

I don't want your money.

JACKSON

Come on in.

GABRIEL

I don't want your fucking money!

Now Jackson stops.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)

(quickly)

I thought that my mom was trying to cut you out, telling me some story. I was good with horses and then I saw you and...

Gabriel stops. Chokes up.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)

I'm just gonna leave you alone. I'm not gonna bother you anymore.

Gabriel disappears into the night. Jackson watches him go.

Then he stumbles back inside and slams the door.

INT. JACKSON'S TRAILER - MORNING

Jackson wakes up alone in his trailer. The place is trashed from the night before.

Jackson stares at his hand in the light coming through the curtain. No trembles. No shakes.

EXT. RACETRACK - MORNING

Another sunrise at the track. This one electric with energy. Jackson watches it all from the rails. Completely lost.

EXT. RUTH'S BARN - LATE AT NIGHT

Jackson is in Ruth's office, cleaning out his tack. He pulls his saddle, a couple nice bridles. He considers his nice leather halter, but decides to leave that for her.

As he's walking away down the shed row, someone calls him.

RUTH (O.S.)

Hey! Jackson.

JACKSON

Don't worry. I'm not taking none of your shit.

He waits for her to reply. She watches him, decides not to return a barb.

RUTH

So is this how you're gonna play it? Just sneak out in the night?

He turns back to her.

JACKSON

I'm not sneaking out anywhere. I'm just trying to save you from having to say what you were gonna say. Unless I'm wrong.

She considers a lot of things to say.

RUTH

I'm sorry, Jackson.

He nods.

RUTH (CONT'D)

No other jockey worth anything would even step foot in my barn, but you were always there. You know I wanted this for us.

JACKSON

But now that you've got one of your own... Can't leave anything up to chance.

RUTH

It's not that and you know it.

JACKSON

(escalating)  
Tell me what it is then.

RUTH

I'm not gonna watch you die out there. I'm not gonna--

JACKSON

You won't race a sore horse but a jockey...

RUTH

Oh don't start that with me.

JACKSON

How many times have I ridden broken for you? Huh? Every time I break a collarbone or a rib, or bust my head. I kept racing for you.

RUTH

And who drove you home from the hospital? Who gave you horses when nobody else would?

JACKSON

So what is it now, huh? You know I can do it. That horse knows I can do it. Now what's the difference?

RUTH

You're afraid. That's what's changed.

This stops him.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Man, you said so yourself. And it's okay. But...

She looks around for the words.

RUTH (CONT'D)

These horses will run until they... You gotta tell a horse when it's time to stop.

JACKSON

So that's it then.

RUTH

Yeah.

JACKSON

I'm not OK with it. Just so you know.

He starts to step out.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

But I'll forgive you one day.

EXT. BARNS - LATE AFTERNOON

Jackson smokes a cigarette in the morning light. Nothing to do. He hears the horses speaking softly in their stalls.

He walks through the barns to Dido's Lament's stall. They share a moment. Both caged in their own way.

INT. TRACK RESTAURANT - NEXT DAY

Jackson sits alone at a table near the front. He's going through a barn list of all the trainers. Checking off names, noting who owes him a call. Who has a horse in the futurity.

Gabriel steps into the buffet line starts ordering food.

JACKSON

You're lookin' right and proper out there. Like you and that horse finally got your rhythm together.

There's something caustic to Jackson's tone. Gabriel ignores him.

GABRIEL

(to the cook)

Can I have the special?

JACKSON

Just don't stand in her shoulders so much when she's trying to open up. Sit back and let her roll.

Gabriel ignores that too.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

When she's coming out of the turn especially. You're putting--

GABRIEL

(sharp)

Hey man. I got it.

JACKSON

Big race. Your loss--

GABRIEL

I don't need this shit. I got this horse. That's me.

JACKSON

How do you think you got that horse?

GABRIEL

By working my fucking ass off. I broke bones, I cleaned stalls, I took shit from these trainers--

JACKSON

Oh and how many stalls does a 19-year-old clean? You busted your ass, for what? Four years? Three years?

Gabriel can't stand it. He turns back to the woman serving him.

GABRIEL

Can I have some pico de gallo too?  
Thank you.

JACKSON

How long you think I busted my ass?  
And then giving you a leg up?

Gabriel ignores him. Starts to walk away.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Well I'll give you one last piece  
of valuable advice. Don't fucking  
lie to people.

Gabriel is gone. Jackson looks around. Slams his pen down,  
collects his things and leaves.

INT. RANDOM BARN - LATER

Jackson steps up to a barn, hiding his limp as best he can.

A few guys sit around a bucket, talking and shelling  
pistachios. They stop talking when Jackson approaches.

JACKSON

Hey Jerry.

JERRY MEYER

Yeah... What can I do for you?

JACKSON

My name's--

JERRY MEYER

I know who you are.

JACKSON

I heard you got a horse in the  
Futurity.

JERRY MEYER

I do...

JACKSON

Well, if it's alright I'd like to  
ride for you.

Jerry Meyer looks at the other trainer like it's a joke, then  
he gets serious, excited.



JERRY MEYER

Well... I mean, jeez, I... Hell  
yeah man. This is crazy. I'm...  
This is just crazy... Jackson  
Silva.

Jerry Meyer leads Jackson down his shed row, telling him about the horse as they go.

INT. JOCKS' ROOM - DAY

THE DAY OF THE FUTURITY. The jocks' room is buzzing. Even the jockeys who aren't racing are packed in the room, giving advice, watching the races on the tv.

But Jackson is in the back, getting ready in a room by himself.

He can barely zip his boot. It's a rough sight.

Then the door to the room opens. GABRIEL is standing there, dressed in Ruth's racing silks. He gets the whole picture in a moment.

GABRIEL

You alright?

JACKSON

Never been better. Think I might go  
for a run after this.

Gabriel forces a smile.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

You look ready.

GABRIEL

I heard you were bad off.

JACKSON

Nah, I ain't too bad.

Gabriel steps close. He tries to say what he came to say but doesn't know how. He hands Jackson a folded up newspaper clipping from years ago. Handled so much, it's worn thin.

It's an article about Jackson from his glory days. From that paper up in Cincinnati. Crossing the finish line ahead of the horse.

GABRIEL

I didn't mean to hurt you. I wasn't  
lying.

(MORE)

GABRIEL (CONT'D)

I saw this photo and I thought...  
what if that's him. You know, if  
that's where I came from, then...  
Maybe I could be somebody like  
that. Maybe I could be somebody  
worthy of that photo.

That strikes Jackson.

JACKSON

My dad was an angry man. He got  
hurt early and caught the Fear.  
Couldn't race anymore. A bitter  
man. Only time he'd hug me was when  
he'd take me to the tracks. I'd  
place the bets for him and hold his  
beer. But then when them horses  
would come racing out of that gate  
with the jockeys... I'd imagine  
them flying off to some other  
place... Where they couldn't get  
hurt. Where no one was scared. To  
some better world.

Jackson shakes his head.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

But then they'd cross that finish  
line. Pops would slam his beer,  
stare at me, remind me I was bad  
luck. Then he'd hand me another wad  
of cash and have me place some more  
bets.

Jackson chuckles, but it is a sad and lonely kind of laugh.

GABRIEL

(tentative)

Maybe in this better world... I  
would have been your son.

Jackson looks over to Gabriel.

JACKSON

There ain't no better world.  
There's just this one.

Gabriel was expecting that.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

But I certainly would be proud to  
call you son.

Gabriel is silent. If he speaks he might break.

JACKSON (CONT'D)  
 Stay off the rail. You'll win it by  
 a mile.

EXT. PADDOCK - SOON AFTER

Jackson steps out to the paddock. He sees Ruth talking to Gabriel on the side.

Jackson waits as Jerry Meyer and his barn hand lead Hello Sunshine up to him.

Jackson is mustering some confidence for Jerry. Jerry notices something off.

JERRY MEYER  
 You alright?

JACKSON  
 Hello Sunshine is going to win,  
 Jerry.

JERRY MEYER  
 You really think so?

JACKSON  
 I know it.

Jerry looks like he might cry.

JERRY MEYER  
 I ever tell you the story on why we  
 named him Hello Sunshine?

JACKSON  
 No sir.

JERRY MEYER  
 Well, he was born a few days too  
 late and when he came out we  
 thought he was stillborn.

As Jerry tells the story, Jackson stares at Ruth. She looks up at him. Everything they never said sits in that look between them.

JERRY MEYER (CONT'D)  
 So, we're shaking him, blowing in  
 his nose, trying to get the gunk  
 out. Then all of a sudden through  
 the stall window, this little arc  
 of sunlight landed on his head.  
 (MORE)

JERRY MEYER (CONT'D)

That's when he took his first  
breath.

Jackson clasps Jerry on the shoulder.

JACKSON

You just stay near the winner's  
circle, Jerry Meyer.

Jackson gingerly gets a leg up onto Hello Sunshine and they  
join the parade to the gates.

EXT. RACETRACK - SOON AFTER

Jockeys and horses parade around the track before us toward  
the starting gates as birds flit in and out of frame.

EXT. STARTING GATES / RACETRACK - SOON AFTER

Jackson is in the starting gates with all the other jockeys.

Jackson focuses down the track. He wraps the reins around his  
hand. Takes a handful of mane with his good hand. Anything to  
get an extra hold.

He lets out a long breath... And the world goes SILENT. Only  
the breathing of the horse remains.

Then the gates bang open and they fly out. For Jackson,  
there's no sound except the sound of the horse breathing, its  
heartbeat, the rhythm of its footfall.

He gets a good start -- in the middle of the pack -- then  
moves the horse up in line.

But Hello Sunshine loses steam.

One horse pulls ahead.

Then another.

Jackson and Hello Sunshine keep slipping toward the back, mud  
kicking up from the leaders.

Jackson finishes in seventh place.

EXT. PADDOCK - A LITTLE LATER

Jackson hops off Hello Sunshine near the paddock. Jerry takes  
the horse.

JERRY MEYER  
(half-hearted)  
Thanks Jackson.

He barely acknowledges Jerry. He's already walking away.

Scanning for Gabriel.

All the other jockeys who lost are hopping off their mounts post-race. They're walking past Jackson and the horses swirl behind him as he looks around.

Then another horse is brought around.

The winner.

Gabriel.

Up on the horse like they were made for each other.

Ruth runs up congratulating Gabriel, congratulating Dido. None of them notice Jackson.

Jackson watches as Gabriel is led on the horse to the winner's circle.

Then he turns and walks toward the jocks' room and we hang on his face. A myriad of emotions washes across him. Relief. Pride in the young man. Joy for Ruth.

The struggle is over. He no longer needs to pretend.

He starts to limp heavy as he approaches the jocks' room now.

Nothing to hide.

He disappears into the jocks' room, into a collection of silks of all colors.

END.