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As for script abbreviations: INT. and EXT. refer to whether the scene is inside or outside and whether the lighting is natural or artificial. A SUPER is something printed on the screen.

POV stands for "point of view."

O.S. refers to dialogue spoken by someone who is "off stage."

V.O., or "voice over," refers to dialogue spoken by someone who is not on the screen, or onscreen but not talking.

Now enjoy the story.

FADE IN:

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY (PRESENT TIME)

A large herd of wild mustangs ebbs and flows like some fluid, shifting mass across the Arizona high country.

A half dozen riders are in pursuit. One is JIM McHENRY, ruggedly handsome, late 30s. He rides with abandon, trying to turn the charging herd.

At his side is SKIP McHENRY, about 17. He also rides fearlessly, matches Jim move for move. The other four hands, BUCK, WILL, LUKE, and BLACKIE ride hard but don't exhibit the daring of Jim and Skip.

A large gray stallion, clearly the leader, stops on a rise and watches his herd race past. He waits, nostrils flaring, ears pricked up. Eyes Jim as he approaches.

Jim reins up some distance away. Man and beast glare at each other -- locked in a battle of wills. Then the stallion WHINNIES, turns, and charges after his herd; and Jim renews the pursuit.

Jim and Skip race for the front of the thundering herd -- as the mustangs rip and tear their way through a wide section of wire fence.

The riders rein up, their faces showing the strain of the chase. As they watch the herd gallop off, the stallion stops again and looks back. WHINNIES. Rears up defiantly.

Suddenly Jim dismounts, eyes burning, mouth set in a hard line. He takes a rifle out of its scabbard, levers a shell into the chamber. Aims at the stallion.

Skip is wide-eyed.

SKIP  
Dad! No!

He bolts to Jim's side. Dismounts. Pushes the rifle aside just as Jim FIRES. Jim is furious.

JIM  
Stay outa my way!

SKIP  
You can't do this, Dad.

JIM  
Yeah? Watch me.

He raises the rifle again but the mustangs are long gone. Jim's hot, lowers the weapon and faces Skip.

JIM  
I'm sick of them wild devils tearin' up our fences. Grazin' the range down to the nub. They're gonna ruin that government land.

SKIP  
So your answer's just to shoot 'em?

The other men sit their horses quietly, looking a little awkward. Not really a part of the family squabble.

JIM  
You got any better ideas?

SKIP  
They've been running free for years. That's all they know.

JIM  
Swell. Let 'em be free somewheres else. I want 'em off my land. If that means killin' a few of 'em...

He shrugs, puts his rifle away. Skip glares at him.

SKIP  
You just want to get even. Let it go, Dad - the accident was a long time ago. Donn't blame the horses.

The cowhands exchange quick glances.

JIM  
That's got nothin' to do with it. It's the government leases I'm worried about. We lose them, we could lose the ranch.

Skip looks concerned but says nothing.

EXT. RANCH - LATE AFTERNOON

A neat, well-maintained house with porch and railing. A large barn nearby. A bunkhouse. And a small corral with a few horses in it.

Jim, Skip, and the hired hands lope up. They tie up their horses and head for the house.

BUCK  
Man, I could eat the tail off a skunk.

BLACKIE  
We had that for supper last night.

JIM  
You guys better quit complainin' about the food. Mrs. Allen's gettin' a mite touchy.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

Ranch style: stove, sink, pots and pans hanging.

Jim, Skip, and crew are at a big table, wolfing down food. MRS. ALLEN, 50ish, portly, and frazzled, is at the stove, frying steaks and potatoes. JENNY MCHENRY, 13, cute, is next to her, watching.

All is confusion. Tension. Buffy, a golden retriever, sits by the stove anticipating a handout. He BARKS every once in a while.

BUCK  
How 'bout some more spuds?

MRS. ALLEN  
Hold your horses. I only got one pair a hands.

LUKE  
Any coffee there, darlin'?

MRS. ALLEN  
I'm not your darlin' -- and get your own coffee.

JENNY  
Can I help?

She reaches for a skillet of potatoes, burns her fingers. Sticks them in her mouth.

MRS. ALLEN  
You could help by settin' down.

Buffy nudges Mrs. Allen with his nose. Wags his tail.

SKIP  
Did you feed Buffy yet, Mrs. Allen?

BLACKIE  
This steak's tougher'n my boot. Don't cook that other one so long, will ya?

Jenny goes to the table. Mrs. Allen glares at Skip.

MRS. ALLEN  
I got news for you young man, I hired on here as cook and housekeeper -- not to run a kennel.

She points at Jim.

MRS. ALLEN  
And I got news for you -- I quit.

Jim and the others chuckle, scoff.

MRS. ALLEN  
Glad all of ya find it so funny. You'll soon be laughin' out the other side of your face.

Now Jim knows it's no joke.

JIM  
Hey, wait. You're not serious.

MRS. ALLEN  
Oh, no? I'm givin' ya seven day's notice.  
About six days more than ya deserve.

She slaps steaks on a platter, looks at Blackie.

MRS. ALLEN  
This time next week you can cook your own  
miserable steak any way ya want it.

The room's suddenly quiet. Luke takes his cup to the stove. Reaches for the coffee pot. Bumps into Mrs. Allen and nearly knocks the platter out of her hands. If looks could kill...

Jim gets to his feet.

JIM  
But... Wait... You can't...

MRS. ALLEN  
Oh, yes I can.

She gives Luke another dirty look as she takes the steaks to the table. As she turns away, Jim tries to take her arm. She jerks free.

JIM  
What'll we do without...?

MRS. ALLEN  
Probably starve.

JIM  
Where am I gonna find another housekeeper?

MRS. ALLEN  
Good question. No one else is dumb enough.

She whips off her apron, turns. Trips over Buffy.

MRS. ALLEN  
Oh, get out of my way!

Buffy BARKS, wags his tail. Mrs. Allen throws the apron at him and stomps out of the room. Jim is crestfallen. Luke sips at his coffee. Blackie digs into another steak.

BLACKIE  
Might as well enjoy it while ya can -- even  
if they are a little tough.

BUCK  
(pouting)  
She never did get me anymore spuds.

The room goes quiet again.

JENNY  
Hey! I can cook.

SKIP  
Yeah, about as good as ya play the guitar.

JENNY  
Better than you.

SKIP  
What're we gonna do, Dad?

LUKE  
Yeah, what're ya gonna do, Jim?

Jim picks up the apron. He's disgusted.

JIM  
I don't know about the rest of ya. But  
it's Saturday night and I'm goin' to town.

He rolls the apron in a ball and throws it in the sink. Then strides  
out of the room.

The hired hands look at one another. Skip shrugs. Buffy BARKS. Then  
Blackie gets up and heads for the door.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF, AZ - NIGHT

A city limits sign ESTABLISHES.

A dusty pickup truck moves with the traffic past the sign.

Jim is at the wheel. Country/western MUSIC BLARES from the radio. He  
makes his way along the brightly lit streets, past neon signs promising  
all sorts of earthly pleasures.

The truck moves out of downtown, away from the bright lights.

EXT. WAGON WHEEL BAR

A C/W saloon on the outskirts of town. A little garish in neon but  
nice. The parking lot is about a third full. Jim's pickup pulls in  
under a lighted BILLBOARD that announces...

BILLY WILSON'S WAGON WHEEL NOW APPEARING... LAURA CARTER, EVERYONE'S  
COUNTRY SWEETHEART

INT. WAGON WHEEL

Smoky and noisy. Bar stools are filled with a mixture of tourist  
types, real cowboys, and cowboy wannabes sporting hats and pearl button  
shirts. And a few lone women.

A small DANCE FLOOR is surrounded by tables, about half of them  
occupied. There's LAUGHTER; the CLINK of glasses; the BUZZ of  
convesation. A fun place.

On the BANDSTAND, a small band backs up a pretty woman SINGING a  
popular C/W song. She's LAURA CARTER, 30-something, dressed in cowgirl  
shirt and fancy jeans.

She struggles to be heard over the sounds of the club.

Jim comes in and ambles toward the bar. He stops to look across the  
dance floor and listen to Laura. Smiles, obviously enjoying what he  
sees and hears.

He continues to the bar. Nods to a couple of men along the way. Finds  
a vacant stool.

CHUCK, the bartender, smiles; comes right over.

CHUCK  
Hey, Jim. Long time no see.

JIM  
Hey, Chuck. Yeah, been keepin' pretty busy. You know the cattle business.

CHUCK  
The usual?

Jim nods. Chuck sets up a beer. Jim takes it, turns his back to the bar and watches as

LAURA  
works her heart out trying to compete with the room noise. Her voice is pretty, plaintive. Real C/W.

AT THE BAR  
Jim smiles, clearly enjoying Laura's performance. He taps his hand in time with the music.

CHUCK  
I see you got an eye for talent.

JIM  
Oh, I just kinda like her looks.

CHUCK  
Spoken like a true music lover. How about her singin'?

JIM  
That too. Nice style.

A woman along the bar leaves the MAN she's with and heads Jim's way. She's SIBYL TRENT, late 30s, pretty but with some hard edges. Good figure in a chic dress.

She comes up on Jim's blind side.

SIBYL  
Hello, Jim.

Jim turns. His smile changes to a look of surprise. Sibyl gives him a provocative stare.

JIM  
Well I'll be... I don't believe it!  
Sibyl! Is that you? I'll be a dirty bird.

SIBYL  
I wondered if you'd remember.

JIM  
C'mon. It ain't been that long since you left Flag -- has it?

SIBYL  
Nearly ten years.

Jim seems a little shocked.

JIM  
I guess I lost track.  
(a beat)  
And got married, right?

Sibyl nods. Jim looks expectantly along the bar.

JIM  
He here with ya?

SIBYL  
He better not be. We were divorced a year ago.

JIM  
Sorry.

SIBYL  
I'm not. The parting was -- generous.

Now the man Sibyl was sitting with ambles toward them. He's big, husky. Not on a friendly mission.

MAN  
Hey, sweetheart, introduce me to your friend.

SIBYL  
I'm not your sweetheart.

MAN  
Listen, sweetheart, don't pull that stuff on me. I spent too much dough on you to...

SIBYL  
Can't you see I'm busy?

The man's suddenly hostile. Grabs Sibyl's arm roughly.

MAN  
C'mon, sweetheart...

Jim puts a gentle hand on the man's shoulder.

JIM  
I don't think you got the message, pal.  
Seems like the lady don't want to be your sweetheart.

MAN  
Butt out, ugly.

He sweeps Jim's hand off his shoulder. Eyes Jim up and down, then turns back to Sibyl.

MAN  
C'mon, let's go.

He grabs her again, more roughly this time. Jim grips the man's arm.

JIM  
I ain't gonna tell ya again, friend. Turn her loose.

The man glares. Then suddenly pushes Sibyl aside and takes a swing at Jim.

Jim sidesteps the punch. Buries a jab in the man's gut. Sibyl SCREAMS. The man responds with a swing to Jim's head that's blocked. Jim connects with a shot to the jaw.

Chuck leaps over the bar, wraps the man in a bear hug.

CHUCK  
OK, fella. You're outa here.

A murmur goes up at the bar.

People at the tables strain to see what the commotion is about.

ON STAGE Laura keeps singing but sees she's lost much of her audience to the fight. She glares toward

THE BAR  
where Jim holds Sibyl's arm gently while Chuck leads the subdued man away. Jim and Sibyl turn back to the bar.

JIM  
You gotta be more careful who ya drink with.

SIBYL  
Am I safe now?

JIM  
If ya can't trust an old high school buddy, who can ya trust?

Sibyl smiles provocatively.

SIBYL  
Buddy? I thought it was a little more than that -- once.

Jim smiles, signals for Chuck. Sibyl moves closer.

ON STAGE Laura's song ends to indifferent applause and she storms off the band stand. Strides toward

THE BAR  
where Jim and Sibyl get their drinks.

Laura appears, blood in her eye. She grabs Jim's arm, spins him around. Spills his beer.

LAURA  
Thanks a lot, Buster!

Jim throws up his hands in mock fright.

JIM  
Hey, I surrender.

LAURA  
It's hard enough to hold that crowd out there without having to compete with a boxing match at the bar.

JIM  
Look, I'm sorry. No kiddin'. But it wasn't my fault -- really. I'm sorry.

Here, lemme buy ya a drink.

Laura stares from Jim to Sibyl. Sibyl smiles demurely, like a preening Cheshire cat.

LAURA  
Forget it.

She stalks off and heads down a hallway.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - HALLWAY

Laura heads for her dressing room. She's stopped at the door by BILLY WILSON, thin, about 40, smooth in a cheap way.

BILLY  
We need to have a little talk.

He motions to the dressing room.

LAURA  
We can talk here just fine.

BILLY  
Have it your way. That's a pretty thin crowd out there. You don't seem to be attractin' much business.

LAURA  
Maybe you should quit watering your drinks.

BILLY  
Very funny. I'm not sure how much longer I can keep ya on if things don't pick up. Unless of course...  
(leering)  
Unless you and me were to -- to have dinner some night or...

Laura burns him with a glare.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - BAR

Sibyl takes Jim's arm, snuggles up to him. They raise their glasses in a silent toast.

JIM  
So, what brought ya back to this part of the country?

SIBYL  
You know what they say. We all yearn to go back to our roots.

Jim shrugs.

JIM  
Guess I haven't heard that one. You plannin' to stay long?

SIBYL  
That depends.

JIM  
On?

SIBYL  
Oh, a lot of things. It's not much fun anymore -- being on my own.

Jim's interest level goes up.

JIM  
No prospects? You know, no one serious?

SIBYL  
Men? Good Lord no.

She covers Jim's hand with her own. Gives him a squeeze. Gazes into his face.

SIBYL  
What about you?

BILLY  
Well, well. What's this, a class reunion?

They turn to see Billy approaching, a grin on his face.

BILLY  
(to Sibyl)  
When'd you get back to town?

SIBYL  
Hello, Billy. A few days ago.

Billy holds out a hand. They shake limply.

SIBYL  
You haven't changed much. A little less hair.

BILLY  
And a lot more money.

Billy gloats, gives Jim a disdainful look.

BILLY  
Speakin' of money -- or the lack of it -- you ready to sell me that run down spread of yours?

JIM  
No way. That's McHenry land. Always will be.

BILLY  
Don't be too sure.

He smiles at Jim while he addresses Sibyl.

BILLY  
Whadda ya think of that, Sibyl? Here's a guy who turns down a sweet cash offer for a ranch that's goin' broke...

JIM  
My place's a long way from goin' broke -- not that it's any of your business. With the new BLM leases I'll double the size of my herd in a year.

BILLY  
A year? Ha! I'll make more money right here in a week.

Sibyl eyes Billy cynically.

SIBYL  
I remember your picture in the year book. "The most likely to succeed." It just didn't say at what.

Billy laughs.

JIM  
Wheelin' and dealin' most likely.

BILLY  
So I've made a few deals in my day. What's wrong with that?

JIM  
I heard some of 'em were pretty shady.

Billy laughs again.

BILLY  
Not this one, Jim boy. Now's your chance to really cash in. But ya gotta make a move.

JIM  
Forget it.

BILLY  
Suit yourself. But I can't imagine why a man would want to hang on to the place where his wife was killed.

Jim's face goes dark. Sibyl's look is quizzical. The temperature gets suddenly colder. Billy leers.

BILLY  
Especially if that man figured he was to blame.

Jim glares at Billy; takes a menacing step. Billy's suddenly afraid. Backs away. Then Jim lets out a sigh, hangs his head for a second, turns to Sibyl.

JIM  
I never was much for reunions. Maybe we can have a drink alone sometime.

He wheels and heads for the exit. Sibyl stares at Billy.

SIBYL  
Thanks.

BILLY  
What'd I do?

SIBYL  
You're too dense to understand. Things were going just fine till you showed up.

BILLY

You mean McHenry? He's a loser.

SIBYL  
He's a man!

She pushes past Billy and runs toward the exit.

EXT. WAGON WHEEL

Sibyl bursts out the front door. Sees Jim crossing the parking lot to his truck.

SIBYL  
Jim! Wait!

She runs to where he waits at the pickup.

SIBYL  
I don't like reunions either. Is there someplace else we could...? Where it's not so crowded?

JIM  
Aw, they're all the same.  
(a beat)  
Hey, I know. Hop in.

Sibyl smiles, gets in the truck.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - DRESSING ROOM

Small. Cluttered. Laura has changed jeans for a skirt. She's in her bra, just about to put on her blouse when, without knocking, Billy bursts in.

She covers herself, glares at him.

LAURA  
Why don't you just barge right in?

He ignores her sarcasm. Ogles her as she quickly slips on her blouse, holds it closed in front of her.

BILLY  
Don't mind me, just finish what you're doin'.

He goes to her, strokes her shoulder.

BILLY  
Changed your mind about that dinner?

LAURA  
How many times do I have to tell you? I get paid for singing -- nothing else.

She tucks in her blouse, retrieves her purse.

LAURA  
The answer's still no. And it'll always be no.

Billy gets a little ugly. Grabs Laura by the wrist.

BILLY  
Listen. You're just a nowhere honky-tonk

singer. You wanna make it in my place, you be a little nicer to the boss. Got that?

LAURA  
Sit on it.

Billy's suddenly enraged.

BILLY  
OK! That's it! You're done! Fired! Out!

Laura's devastated.

LAURA  
You're -- you're not serious. No. Wait, Billy. You can't. I... If it's just dinner, maybe... I -- I need this job.

Billy sneers.

BILLY  
You shoulda thought a that.

He heads for the door.

LAURA  
Billy, please. Wait...

BILLY  
I don't wait for things I want.

He leaves. SLAMS the door behind him.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Jim and Sibyl are on the porch, by the railing. Cozy. Drinks in hand. Sibyl runs a hand along Jim's arm.

SIBYL  
That vulgar Billy Wilson made me so angry -  
- the way he treated you. All that talkk  
about your ranch.

JIM  
Aw -- don't let it bother ya. Billy  
doesn't know beans about the cattle  
business.

JIM  
Long as I can work the BLM leases plus my  
own land, this place'll do all right.

SIBYL  
BLM?

JIM  
Bureau of Land Management. We lease  
pasture from the government, then it's up  
to us to take care of it.

Sibyl gives him a quizzical look.

SIBYL  
Do you really like it out here this far  
from town?

She touches his arm affectionately. Jim shrugs.

JIM  
Just thirty miles. Why?

JENNY  
Hi! Whatcha doin'?

They turn to see Jenny as she comes out onto the porch. The screen door SLAMS behind her.

JENNY  
I thought I heard voices.

Jim beams -- with a smile as warm as good bourbon.

JIM  
Hi, honey. C'mon out. I want ya to meet someone.

Jenny smiles, crosses the porch.

JIM  
This is Sibyl Trent.

Sibyl's smile is exaggerated, phony. She holds out a hand.

SIBYL  
Jenny, dear. How nice. I've heard so much about you.

JENNY  
No kidding? Where?

SIBYL  
From your father.

JENNY  
You two known each other long?

SIBYL  
Since high school.

JENNY  
Oh, you were a teacher?

Jim gulps. Sibyl's eyes narrow.

SIBYL  
And I knew your mother. Of course that was before she married your father.

She gives Jim a fond look, eye lashes fluttering.

SIBYL  
You might say we were rivals.

JENNY  
I'll bet.  
(a beat - to Jim)  
I just wanted to tell you, Dad. Mrs. Allen changed her mind.

JIM  
Great!

JENNY

She decided not to wait a week. She left right after you went into town.

Jim is crushed. Jenny heads for the door.

JENNY

See ya.

Sibyl's claws are showing. She gives Jim an oily smile.

SIBYL

What a precious child.

At the door, her back to the porch, Jenny sticks two fingers in her mouth. Makes a gagging face.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

Billy stands on a high bluff. Points out features to JAMES BRIGGS, a tall, distinguished looking man next to him. Briggs looks out of place in his expensive business suit.

BILLY

This is the land I was tellin' you about, Mr. Briggs.

BRIGGS

Magnificent. Just what I'm looking for.

BILLY

Five thousand beautiful acres. And a steal at just two and a half million.

BRIGGS

I wouldn't call five hundred dollars an acre a steal, but I'll take it. How soon can we consummate the deal?

BILLY

Ahhh -- gimme some time to -- to clear up some things with the bank and...

BRIGGS

Don't take too long, Wilson. I'm not a patient man. And this isn't the only property I'm looking at.

BILLY

Trust me, Mr. Briggs, I'll...

Briggs turns and strides away leaving Billy gaping.

EXT. HIGH COUNTRY

Jim's pickup bounces along a dirt road. A popular C/W TUNE BLARES from the radio.

INT. TRUCK - MOVING

Jim keeps time with the music on the steering wheel. Buffy is on the seat beside him. The pickup nears an intersecting paved road as a yellow school bus approaches. Jim stops, waits for the bus.

EXT. PAVED ROAD

The bus stops, Jenny gets out. She waves to the other kids on the bus who wave back.

JENNY  
Bye. So long. See ya in the fall!

INT. TRUCK

Jenny climbs in. Hugs Jim. Roughhouses with Buffy. Jim turns down the radio.

JIM  
Seen your brother?

JENNY  
Just for a minute. He had to stay after.  
Then he said he was going to rodeo practice.

JIM  
Hope he enjoys it while it lasts.

Jenny looks melancholy for a beat. Then looks at Jim.

JENNY  
Daddy -- why don't you want Skip to rodeo after he gets out of school?

JIM  
I rodeoed for fifteen years, and what'd it get me? A drawer full a belt buckles and body full a broken bones. Besides, I want him here. On the ranch.

JENNY  
Is that what he wants?

Jim doesn't answer. He turns the volume up on the radio.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - DAY

Small-time. Stands empty except for a smattering of teenagers. A few boys hang on the pipe fences in the chute area.

EDDIE SYKES, mid 20s, waits by a pen. Stop watch in his hand. There's an antsy Hereford calf in the pen. In the chute next to it, Skip sits astride a horse, a determined look on his face. A pigging string in his mouth.

EDDIE  
All set?

Skip nods. Eddie releases the calf. It charges out of the pen with Skip in hot pursuit.

HOOTS AND HOLLERS in the b.g. as Skip ropes the calf. Jerks it up short, runs to it, and swiftly ties it up. Throws his hands in the air.

Eddie punches his stop watch. Runs to Skip.

EDDIE  
Great! Just great! Eight point two seconds. That's enough to beat half the calf ropers in the pros!

Skip beams, unties the calf. It scampers away.

EDDIE  
If you don't win the high school finals  
I'll quit coachin'. Right after I beat you  
black and blue with your own piggin'  
string.

He and Skip laugh, slap each other on the back. Eddie walks away  
beaming.

RON BAXTER, about Skip's age and wearing a big grin, runs up. Gives  
Skip some high fives.

RON  
Hey, cowboy! You're some kinda bad. That  
poor calf never had a chance.

SKIP  
Thanks. Oh, hey. How about a ride home?

RON  
No sweat. Man, you got that championship  
wired.

Skip shrugs.

SKIP  
I sure hope so, maybe Dad'll let...

He's interrupted by CAROL SIBLEY, a pretty teenager. She's got eyes  
for Skip.

CAROL  
Hi, Skip. Hi, Ron.

RON  
Hi, Carol.

CAROL  
(to Skip)  
You were great. We're going for something  
to eat. You coming?

She takes Skip's hand.

SKIP  
Oh, man. I can't today.

CAROL  
Well, if you don't want to...

SKIP  
You know better'n that. But I'm late now.  
How about, you know, some other time?

Carol pretends a pout then smiles quickly.

CAROL  
Sure. See you later.

She gives him a peck on the cheek then heads for some other kids. Skip  
and Ron start for Ron's car.

RON  
I hear Carol's applied to UNLV.

SKIP  
Really?

RON  
That wouldn't be because that's where you  
might be goin'?

SKIP  
How should I know?

RON  
How come all the good lookin' women go for  
you cowboy types? It ain't fair.

Skip looks sad.

SKIP  
A lot of things aren't fair.

They walk in silence to the car. Get in and drive away.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - EARLY MORNING

A sparkling high-country morning. Jim, Blackie, and Luke ride along a  
fence line. Stop at a section where the fence posts are broken at odd  
angles or torn out of the dirt.

Several head of cattle wander loose, feeding and milling around the  
damaged fence. Jim scowls.

LUKE  
Mustangs again, Jim?

JIM  
What else?

He points to a distant rise. A herd of wild horses is just moving out  
sight.

JIM  
Somethin's gotta be done about them horses  
-- one way or the other. Laws or no lawss.

Blackie and Luke exchange glances. Jim spots a pregnant cow. He rides  
to her, feels her belly, checks her eyes. The cow BELLOWS. Jim turns  
to the men.

JIM  
I don't like her looks. I'm gonna move her  
into the barn.

Looking grim, he takes his rope, secures it around the cow's horns,  
remounts.

JIM  
You two get started on this fence. I'll be  
back.

He mounts up and leads the cow away.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

A mess. Burnt toast, bacon strips and eggs -- some broken -- on the  
counter. Dirty dishes and pans scattered around.

Jenny and Skip play tug of war with a cereal box.

JENNY  
Gimme that!

SKIP  
No!

The box rips and frosted fuzzy pops, or some such abomination, fly all over the floor.

SKIP  
Now look what you did!

JENNY  
You did it, genius!

Jim comes in.

JIM  
Hey, you two!

JENNY  
He's making a mess!

SKIP  
She's making a mess!

JIM  
Hold it, hold it. One at a time. What's goin' on here?

JENNY  
It was his turn to make breakfast.

SKIP  
I did. But she didn't like it.

JENNY  
Ha! Some breakfast. Burnt toast. Half raw eggs. Uch!

SKIP  
They were scrambled.

JENNY  
So's your brain.

JIM  
That's enough! I don't care whose turn it was. This place looks worse than the stable.

He starts trying to clean up. He's hot.

JIM  
(to Skip)  
You get out to the north range and give Luke and Blackie a hand with the fence.

JIM  
(to Jenny)  
And you help me get this mess cleaned up.

Both kids pout. Then Skip stomps off and Jenny reluctantly begins to help Jim. He dumps the eggs into the bag under the sink.

JENNY

Mother always put that stuff down the garbage disposal.

Jim glares, then puts a dirty pan into the dish washer.

JENNY

She always washed those by hand.

Jim glares some more. Stacks dishes in the washer.

JENNY

Mother always...

Jim stops, looks holes through his daughter.

JENNY

...rinsed those -- first.

She knows she's pushed it too far. Jim throws his dirty dish into the sink. It breaks. He grabs a towel, wipes his hands. He fumes.

JIM

Great. You know so much about how your mother did things, you take over.

He throws the towel down. Makes a sweeping gesture.

JIM

You're the woman of the house now.

He stomps out of the kitchen. Jenny smiles confidently; punches the air.

JENNY

Yes!

EXT. FLAGSTAFF - CITY STREETS - DAY

Laura tools along in her VW Rabbit.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

1) She drives up to the Golden Horseshoe, a fancy club. Parks, goes in. She's out in a minute, drives away.

2) She tools up to The Cowboy, more of a honky-tonk, but still nice. She's there for a few minutes then comes out, followed by a grinning fat man. She strides angrily to her car. Drives off.

3) Now she's at The Buckaroo Lounge, still further down on the class scale. She opens the front door, looks in, changes her mind. Closes the door and runs to her car.

4) Her next stop is at the Fillies and Foxes. A joint that makes even The Buckaroo Lounge look good.

She goes in. Reappears in a flash with a greasy looking character who pats her arm, whispers something in her ear. Giggles. Laura slaps his face. Strides to her car.

INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Small. Neat but not plush.

Laura comes in, weary. Turns on a light, goes to the kitchen. She

dials her portable phone, tucks it under her chin. Puts a skillet on the stove, puts water in a pan, starts to peel vegetables.

LAURA  
Hi, Marty. Laura Carter.

INT. SMALL OFFICE

A messy cubbyhole. MARTY REYNOLDS, a Sammy Glick type, is on the phone.

MARTY  
Hi, babe. How are ya?

INTERCUT AS NEEDED:

LAURA  
Swell. No I'm not swell. I'm beat. Got anything for me?

MARTY  
Things are a little slow right now, babe.

LAURA  
That's what you said a week ago!

MARTY  
Nothin's happenin'. What can I tell ya?

LAURA  
Tell me you found me a job. I'm down to my last...

MARTY  
Maybe ya should, you know, write home for money or somethin'.

LAURA  
And maybe you should get me a gig!

MARTY  
Believe me, I'm tryin'. But you -- you got a lotta competition.

LAURA  
So? You're my agent, do something!

Marty shakes his head, says nothing. Laura sighs.

LAURA  
I'm sorry. I know you're trying. Later.

She hangs up, rubs her temples. Then grabs at the pan on the stove -- the water's boiling over. So is her frustration.

INT. WAGON WHEEL

The bar is half full. C/W MUSIC plays from a jukebox.

Several couples are dancing, doing the latest steps. Billy spots Sibyl alone at the bar, goes to join her.

BILLY  
Look who's here. Guess you ain't sore at me any more.

SIBYL  
No -- but I should be. The way you ran Jim off.

BILLY  
Awww. You're wastin' your time chasin' after McHenry.

SIBYL  
I beg your pardon. I'm not "chasing" after anyone.

BILLY  
Ya coulda fooled me.

SIBYL  
He's a very attractive man. But that place of his...

BILLY  
What's wrong with it?

SIBYL  
It's just so -- so far. From everything.

BILLY  
Yeah, ain't it great? Now if I can just convince McHenry to sell.

Sibyl's wheels are turning.

SIBYL  
Mmmm. Perhaps it's not a bad idea at that.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jim, Skip, and the ranch hands are at the table, set for dinner. Buffy looks on expectantly.

Jenny is at the stove. Hassled amid a variety of pots and pans and dishes and platters. Some things boil over; others smoke. It's not looking good.

Jim and Skip exchange doubtful glances. Blackie and Luke rub their hands together, lick their lips.

SKIP  
What's she doin', Dad?

JENNY  
I'm making supper, you dolt!

SKIP  
What's a dolt?

JENNY  
If you have to ask, you are one.

She spoons food of some kind onto a couple of plates.

SKIP  
It sure took ya long enough.

Jenny sets the plates in front of Jim and Skip.

JENNY

You could've left any time.

BLACKIE

Hey, that smells kinda good.

Jenny spoons food on more plates, burns a finger. Jim starts to get up.

JIM

Honey, why don't ya let me help?

JENNY

No! You said I was supposed to be the woman of the house so just give me a chance.

Jim sits down again.

Jenny sets plates in front of the ranch hands. Stands watching nervously, chews a fingernail.

Jim pokes at his food, ventures a bite. His eyes widen. He looks in danger of throwing up. Skip gags down a bite and reaches for a drink of water.

Luke, Blackie, Will, and Buck take bites. Then, looking embarrassed, just stare at their plates; move the food around with their forks.

Jim pushes his plate away. Gives Jenny a forlorn look.

JIM

I'm sorry, honey, I just can't...

Jenny's crestfallen.

Skip takes his plate and scrapes the food into a dog dish by the stove. Buffy follows eagerly; wolfs down a couple of bites. Then buries his head in his paws and whines.

Jenny breaks into tears and runs from the room.

In the awkward quiet, the ranch hands get up and amble toward the door. Blackie pauses, looks at Jim.

BLACKIE

Kinda makes ya wish Mrs. Allen was back, don't it?

He leaves and Jim goes to the telephone, digs a slip of paper out of his pocket. Dials.

JIM

Yeah, hi. I -- ah -- I want to run an ad for a...

(a beat)

Yeah. Classified. An ad for a cook. And a housekeeper.

(a beat)

No, not one of each.

(a beat)

Maybe ya can help me with the words.

He takes a desperate look around the kitchen.

JIM

I need somebody right away.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Laura's at the counter with a cup of coffee and a newspaper. Pencil in hand. She pores over the classifieds. Circles one.

The ad headline reads: GENTLEMAN RANCHER NEEDS PERSONAL CHEF. EXCELLENT SALARY AND WORKING CONDITIONS. FLEXIBLE HOURS.

Laura thinks for a moment. Takes the paper to the pay phone. Dials.

LAURA

Yes, I'm calling about the job in the...

(a beat)

Yeah, that one. Could you tell me a little more about...

(a beat)

Interview? Sure, I guess.

(a beat)

Saturday night? That's kind of a funny time for an interview.

(a beat)

At the Wagon Wheel? Say, is this thing on the level?

(a beat)

Sure I'm interested in the job, but...

LAURA

(a beat)

OK, OK. How will I know you?

(a beat)

Right. Saturday, eight o'clock.

She hangs up and stares at the phone. Shakes her head in wonderment at what she's doing.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - NIGHT

The dance floor is crowded. The C/W BAND in full swing.

Jim's at the bar talking with three MEN. They're different ages, but all ruddy faced, real rancher types. Everybody looks serious.

MAN #1

We all got problems with them mustangs, Jim. But you seem to be havin' more'n your share lately.

The men all nod soberly.

JIM

Bustin' up fences is one thing, but it's the overgrazin' that's really got me worried.

MAN #2

It's about the quickest way I know to lose your leases. The BLM's real sticky about that.

JIM

But they won't do a blasted thing about the mustangs.

MAN #3

Won't or can't?

JIM  
Same thing. All I know is I stand to lose  
a lot more than just that government land.  
(a beat)  
Plus I got other reasons.

The ranchers nod solemnly, examine their hands.

AT THE ENTRANCE  
Sibyl comes in.

AT THE ENTRANCE  
Dressed for the hunt in a tight cocktail  
dress. Heels. The works. She spots Jim at  
the bar. Sashays in his direction.

AT THE BAR  
things brighten as Sibyl appears. The men  
smile, tip their Stetsons, ad lib some  
greetings. She touches a cheek to Jim's.  
The ranchers tip their hats again and drift  
away.

SIBYL  
You looked so serious just now.

JIM  
Ranch business.

SIBYL  
Trouble?

JIM  
Nothin' I can't handle.

SIBYL  
Perhaps you should consider Billy's offer.

JIM  
Sell out? No way. Let's get a table and  
talk about somethin' a little more fun.

Hand at her elbow, he steers Sibyl toward the tables.

AT THE ENTRANCE  
Laura comes in, takes note of the large,  
NOISY crowd.

She stops for a minute to watch the pretty young singer belting out a  
C/W TUNE from the stage. Laura's not a happy camper as she moves  
toward

THE BAR  
Laura catches Chuck's eye.

CHUCK  
Laura! How you doin'?

LAURA  
Could be better.

CHUCK  
Aw, gee. Sorry about that. What can I do  
for ya?

She checks a piece of paper.

LAURA  
You know a -- a Jim McHenry?

CHUCK  
Sure. He's a regular.

LAURA  
I'm supposed to meet him here.

CHUCK  
You got a little competition.

LAURA  
It's not that kind of meeting.

CHUCK  
Sorry. None of my business.  
(pointing)  
The corner table.

Laura looks where Chuck points. Sees Jim.

LAURA  
Oh, no. The fighter. Some "gentleman  
rancher." Forget it. See you later,  
Chuck.

As she turns to leave she bumps into Billy. He leers, as usual. Takes her arm.

BILLY  
Well, look who's here. Come to see who got  
your old job?

He nods toward the bandstand where the cute young thing sings her heart out. Laura's envy is showing.

BILLY  
Now there's a singer who knows how to --  
cooperate.  
(a beat)  
I hear you ain't doin' so hot. You could  
always work for me again, ya know.

LAURA  
I've got a job, thank you.

She twists away from Billy and strides to

JIM'S TABLE  
where he and Sibyl are deep in  
conversation.

LAURA  
Ahem. Excuse me?

Jim looks up, smiles. Sibyl frowns.

JIM  
Don't I know you?

LAURA  
I came about your ad.

JIM  
Hey, I remember. You're a singer!

LAURA  
So?

JIM  
So I need a cook.

Laura shrugs.

JIM  
You know how to cook?

LAURA  
I can manage.

Sibyl's claws are out.

SIBYL  
Hmmm. I'm sure.

JIM  
Ever work a ranch?

LAURA  
Hasn't everyone?

SIBYL  
He's talking about the kind where they have  
cows, dear -- not mustangs.

The sparks dance between Laura and Sybil.

LAURA  
(to Jim)  
On second thought, I'm not sure I'd fit.

Jim takes a napkin, scribbles on it, hands it to her.

JIM  
Suit yourself. Here's where I live. If ya  
want the job, be there first thing Monday  
morning.

He turns his attention back to Sibyl. Behind his back, she glares at  
Laura.

LAURA  
Don't hold your breath.

She walks toward the exit. Drops the napkin in an ashtray as she  
passes. Then she sees Billy and his new singer heading for the  
dressing room. He spots Laura watching and gives her a big wink.

Laura goes back to the ashtray, retrieves the napkin and puts it in her  
pocket.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - MORNING

Early. Still. A VW Rabbit drives up the lane and stops. Laura gets  
out, a little hesitant. Looks around.

Slowly she walks up the steps, across the porch, and taps on the door.  
No answer. She knocks again, louder. Still no answer.

A dog BARKS somewhere in the house. She peeks in a window. Then tries the front door. It opens and she quietly lets herself in.

INT. RANCH - LIVING ROOM

Spacious. Clean. Well-furnished in western style. There's no one around. Laura looks the room over, nods approvingly.

LAURA  
Not bad.

She tiptoes across the room, into the

KITCHEN  
where she surveys a disaster. Dirty dishes on the table and in the sink.

KITCHEN  
Leftover food on the counters. She tiptoes back toward the door.

JENNY  
Hi.

Laura jumps, clutches her breast. Then she sees Jenny.

LAURA  
Good Lord! Who are you?

JENNY  
I'm Jenny. Who are you?

LAURA  
Laura. Laura Carter.  
(a beat)  
The ad didn't say anything about -- about kids.

JENNY  
What ad? Hey, wait. Are you...?  
(grinning, hopeful)  
The new cook?

Laura's skeptical.

LAURA  
I'm beginning to doubt it.

Jenny jumps up and down, overjoyed.

JENNY  
Yay! Reinforcements! Just in time!

She goes to Laura, hugs her, twirls her around. Laura's flabbergasted. Buffy charges in, BARKS, wags his tail.

JENNY  
We eat, Buffy, we eat!

Laura smiles weakly. Gazes around again.

LAURA  
Looks like we could use a little clean-up first.

EXT. RANCH

Jim, in work clothes, rides up to the barn. Ties up his horse and starts for the house.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Laura is tidying up. Jenny is setting the table.

JENNY  
Dad always sits at the head of the table.  
He's kinda fussy about it.

LAURA  
Well I guess he's the boss.

JENNY  
You can say that again.

LAURA  
By the way, where is -- ah...

JIM  
Jim. Jim McHenry.

They turn as Jim comes in. He smiles at Jenny, gives her a tender pat. Turns to Laura and his smile fades.

JIM  
We like to have breakfast ready by the time  
we came in from chores.

Laura tries to smile.

LAURA  
I... We... I thought we should clean up  
the kitchen a little before...

JIM  
Looks clean. When's breakfast?

Skip comes in, shirttail out, rubbing his eyes.

JENNY  
(to Laura)  
He's Skip. My brother.

Laura's mouth drops open.

LAURA  
Brother? How nice. Are there any more  
like him?

Jenny makes a face. Sticks her tongue out.

SKIP  
Hi.

JIM  
This is Laura. She's takin' Mrs. Allen's  
place -- at least for now. She'll be doin'  
the cleanin' and...

Laura frowns at Jim.

LAURA  
Cleaning?

JIM  
And cookin'.

SKIP  
Great, when do we eat? I'm starved.

The door opens and Luke, Will, and Buck come in.

JIM  
Boys, meet the new cook.

He motions to Laura. She's overwhelmed.

LAURA  
Now just a minute! The ad said...

JIM  
Let's start breakfast.

Jenny gives Laura a quick glance.

JENNY  
Yeah! Let's have some chocolate covered  
sugar puffs.

Laura smiles.

LAURA  
Good idea.

She and Jenny begin to dig out the cereal and some bowls. Jim and the  
hands exchange worried looks.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

The mustang herd feeds peacefully under the watchful eye of the gray  
stallion. In the distance, a lone rider approaches. He's too far away  
to tell who it is, but he reins up, dismounts and takes out a rifle.

The man FIRES. A horse drops. The herd bolts.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - BEDROOM

Plain but nicely furnished. Laura, suitcase in hand, follows Jenny in.

JENNY  
This was Mrs. Allen's room. It's not fancy  
but it's all yours now.

Laura looks around, sets her suitcase down.

LAURA  
Very nice. Thank you.

Jenny plops down on the bed.

JENNY  
I oughta be thanking you.  
(off Laura's look)  
I liked Mrs. Allen but I'm really glad  
you're here. Now maybe I can get rid of  
Sibyl.

LAURA  
Sibyl?

JENNY  
A friend of my father's.

LAURA  
Girl fiend?

Jenny makes a gagging motion.

JENNY  
Some "girl."

LAURA  
What does my being here have to do with her?

JENNY  
Maybe Dad'll get interested in you instead.

Laura's caught off guard.

LAURA  
Whoa. Not so fast.

She starts unpacking, putting things in a chest of drawers.

LAURA  
I'm a singer, not a -- what do you call it?  
-- career domestic.

JENNY  
A singer? Oh, wow.

LAURA  
This is only a temporary gig.

JENNY  
I just love show business talk.

Laura smiles. Takes some clothes to the closet where she finds a few dresses hanging. With her back to Jenny she checks them out. They're chic, about Laura's size.

LAURA  
Jenny, how old is Mrs. Allen?

JENNY  
Real old. Probably forty or something.

LAURA  
Is she my size?

JENNY  
Yeah, top to bottom. But she's about twice as wide.

Thoughtfully, Laura pushes the dresses aside, hangs her own.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

The ranch hands and McHenry's are around the table.

The men all look reasonably contented. Jenny and Laura clear the dirty dishes. Luke pats his belly.

LUKE

That was a fair supper there, darlin'.

JIM  
There ain't much ya can do to spoil steak  
and potatoes, Luke.

LUKE  
Well, there's nothin' like plain old  
country vittles.

Jim gives Laura a teasing look.

JIM  
Next time we might even get gravy.

Laura gives him a dark stare.

LAURA  
Your ad didn't say anything about cooking  
for an army.

The air's suddenly frosty. Laura and Jenny continue with the dishes as  
the hands struggle up from the table.

BLACKIE  
Think I'll take a little air.

BUCK  
Good idea, Blackie. I'll go with ya.

Jim, Skip, and the ranch hands all stroll toward the door.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - PORCH

Jim and the hands sit on the porch railing or on the steps. Skip  
strums idly on a guitar. His playing leaves something to be wished  
for.

Jenny and Laura come out with Buffy. They find a place to sit and  
listen. Skip's the center of attention.

SKIP  
What's everybody lookin' at?

JENNY  
We're trying to figure out if you make that  
noise on purpose or if you just can't help  
it.

A few chuckles. Skip hands the guitar to Jenny.

SKIP  
Here, you play so good.

JENNY TAKES IT THEN

JENNY  
Oh, hey!

She turns to Laura.

JENNY  
Sing for us, Laura.

Laura resists.

JENNY

Oh, please. Just one song. Even part of a song. Please?

Everyone ad libs their encouragement. Jim looks on appreciatively.

LAURA

Well -- OK. Just one.

She takes the guitar and accompanies herself while she sings a soft C/W ballad. Jim smiles as he watches.

When Laura's done there's APPLAUSE and a couple of soft WHISTLES from the men. Jenny is ecstatic. Claps wildly.

Jim gets up and adopts his best ranch boss stance.

JIM

Well, four-thirty comes early.

LAURA

What happens at four-thirty?

JIM

You're on a ranch now. That's when we get up.

Laura is open-mouthed. The hands stand and amble across the porch.

WILL

Yeah, guess it's time to turn in.

The others ad lib goodnights, head for the bunkhouse.

JIM

(to Laura)

You better do the same.

LAURA

I think I'm old enough to know when to go to bed, thank you.

JIM

Not till you been ranchin' for a while you're not. Just give me some credit for knowin' what's best.

SKIP

Yeah, for everybody.

Jim scowls as Skip gets up and goes into the house. Laura gives the guitar back to Jenny then, with a sharp look at Jim, follows Skip.

Jenny tags after her. Stops at the door, smiles.

JENNY

Good night, Daddy. We really do love you.

Jim watches Jenny go in. Then Buffy looks at him, goes to the door and BARKS.

JIM

You too?

He opens the door for Buffy.

JIM  
Some friend you are.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - JIM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark. Quiet. Jim's in bed, sleeping.

There's a muffled sound of a COW BAWLING. The SOUND repeats. Jim stirs, sits up. Listens. More BAWLING. He puts on his pants, boots, and shirt.

Heads out of the room.

INT. BARN

A row of stalls. Some with pregnant cows in them.

Jim comes in, a worried look on his face. More BAWLING. He looks for the protesting animal.

He finds the cow he brought in from the range. She's down on her side and laboring, a milky substance spread around her rear quarters.

JIM  
Good Lord, no!

He rushes to the cow, tugs and pulls on her. Tries to get her to stand up.

JIM  
C'mon, girl, on your feet! Get up! C'mon, get up!

The cow BELLOWS more loudly than ever.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - LAURA'S ROOM

Laura's lying on the bed, dressed, reading a book. She hears the COW BELLOWING. Again. Frowning, she puts the book aside, slips on her shoes and goes out the door.

INT. BARN

Laura comes in as the cow struggles to her feet with a lot of pushing, shoving, and grunting from Jim.

He spots Laura.

JIM  
You're just in time!

LAURA  
For what?

JIM  
This cow passed her afterbirth first. We gotta deliver the calf right now or it'll die.

Laura looks terrified.

LAURA  
We?

Jim hands her a bucket of water and a bottle of liquid.

JIM  
Pour about half the bottle in the water and  
stir it up.

He points to a cupboard.

JIM  
Then get the surgical soap and towels outa  
that cupboard.

Laura mixes the liquid in the bucket. Then gets the towels and soap.

Meanwhile Jim gets the cow fixed into a head gate. He takes some  
chains off the wall and dips them in the bucket. With the chains in  
one hand, he thrusts the other hand deep into the cow. Gropes for the  
calf.

JIM  
Please girl, don't lay down on me.

The cow BAWLS as Jim pulls two small hooves out of her.

JIM  
Get the soap ready!

LAURA  
Ready for what?

He hooks the chains to a calf puller. Laura gasps.

JIM  
When I start to pull, you soap up the cow.  
And use plenty of it!

He starts to crank.

LAURA  
You mean I have to touch...?

JIM  
I mean you gotta make her good and slippery  
or this calf won't make it!

Laura applies soap to the birth canal. Squeamishly at first, then  
with more vigor. Two legs emerge, followed by the calf's hips. The  
cow BELLOWS.

JIM  
Don't lay down on me now, momma. We might  
get a baby for ya yet.

Jim pulls. Laura soaps. A few more pulls and there's a sticky, gangly  
baby calf on the bloody straw. Laura is awestruck. Jim smiles -- but  
it fades suddenly.

JIM  
He ain't breathin'!

He begins to blow into the calf's nostrils. Points to some burlap  
bags hanging on the wall.

JIM  
Grab them gunny sacks!

They're high on the wall. Laura jumps, and after a couple of tries,  
pulls some bags down.

JIM  
Rub! Rub him with those sacks. Rub hard!

Laura rubs while Jim feels for the calf's jugular vein.

JIM  
He's got a pulse! Keep rubbin'!

He blows into the calf's nose some more.

JIM  
C'mon, boy, breathe!

A gasp catches in the calf's throat. He sneezes, gets up on wobbly legs. Looks at Laura with big brown eyes.

Jim smiles. Laura looks beat. She lets out a big sigh, sags against the stall, trembling. She admires Jim with misty eyes. He goes to her, takes her by the shoulders.

LAURA  
I never saw anything like that. You were --  
you were just...

She sees Jim in a new light. He smiles at her gently.

JIM  
You weren't too bad yourself. We might  
make a rancher outa you yet.

For a moment it looks as though he might kiss her. Then he turns and walks away. Laura looks after him quizzically.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - LAURA'S ROOM - DAWN

An ALARM CLOCK RINGS in the semi-darkness. Laura, in bed, struggles awake. Gropes, turns off the alarm. Pulls the covers over her head. There's a KNOCK at the door.

JIM  
Time to get up.

Laura pushes back the covers from her face.

LAURA  
You're sick. Go away. It's the middle of  
the night.

JIM  
Let's go. You wanted the job.

LAURA  
I've changed my mind. I'm going back to  
Flagstaff. Soon as it's time for normal  
people to be up.

The door opens and Buffy bounds into the room. He BARKS. Wags his tail. Gives her doggie kisses. Laura knows when she's licked.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Laura's a whirlwind of activity. And frazzled.

She tries to fry bacon, make pancakes, brew coffee, all at once. There's pancake batter slopped around. Spilled coffee grounds. And

the bacon smokes.

Jim and the ranch hands watch as Laura struggles. The kids are nowhere to be seen.

JIM  
It's gettin' late.

LAURA  
It's barely daylight for Pete's sake!

Jim frowns. Buffy BARKS at Laura. She steams.

JIM  
And some of us already got half a day's work done -- with more to do.

The hands exchange expectant looks; and watch as Laura stacks pancakes on a platter.

JIM  
I thought you knew your way around a kitchen.

Laura glares. Slams the platter on the table.

LAURA  
This isn't a kitchen, it's a mess hall.

She's near the boiling point.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

Jim, on horseback, herds a few cattle through a gate in a barbed wire fence.

A pickup truck drives up. Markings on the door read: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT.

GUS HARDESTY, mid 40s, pleasant looking, is behind the wheel. He pulls along side of Jim. Rolls down the window.

GUS  
Howdy, Jim.

JIM  
Gus.

GUS  
Heard there was a wild horse shot out here the other day.

JIM  
Just one? Too bad.

GUS  
Wouldn't have any idea who mighta been responsible?

JIM  
No, but if ya find out, tell him I'll buy him a drink.

GUS  
I understand you been havin' some trouble with the mustangs.

JIM  
Me and about every other rancher around.

GUS  
The way I get it, you more'n most.

Gus gives Jim a squinty look. Puts the truck in gear.

GUS  
Don't do anything foolish, Jim.

Jim returns Gus's hard look as the truck drives off.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Neat and tidy. Laura is on the phone.

LAURA  
C'mon, Marty. That's the same thing you told me last week.  
(a beat)  
I just don't believe there aren't any singing jobs out there.  
(a beat)  
Then try a little harder! I've got to get away from this place!

SLAM. She turns to see Jenny, wearing a long face, standing in the doorway.

JENNY  
I didn't mean to listen.

Laura sighs.

LAURA  
I know. It doesn't matter.

JENNY  
You aren't really going to leave?

LAURA  
Oh, Jenny. I don't belong here. You know it. I know it. And by now your father certainly knows it.

JENNY  
Please. Just give it a chance? Give him a chance. Stay -- please?

Laura hugs Jenny. Makes no promises.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - LAURA'S ROOM - EVENING

Laura folds some clothes, puts them in a chest of drawers. There's a TAP on the door.

It's Jim. He seems softer, maybe a little contrite.

JIM  
Can I come in a minute?

Laura motions him in.

JIM

I know things are off to kind of a rough start. But they'll get better.

Laura just shrugs. Jim goes to the closet.

JIM  
There's some stuff in here I shoulda took out. You can probably use the room.

Laura is noncommittal as he takes out the extra dresses. There's an awkward beat.

JIM  
These belonged to...

LAURA  
Please, it's none of my business.

JIM  
They belonged to my wife. Kinda her favorites.

His face registers hurt.

JIM  
I just stuck 'em in here after -- after she died.

Laura bites her lip, waits a beat.

LAURA  
When...?

JIM  
Three years ago. A riding accident.

Jim relives some painful memory. Then he snaps out of it. Smiles softly.

JIM  
I got an easy day tomorrow. Maybe we could... Maybe you'd like to take a look around the ranch.

Laura shrugs, smiles thinly.

LAURA  
Why not?

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

Jim and Laura ride over the high country -- slowly. She's not Dale Evans. He points to a large herd of cattle scattered over some distant hills.

JIM  
That's our herd. Part of it. This time a year they're pretty well spread out. Grazin' where they find it.

Laura smiles appreciatively, and they ride on. She spots a herd of horses roaming in the distance.

LAURA  
Oh, look. Are they yours too?

Jim's look turns cold.

JIM  
Not hardly.

She doesn't notice his bitterness. She's entranced.

LAURA  
They're the most beautiful creatures I've ever seen!

JIM  
I can think a some other names for 'em.

Laura's puzzled.

JIM  
They're mustangs. Wild horses. They're ruinin' this country.  
(off her stare)  
They overgraze the land. Don't leave anything for the cattle. Ya can't keep 'em out of the good pasture. They tear up the fences and...

LAURA  
Maybe they just want to be free. Like people.

JIM  
They hate people. They're ornery, mean.

LAURA  
I can't believe that.

JIM  
Neither could my wife.  
(a beat)  
The BLM tried to get people to buy 'em. Adopt-A-Mustang, they called it. My wife had to have one. Claimed she could break it herself. She got killed for her trouble.

Laura sucks in a big breath.

JIM  
I should a never let her...

He sighs. They wait silently for a moment then ride on. They top a small rise and come upon two dead horses.

LAURA  
Look! Oh, my God!

Jim dismounts, checks out the mustangs.

JIM  
Shot. Looks like they been dead a while.

Laura's appalled.

LAURA  
How ghastly!

Jim shrugs.

LAURA  
Don't you care? Don't you want to know who did it?

Jim remounts.

JIM  
Nope. Just so long as I don't get the blame.

LAURA  
How can people do this? Can't they just leave these poor animals alone?

Jim gives her a long look, then wheels his horse.

JIM  
C'mon, I want to show ya somethin'.

They ride off.

EXT. LARGE PIPE CORRAL

Filled to bursting with wild horses. A sign identifies the corral as a Bureau of Land Management holding pen.

Laura and Jim ride up. Stare silently for a moment at the horses.

JIM  
I love animals. I used to love these mustangs. They were part of the West I grew up in. Then the herds got bigger and bigger. Ten times what they used to be. Now they're takin' over the water, the good pasture.

They ride around the corral.

JIM  
Thousands of 'em have been rounded up and stuck in pens like this. Whadda ya do with 'em? It's a problem with no solution.

LAURA  
Killing's not the answer.

JIM  
They gotta be controlled.  
(bitterly)  
It's them or the ranch.

Laura gives him a frightened look.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jim's on the phone.

JIM  
No, Gus, I don't know anything about more dead mustangs.

GUS  
Well maybe next time you're in town you could stop by the bureau office.

JIM

What for?

GUS  
Just for a little talk.

JIM  
Whatever you say, Gus.

He hangs up, a dark look on his face.

INT. BARN

Skip listlessly practices tossing a lasso over horns mounted on a sawhorse. Blackie comes in, leading his horse. Begins to unsaddle. He sees Skip and leers.

BLACKIE  
They're easier to rope when they ain't  
runnin'.

SKIP  
I do OK.

BLACKIE  
So I hear. Too bad your old man don't  
think so.

SKIP  
What's that supposed to mean?

BLACKIE  
Anyone good as you with a rope oughta get  
to rodeo all he wants.

Skip gives Blackie a dark look and leaves the barn.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - DAY

The same arena we saw before.

This time there are more people in the stands. Mostly teens. Plus a few adults, including Jim and Sibyl.

Eddie, the coach, stands by a chute, stop watch in hand.

The chute opens and a calf breaks out, followed by Skip and his horse. Skip does another masterful job of roping and hog-tying the calf.

CHEERS from the stands as Eddie runs up to Skip. They grin, laugh. Thump each other on the back.

EDDIE  
Man, you're ready!

Skip waves to the noisy stands. Especially to Carol.

EDDIE  
That's enough for today. I don't want ya  
to lose your edge.

SKIP  
Don't worry, Eddie. I'm up for this one.

Eddie gives him a high five. Skip leads his horse back to the chute area. He's surprised to see Jim and Sibyl waiting for him. Jim smiles, offers his hand. Skip takes it, smiles back.

JIM  
Good job.

SKIP  
Thanks. I didn't know you were watching.

JIM  
I didn't want to miss it. This being your last season.

Skip's mood darkens. He turns and stalks toward the stands. To where Carol and Ron are waiting.

Jim's sad as he watches Skip stride off.

SIBYL  
It looks like you two have a little difference of opinion.

JIM  
He'll thank me some day. When the ranch is his.

Sibyl gives Jim a quick look. Then smiles coyly and hugs his arm as they walk away.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Jim and Sibyl sit at the counter. Sip coffee. Sibyl is attentive. The interested companion.

JIM  
So now Gus Hardesty thinks I got somethin' to do with shootin' the mustangs.

SIBYL  
Why on earth would he think that?

JIM  
Because he knows how I feel about 'em. How much trouble they been causin' me.

SIBYL  
I never knew running a ranch was so difficult. Why not sell it? Move closer to town? Is it really worth all that hassle?

JIM  
See for yourself. Come to supper Sunday night. I'll show ya around the place and...

SIBYL  
I'd love to.

She checks her watch.

SIBYL  
Oh, oh. I've got to scoot. I've got a hairdresser's appointment.

She gets up. Gives Jim a peck on the cheek.

SIBYL

And I'll want to look my best for Sunday.

She hustles away and Jim finishes his coffee. Starts for the door.  
He's intercepted by Billy.

BILLY  
Hey, McHenry. I been lookin' all over for  
ya.  
(leering)  
I hear ya been shootin' up the wild horses.

JIM  
Careful, Billy, I might start on saloon  
owners next.

BILLY  
Listen, let's get serious about that place  
a yours. I'll give ya five hundred  
thousand. Cash.

JIM  
It's not for sale.

BILLY  
Man, you drive a hard bargain. OK. Six  
hundred large ones. That's my top offer.

JIM  
How come you're so anxious, Billy?

BILLY  
I'm just a cowboy at heart, Jim. You know  
that.

Jim laughs and walks away. Billy looks pained. He goes to a pay  
phone, digs out a piece of paper. Dials.

BILLY  
Mr. Briggs? Hi. Billy Wilson.  
(a beat)  
Yeah, that's what I called about. No, no.  
Nothin' wrong. I just need a little more  
time.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Sunday dinner. Jim at the head of the table, Jenny and Skip at the  
sides, Sibyl at the other end toying with her food. There's a vacant  
chair.

SIBYL  
Your new cook certainly prepares a basic  
menu.

JIM  
Well, she doesn't have time for much fancy  
stuff with a bunch this size.

SIBYL  
I was cooking meals like this when I was  
little more than a girl.

JENNY  
Gee, what a great memory.

Sibyl absorbs the zinger as Laura comes in with a bowl of potatoes.

Sibyl's claws are out again. She glares at Laura as she sets the bowl down.

SIBYL

May I have that here, ah -- what's your name, dear?

Laura smiles a sweet, mocking smile. Plops the bowl down in front of Sibyl then goes to the empty chair.

LAURA

Miss Carter, to you -- dear.

SIBYL

I rarely eat potatoes. They're so fattening.

JENNY

Yeah. They say it's hard to keep the weight off when you get old.

Sibyl looks like she just tasted something bad. Jim nods, pats his belly. Smiles at Sibyl.

JIM

Man, it sure is when ya get our age.

Laura smiles at Sibyl.

LAURA

I'm not looking forward to it.

Sibyl glares at Jim. Then forces a sickly smile.

JIM

Say, speakin' a food, there's a picnic and dance at the...

SKIP

Are you kiddin', Dad. You dance?

Laura takes an empty bowl, heads for the kitchen.

LAURA

I'll get some more gravy.

SIBYL

Excuse me.

She follows Laura. Jenny and Skip exchange looks, shrug.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Laura, at the stove, ladles up gravy. Sibyl comes up behind her, steaming.

SIBYL

I know what you're up to and it won't work.

LAURA

What're you talking about?

SIBYL

You know perfectly well. Trying to embarrass me in front of Jim. Do I look stupid?

LAURA  
Please. Don't make it so easy for me.

SIBYL  
I saw how you looked at him. How he looked  
at you.

LAURA  
Maybe he likes the view.

SIBYL  
Just how much has he seen?

LAURA  
You witch! You insulting...

SIBYL  
Why don't you go back to -- whatever it is  
you do in those saloons.

LAURA  
I'm a singer.

SIBYL  
Oh, is that what they're calling it these  
days?

Laura is stunned. Incensed. Hurt.

SIBYL  
He's too good for your kind. Just keep  
away from him, you hear?

Laura sags as Sibyl wheels and heads toward the door.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Sibyl swishes in, a smile pasted on her face. She takes her seat.  
Laura comes to the kitchen doorway. Stands watching. She's subdued,  
gloomy.

SIBYL  
You were saying about a picnic?

JIM  
Yeah, how'd ya like to go? Even if my son  
doesn't think much of my dancin'.

JENNY  
Yeah! We'll all go.

Laura begins to clear dirty dishes from the table. Sibyl glances up,  
gives her a catty smile. Then turns to Jenny.

SIBYL  
You mean the family of course.

Laura disappears back into the kitchen.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jim is at the table. Laura, in an apron, is at the sink doing dishes.  
She goes to the table and snatches Jim's coffee cup. His eyes bug out  
as she turns away.

JIM  
What's got into you?

JIM  
Ya been actin' ornery as a hen tryin' to lay a goose egg.

LAURA  
I'd like to get these dishes done.

JIM  
Jenny offered to help.

LAURA  
She's the only one.

JIM  
Sibyl had to get home.

Laura, fuming, attacks the dishes with a vengeance. Jim is perplexed.

JIM  
Is it the picnic? Because I asked Sibyl?

LAURA  
Ask anyone you want. It's none of my business.

Laura takes off her apron, throws it down. Stalks off.

EXT. RANCH - DAY

Jim, Skip, and the ranch hands are by the barn, saddling horses. Luke glances around.

LUKE  
Anyone seen Smiley?

BLACKIE  
What's a matter, Luke, scared ya won't get fed?

LUKE  
You bet. I ain't goin' on no roundup 'less I know the chuck wagon's right behind me.

BUCK  
Speak a the devil...

They turn to see the "chuck truck." A converted pickup with camper shell and pots and pans hanging on it.

The driver is SMILEY, a skinny, sour-faced Native American. Two long braids hang from under his tall hat. He stops, leans out the window.

Jenny and Laura come out of the house. Laura doesn't look too happy.

LUKE  
'Bout time ya got here, Smiley. I was gettin' worried.

Smiley's face is a blank.

SMILEY  
Why are white men always in a hurry? I had to make sure I had enough supplies to last.

Jim darts a look Laura's way. Gives her an impish grin.

JIM

Good. We might get regular meals for a change.

The hands look away and ad lib "ouches" and "oh, ohs" along with a little nervous laughter. Laura misses the humor. Stares a hole through Jim.

The men mount up. Skip and Jim wave. Jenny waves back. Laura scowls and Jim knows he put his foot in deep do-do.

EXT. OPEN RANGE

A roundup is underway. Jim and Skip ride side by side. The rest of the hands are spread out behind a small herd of cattle. Smiley brings up the rear in his truck.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

1) Jim and Skip, laughing and having fun, race after two strays. The cattle squirt away from Jim. Skip deftly ropes one of the animals. Makes faces at his father.

2) The herd has stopped. There's a fire going, branding irons heat. Jim and Skip wait. Will brings a roped calf to the fire. Skip flips it easily on its side. Blackie jabs it with a hot iron. Skip turns it loose.

3) Luke brings a roped calf to the fire. Jim tries to flip it, struggles, finally gets it down. He falls in the process. The calf squirts away. Skip looks on, makes fun. Jim kicks at the dirt, then smiles.

4) Dusk. The crew gathers around the chuck truck. Some drink coffee from tin mugs, others smoke. Skip nudges Buck, points at Jim. He's asleep sitting up. Skip sticks a match in the sole of Jim's boot, lights it. Jim wakes with a start. Does a dance to stamp out the hotfoot. Then smiles good naturedly at the laughter.

5) Night. The men slip into their bed rolls. They exchange glances and watch Skip stretch his feet into his bag. He lets out a yell, tears free. The men roar as Blackie goes to Skip's bag, pulls out a small rabbit, turns it loose. Skip hides his head in embarrassment.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

The herd is moving again. Jim and Skip ride together. They look happy.

JIM

I'm glad you're along.

Skip nods.

JIM

You're a top hand, Skip. I mean it.

SKIP

I know what you're getting at, Dad. And I like ranchin', but it's just...

Skip's eyes grow large and he stares at something o.s.

SKIP  
Hey! There's something out there. Looks like...

He spurs his horse and rides to the bloated body of another dead mustang. Jim rides up. Skip stares sadly at the carcass.

JIM  
Guess someone's tryin' to do me a favor.

Skip glares. He's hot.

SKIP  
That's all you care about isn't it? Having things your way.

He rides off in a huff leaving Jim bug-eyed.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Laura and Jenny come out, sit on the steps. Jenny's guitar is propped against a rocking chair.

LAURA  
What a perfect night. So quiet. And the stars are so close.

JENNY  
Yeah, and Sibyl's not around. She's such a pain.

LAURA  
Your father doesn't seem to think so.

JENNY  
He's a man, what's he know?

LAURA  
Is he -- serious?

JENNY  
I don't know if he's serious, but she sure is. She had a crush on him in high school. I guess now she figures she's got a second chance.  
(a beat)  
That's why you gotta stay around.

LAURA  
Come on now. We settled that, remember?  
I'm a singer. That's what I do.

Jenny broods. Then brightens as Laura gets the guitar, strums softly, hums a tune. Jenny, her eyes full of admiration, smiles at Laura.

Laura begins singing a popular C/W tune. After a few seconds she nods at Jenny.

LAURA  
(between words to the song)  
Help me out.

Jenny joins in. Tentatively at first but with increasing confidence.

They make pretty music. Laura nods and smiles. Jenny beams. They finish.

LAURA  
Hey, we're pretty good together.

JENNY  
Really? Do you mean it?

LAURA  
Of course. You have a very nice voice.

JENNY  
Oh, wow. How'd you get to be a star?

LAURA  
(smiling)  
You're great for my ego! I'm a long way from being a star. Right now I'd be happy with ten weeks at the local Elks Club.

JENNY  
So why did you come here?

Laura's face clouds. She gets up, hands Jenny the guitar. Turns toward the door.

LAURA  
Let's just say I -- I needed a job.

She looks wistful.

EXT. RANCH - LATE AFTERNOON

Jim, Skip, and the ranch hands ride up to the barn. Followed by Smiley's chuck truck. They're all bearded and scruffy. They dismount and unsaddle their horses.

JIM  
You men did a good job. I'll see ya get some kinda bonus.

BUCK  
I'll settle for a hot bath and some clean sheets.

The others ad lib their agreement and head for the bunkhouse. Jim and Skip head for the main ranch house.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jim is at the table with a cup of coffee. Laura clears dirty dishes, takes them to the sink. Jim pushes his chair back, stretches out his legs. Sighs comfortably.

JIM  
That meal really hit the spot.

Laura gives him a quizzical look.

LAURA  
Maybe you ought to go on a roundup more often.

Jim chuckles. Gets up and goes to Laura's side.

JIM  
You might be right at that.  
(a beat)  
Look, I'm sorry about... Well, I'm just  
sorry things seem to get all messed up  
between us.

There's an awkward silence, then Laura softens.

LAURA  
Me too.

JIM  
Truce?

Laura gives him a long look, then a little smile.

LAURA  
Sit down. I'll get you more coffee.

EXT. RANCH - BACK YARD - DAY

Laura hangs clothes on a line under a hot sun. Jenny's helping.

LAURA  
These clothes look like they've been slept  
in for a week.

JENNY  
They probably were. I don't think they  
change while they're on roundup.

Laura sees Jim and Skip riding in -- hard. Sweat soaked and looking  
haggard. They dismount.

LAURA  
Lunch is all ready. If you just want to  
wash up.

JIM  
No time. We're goin' right back out.

He and Skip go to a pump, soak their heads.

JIM  
(to Skip)  
Get the men.

Skip heads for the barn.

LAURA  
What's wrong?

JIM  
Mustangs.

Laura gives him a troubled look.

JIM  
A big herd. On the move. We gotta keep  
'em outa the BLM land.

LAURA  
You won't have to -- hurt them?

JIM

Now don't start. Please. Just fix us some food to take with us.

Laura dashes for the house as Skip and three hands show up with their horses.

JIM  
Where's Blackie?

BUCK  
He said somethin' this mornin' about mendin' fences somewhere.

Jim shoots Buck a quizzical look. Laura comes back with a couple of paper sacks of food.

LAURA  
Just some sandwiches.

Jim stuffs them in his saddle bag, gives her a wry grin.

JIM  
No wise cracks this time.

Laura shrugs, then smiles. Jim laughs. In the distance, thunder RUMBLES. Lightening CRACKLES out of the black clouds along the horizon. The men mount up.

Laura strokes Jim's horse. Looks into Jim's eyes.

LAURA  
Be careful.

Jim's surprised. But he touches her hand, nods. Then he's off. Laura and Jenny watch, concern in their faces.

The PHONE RINGS in the house. Jenny runs in to answer it while Laura lingers to watch the departing riders.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jenny's on the phone.

JENNY  
Can I tell her who's calling?

VOICE  
This is Marty Reynolds. Her agent.

JENNY  
Oh -- ah -- I'm sorry, she's not here right now.

VOICE  
Well have her call me. Tell her I might have a job for her. Got that?

JENNY  
Yes. I'll tell her.

She hangs up just as Laura comes into the room.

LAURA  
Who was that?

JENNY

Ah -- a wrong number.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - DAY

A large mustang herd grazes aimlessly. Under the protective eye of the gray stallion. At the sound of THUNDER his ears prick up, his nostrils flare.

He WHINNIES nervously and paws the ground.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

A man -- his face concealed -- dismounts from his horse and gathers up some dry grass. Twists it into a torch. He lights it and touches it to several patches of tinder-dry pasture.

He's immediately got a ROARING FIRE going. He mounts up and rides off.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

Jim and his men ride at a canter.

EXT. RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

Flames roar across the dry prairie. Consuming everything in their path.

THE MUSTANG HERD

is in no immediate danger but is panicked by the oncoming blaze. They begin to run blindly away from the threat. Soon they are stampeding wildly across the prairie.

In their flight they tear up and trample fences and poles. Some of the horses are scratched and bloodied.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

Jim, Skip, and the three ranch hands ride out of the smoke. Their clothes wet and sticking to them. Faces blackened. Jim signals and they rein up.

JIM

We gotta turn them or they'll tear out every fence between here and the ranch house!

(to the men)

You three ride south. Make sure they don't get in the main pasture. Skip and me'll see if we can head 'em off.

They spur their mounts into action. The hands in one direction, Jim and Skip in another.

Jim and Skip SHOUT and wave as they ride full tilt to the head of the THUNDERING herd. Skip gets out in front and the mustangs begins to turn.

Jim falls behind as Skip rides with abandon.

JIM

Atta boy, Skip! They're turnin'! They're turnin'!

Then Skip's horse stumbles and falls. Skip tumbles to the ground, rolls, and is still.

Jim rides up. Leaps down and takes Skip in his arms.

JIM  
Skip! Skip!

There's no response. His face a mask of torment, Jim clutches Skip's head to his chest.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - BEDROOM

A teenage boy's room. Jim, Laura, Jenny, and Buffy stand solemnly at bedside. A DOCTOR peers at Skip's bandaged face. Examines him with an ophthalmoscope.

Then the doctor shakes his head sadly, turns away. Skip's eyes follow him.

DOCTOR  
I'm sorry...

The room holds its breath. The doctor breaks into a smile, pats Skip's shoulder.

DOCTOR  
But there's nothing wrong with this young man that a pepperoni pizza won't fix up.

Smiles all around.

SKIP  
Hey, that sounds pretty good for a change.

LAURA  
Are you trying to tell me something about my cooking?

More smiles as the doctor leaves. Everyone crowds around Skip.

Except Jim. He stands for a beat, head down, shoulders hunched. He wipes at his eyes. Then, while the attention is on Skip, walks from the room.

Jenny sees him leave and goes to the window. At bedside, Laura smiles happily, hugs Skip. He responds warmly.

LAURA  
I'll make you the biggest pizza you ever saw.

SKIP  
That's OK. Maybe we can find a place that delivers.

Laura laughs. Buffy BARKS. Skip looks around the room.

SKIP  
What happened to Dad?

JENNY  
He just rode out.

The room is suddenly quiet. Sadder.

EXT. OPEN RANGE

Blackened prairie. Torn up fence posts and tangled barbed wire. Jim,

like a statue on horseback, his face grim, looks over the damage.

He hears the NICKER of a horse. Turns to see the mustang stallion in the middle distance. Just standing and staring. Man and beast glare at each other.

JIM  
Heven't ya done enough? Leave us alone! If  
ya don't I'll kill ya!

The stallion rears. Takes a last look and gallops off. Jim slumps dejectedly.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AREA - OFFICE COMPLEX

A pickup drives up, parks. Jim and Skip, still bandaged, get out.

They head for a building with a sign: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT - FLAGSTAFF DISTRICT. GUS HARDESTY, DIRECTOR.

INT. BLM OFFICE

A small meeting room with table and chairs. Crowded with several ruddy-faced RANCHERS. Plus Gus Hardesty and Billy.

RANCHER #1  
I say shoot 'em! Shoot 'em all!

There's a RUMBLE of agreement.

GUS  
Now hold on.

RANCHER #2  
What're ya afraid of, Gus? It's legal  
after ya hold 'em forty-five days.

GUS  
Legal, yes. But imagine how the fur would  
fly if we started shootin' wild horses.  
It'd be political suicide for the bureau.

Jim and Skip come in.

JIM  
What's worse? That or losin' our  
government land because it's overgrazed?

All eyes turn in his direction.

GUS  
Thanks for comin' in, Jim.

RANCHER #1  
Yeah. Ask Jim here how he feels about  
shootin' the mustangs.

More RUMBLES of agreement. Skip watches Jim expectantly.

JIM  
I say if that's what it takes, do it.

SKIP  
No! There's gotta be a better way. Let  
the horses be.

The ranchers GRUMBLE and motion for Skip to butt out.

RANCHER #2

That's right humane like, Skip, but it don't solve the problem.

SKIP

Does shooting them solve it?

BILLY

Your father seems to think so.

Jim glowers at Billy.

JIM

You got somethin' to say, Billy?

BILLY

I heard there's been quite a few mustangs shot on your place.

Jim lunges for Billy. Gus and a rancher intervene.

GUS

That's enough, Billy.

(to Jim)

But I admit things do look a little suspicious, Jim.

SKIP

Yeah -- they sure do.

Father and son stare each other down then

JIM

I don't need to hear this from you too.

C'mon, we're goin' home.

Billy leers. Skip stomps out of the room. Jim pauses, looks around, then starts after him. Gus follows. Stops Jim by the door, out of hearing of the others.

GUS

We need to have a talk.

JIM

Can ya make it short and sweet?

GUS

I can make it short, but there's no way I can sweeten it up. The Regional Office got wind of all the mustang killin' and...

JIM

What's that got to do with me?

GUS

It happened on your land. They're kinda sore about it.

JIM

They think I did it?

GUS

That's what they want to find out. They... Well, they're gonna hold a hearing to see

if there's cause to suspend your leases.

JIM  
They what? Ya can't do that, Gus! Not now. If they suspend those leases it'll bust me.

GUS  
I'm sorry, Jim.

JIM  
Sorry! That's big of ya. What ever happened to the idea that a man was innocent till they proved him guilty?

Gus hangs his head. Jim fumes.

GUS  
This ain't a trial, Jim. It don't work that way.

Jim storms out the door, SLAMS it behind him.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - MOVING

Jim and Skip sit side by side in stony silence. Jim sneaks a sidelong glance at Skip then

JIM  
It'd be kinda nice to have your own son stand up for ya.

More stony silence.

JIM  
Especially in public. Against outsiders. I'd like to think you're on my side.

Skip is hot.

SKIP  
You're never on mine.

JIM  
How can ya say that? So we disagree about the...

SKIP  
Is that all killing horses is to you? A disagreement?

JIM  
You act like I was the one doin' it.

SKIP  
Who else would want to kill mustangs on our land?

Jim grows quiet, thoughtful. Skip cools down. The stony silence returns.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Laura's at the stove cooking. Jim and Skip come in, both gloomy. Skip walks right out again without speaking. Jim plops down at the table.

LAURA  
How'd the meeting go ?

JIM  
How d'ya think a meetin' about wild horses  
would go?

Laura gives him a withering look.

LAURA  
Sorry I asked.

JIM  
You mighta liked it. You seem to be on the  
horses' side most a the time.

LAURA  
Listen, just because you've got a case of  
the uglies, don't take it out on me, OK?

JIM  
If ya don't like it here ya could always  
quit.

The tension crackles. They glare. Laura loads some food on a plate  
and slams it down in front of Jim.

LAURA  
If I didn't need your stinking job so bad  
I'd do just that!

She stomps out of the room. Passes Jenny, who's on her way in. Jenny  
looks perplexed.

JENNY  
Gee, you guys sound like you're married or  
something.

Jim snorts.

JIM  
Gimme a break.

JENNY  
Maybe -- maybe she's the one that needs a  
break, Dad.

Jim looks remorseful.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Laura is ironing. Jim comes in looking contrite.

JIM  
Got a minute?

LAURA  
You're the boss, I just work here.

JIM  
I deserve that. C'mon, I want to show ya  
somethin'.

HE LEADS HER OUT TO

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL

There's a beautiful palomino filly inside. Jim climbs in, takes a rope off a post and ropes her. Leads the horse to Laura.

JIM  
Like her?

Laura's perplexed. She strokes the horse affectionately.

LAURA  
What's not to like? She's beautiful.

JIM  
She's yours.

Laura's overwhelmed.

LAURA  
You... You're joking. You can't be serious. I never...

JIM  
Cross my heart.

LAURA  
Oh, wow! This is too much. I never had a horse before. I...

She hugs the horse's neck. And, with trembling lips, smiles weakly at Jim. He beams.

LAURA  
Look, I -- I hope this wasn't just because of -- because of yesterday.

JIM  
It's because every cowgirl oughta have a horse.

LAURA  
Yeah, well... You have to know by now I'm the furthest thing in the world from a cowgirl.

JIM  
I kinda had that feelin'.

LAURA  
I was born in Connecticut. My father came out to Arizona looking for work. But he fell in with -- what'd they used to call it? -- the wrong crowd. My mother and I watched him lose our life's savings, then finally drink himself to death.

JIM  
I don't need to know this. It's your business.

LAURA  
All that country-western stuff was just hype for my singing. And when you asked me that night if I could cook -- well, any job looked good.

JIM

And I'm glad ya took this one. Honest. I guess I shoulda told ya about the kids -- and the boys.

Laura laughs in spite of herself.

LAURA  
And Buffy.

JIM  
But you're doin' real good now. Besides, Jenny's crazy about ya. And I... Well, I'd kinda like for ya to stay around. At least till I sort out how I feel about Sibyl.

That lights Laura's fuse.

LAURA  
Until you what? Do what? Is that all I am around here? A fill-in until you make up your mind about -- about some -- some ghost out of your high school year book?

JIM  
Hey! What're ya all shook up about? What's eatin' ya all of a sudden?

Laura takes a deep breath.

LAURA  
I don't know !

But we do. She stomps back toward the house leaving Jim bewildered.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

In the near darkness, Laura dials the phone. Waits.

LAURA  
Marty? Laura Carter. I just called to see if...

MARTY  
Hey, didn't you get my message?

LAURA  
What message?

MARTY  
About the job. I talked to some kid.

LAURA  
What job?

MARTY  
Forget it. It's gone already. Keep in touch.

LAURA  
Wait!

Click.

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - DAY

Kids play tag among the trees. Wooden tables. Mostly occupied by families unpacking baskets and piles of goodies.

A C/W BAND PLAYS while couples do the latest line dances on a portable dance floor.

At one of the tables, Skip and Carol unpack a basket. Their hands touch. Skip holds her hand, pulls her close gives her a kiss. Carol pushes him away halfheartedly.

CAROL  
Everybody's looking.

SKIP  
Nobody's looking. C'mere.

He tires to kiss her again. She pushes again, but not as hard. They turn as Ron and BETH, his date, come up.

RON  
Hey, you two, none a that.

IN THE PARKING AREA Jim's pickup pulls up. Laura, Jenny, and Buffy pile out. They look for a table to set their basket on.

As they pass through the crowd, Laura nods and smiles to the women. Some nod politely. But several give her dirty looks; turn away without a smile or a greeting. Some whisper to friends and point at her.

Jenny spots Skip, Ron, Carol, and Beth. She dashes to

THE TABLE  
just as Skip is kissing Carol again. They don't see her.

JENNY  
How can you stand that, Carol? He didn't even brush his teeth this morning.

Skip and Carol break. Skip glares at Jenny.

SKIP  
What are you doin' here alone?

JENNY  
Laura's right behind me.

SKIP  
Did she bring your play pen?

Laura and Buffy join the group.

SKIP  
Hi. We saved you a seat. Where's Dad?

JENNY  
He's driving with...

She makes a gagging motion. Laura puts the basket down, smiles at the other kids.

SKIP  
(to Laura)  
Oh, sorry. This is Ron and Carol and Beth.

Everyone nods and smiles, ad lib greetings. They're interrupted by the

appearance of Mrs. Allen at the table.

JENNY  
Mrs. Allen!

They hug warmly. Laura looks on, not sure what to expect.

JENNY  
Mrs. Allen this is Laura. She...

MRS. ALLEN  
I know. She took my place.

Mrs. Allen smiles, offers her hand. Laura takes it.

MRS. ALLEN  
I had to come over and see what a real  
martyr looks like. Or is it a saint?

LAURA  
Neither one I'm afraid.

MRS. ALLEN  
You've gotta be somethin' special to stick  
it out at the McHenry's.

JENNY  
Hey!

SKIP  
Hey!

Chuckles all around.

MRS. ALLEN  
I'm talkin' about that bull-headed Jim  
McHenry and the ungrateful crew he's got  
workin' for him.  
(to Laura)  
Anyway, it's a pleasure to meet ya.

Laura glances around at some of the women nearby.

LAURA  
Not everyone seems to share your opinion.

MRS. ALLEN  
Oh?

LAURA  
I got some rather -- funny looks from some  
of the "ladies."

MRS. ALLEN  
Awww. Don't let it bother ya. That's just  
the new-woman-in-town treatment. Besides,  
half of 'em are probably just jealous  
because you're so pretty.

Jenny points.

JENNY  
There's Dad.

PARKING AREA  
A car pulls up, Sibyl at the wheel, Jim

beside her. They park and get out. Jim looks around, spots the group.

AT THE TABLE

Mrs. Allen pats Laura's hand.

MRS. ALLEN

I'll leave ya to your family, dear.

She leaves.

Jim and Sibyl join the group and the atmosphere immediately chills.

Laura and Sibyl exchange cold looks. Don't speak. Jenny looks like she smells something bad. Jim and Laura barely nod. Skip can see what's happening.

SKIP

Hey you guys, we're gonna go dance.

He, Ron, and their girlfriends take off.

JIM

Well, I guess it's a little too early to eat.

Sibyl gives Laura a catty smile.

SIBYL

But perhaps you ought to get things ready, dear -- in case Jim changes his mind.

Laura seethes.

LAURA

And perhaps you ought to go...

BILLY

Well, well, well. Now ain't this cozy.

Billy, a smirk on his face, joins the group. He's tipsy, weaves like a reed in the wind. He leers at Laura.

BILLY

Singin' much these days, honey?

Laura burns him with a look.

JIM

This is a family gatherin', Billy. And you ain't family.

BILLY

Aw, c'mon, Jim boy.

BILLY

You're not still sore about what I said at the BLM meetin'? I was just kiddin'. I know it ain't really you shootin' those horses. Least I don't think it is.

He giggles.

JIM

I don't even know why Gus let you in.

BILLY  
It's a free country.

JIM  
That meetin' was for ranchers.

BILLY  
Speakin' a ranchers, let's talk about me  
buyin' that place a yours.

Sibyl takes Jim's arm. She's got a "stand by your man" look on her  
face. Gives Billy a long stare.

SIBYL  
I don't think Jim wants to talk about it  
right now, Billy.

Laura and Jenny trade looks, then glare at Sibyl.

JENNY  
(softly to Laura, but  
audible)  
Like it was any of her business.

Sibyl glares back, but shuts her mouth.

JIM  
(to Billy)  
Sibyl's right. There's nothin' to talk  
about.

Billy sits down uninvited.

BILLY  
Maybe later. Let's have a beer and think  
it over.

He begins to paw through one of the picnic baskets. Draws a cold stare  
from Jim.

JIM  
Another beer and you won't be able to  
think.

Billy digs out a beer. Sibyl turns to Jim.

SIBYL  
Why don't we dance?

JIM  
I don't know, I'm not much...

SIBYL  
Oh, come on. It'll help you work up an  
appetite.

She pulls Jim to his feet.

SIBYL  
(to Laura - smirking)  
That'll give you a chance to get things  
ready -- dear.

Laura shoots daggers at Sibyl who ignores her and drags Jim toward the  
dance floor.

LAURA  
Break a leg.

JENNY  
That's show business talk, right?

LAURA  
Not this time.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR Jim and Sibyl join Skip and his friends. Jim is as bad a dancer as Skip is good. Sibyl struggles to help him with the steps.

In the b.g., a nice looking boy goes to the table and asks Jenny to dance. She checks Laura for an OK. Then leaves her alone with Billy.

On the floor, Jenny and the boy show their stuff.

Then there's a break in the music. Jenny goes to the BAND LEADER. Whispers in his ear, and points to the table and Laura. He goes to the microphone.

BAND LEADER  
Ladies and gentlemen, we're real lucky to have one of country-western's rising singing stars with us today.  
(pointing)  
If you'd all give her a nice warm welcome I'm sure we could get Miss Laura Carter up here to do a song for us.

Scattered APPLAUSE. Much craning of necks and gawking.

AT THE TABLE  
Laura waves off the invitation. Billy sucks on his beer.

BILLY  
Better do it, sweetie. Might be the last chance ya get.

From the crowd, ad lib calls of encouragement.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR Jenny claps and jumps with glee.

JENNY  
Please come sing! Do it for me!

Jim smiles wryly and Sibyl frowns. Laura gives in and heads for the band stand to rising APPLAUSE.

ON STAGE Laura confers with the band leader. They begin the song.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR Jenny beams. Jim gets a big smile on his face, clearly enjoying Laura's singing. Sibyl sees his reaction and is annoyed. She clings to his arm but he ignores her.

The song ends to warm APPLAUSE and Laura starts back to the table. At the edge of the dance floor she draws a cold stare from a sloppy, matronly WOMAN.

WOMAN  
Might've known she was one of them show business floozies. Livin' with a single man. Right in front of his kids at that.

Jim overhears the remark. He's hot. Laura continues to her table.  
Jim leaves Sibyl and confronts the woman.

JIM  
It's none a your business, but she ain't  
"livin'" with me. She's my housekeeper.  
And a blamed good one. Probably a darned  
sight better'n you are by the look a  
things.

Sibyl's surprised at Jim's anger. Then, as the MUSIC begins again, she  
drags him back to the dance floor.

SIBYL  
Come on, dear, let's finish our dance.

Jim's still steaming as they move onto the floor.

SIBYL  
My, my, I had no idea you felt so strongly  
about your -- "housekeeper."

JIM  
Me neither.

Now Sibyl's frowning.

AT THE TABLE  
Laura returns. Billy is sucking on another  
beer, looking drunker than ever.

BILLY  
Say, that wasn't bad. I forgot how good  
you were. Singin' I mean.

LAURA  
You're disgusting.

Billy stands, weaves slightly. Grabs Laura's arm.

BILLY  
Yeah, but I can give ya a lot more than  
you'll ever get workin' for McHenry. All  
ya gotta do is...

He tries to draw Laura close. Attempts to kiss her.

LAURA  
Cut it out, you creep!

Heads turn. Laura struggles with Billy, pushes him away.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR Jim sees what's happening. Leaves Sibyl standing  
with her mouth open and dashes back to

THE TABLE  
where Billy and Laura still struggle. Jim  
pops Billy in the chops. Billy goes over  
the table on his butt. Jim takes Laura by  
the shoulders.

JIM  
You OK?

Laura nods. They stare at each other. Then, gently, she pushes his  
hands away. Sibyl and Jenny join them. The BAND starts up again.

Billy holds his head.

JIM  
(to Laura)  
You sure you're OK?

SIBYL  
Oh, for heaven's sake, she's all right.

Jim scowls at her, turns back to Laura. He's concerned. Sibyl tugs at his arm.

SIBYL  
Come on, the band's playing.

LAURA  
(to Jim)  
You go ahead, I'm all right. But I've had enough picnic fun for today. I'm leaving.

SIBYL  
I'm sure you have work to do around the house -- dear.

Jim disengages himself from Sibyl. Turns back to Laura.

JIM  
I'll see ya get home all right.

SIBYL  
Jim, darling! After all, she's only a housekeeper. Or is she?

JIM  
What's that supposed to mean?

SIBYL  
Maybe that woman at the table was right.

JIM  
That's a rotten crack.

Sibyl backs off, tries to smile.

SIBYL  
I only meant...

JIM  
I think I know what ya meant.  
(to Laura and Jenny)  
Let's go.

Jenny grabs their basket. Jim steers her and Laura toward his truck. Sibyl and Billy watch with pained looks on their faces.

BILLY  
Well, so much for old boy friends.

SIBYL  
Easy come, easy go. Besides, I don't intend to live in the sticks. And he's not about to move.

BILLY  
Don't be so sure. I'm prepared to up the ante to seven hundred and fifty thou. He'd

make ya a rich husband.

SIBYL  
Rich or poor. I just want him off that ranch.

BILLY  
I couldn't a said it better.

BRIGGS  
There you are, Wilson.

They turn to see Briggs. Dressed in elegant Western casual wear and approaching the table.

BRIGGS  
(to Billy)  
I need to talk to you.

He gives Sibyl a quick appraisal.

BRIGGS  
Privately.

SIBYL  
I was just leaving.

She eyes Briggs openly, provocatively. Now he's more interested. Returns her gaze and holds it for a beat before she heads for her car. He turns to Billy.

BRIGGS  
You didn't introduce us.

He gives Sibyl a lingering look as she walks away, then

BRIGGS  
Now, about that property...

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jim's truck pulls up. He, Laura, and Jenny get out, walk slowly up on the porch. Jenny gives Laura a big grin.

JENNY  
That was a super picnic. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Thanks, you guys.

She goes in, Laura starts to follow. Jim stops her.

JIM  
Wait. She's right, it was a great picnic.

LAURA  
I'm not sure Sibyl would agree.

JIM  
That's what made it so great.

They share a chuckle, then grow serious.

JIM  
I'm glad things turned out the way they did.

LAURA

Me too.

He takes her by the shoulders, kisses her lightly. Looks at her expectantly.

JIM  
Laura, I...

He tries to draw her closer. She resists gently.

LAURA  
It was nice to have you treat me like an equal...

She pushes herself slowly away.

LAURA  
...instead of like the hired help.

Jim looks perplexed. Laura gives him a wry smile, pecks him on the cheek.

LAURA  
You might think about easing up on Skip a little too. Tomorrow night would be a nice time to start.

She turns and goes in the house. Closes the door softly behind her. Jim frowns a little. He's deep in thought.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - NIGHT

Jim, Laura, and Jenny are in the packed stands. The crowd BUZZES excitedly.

ANNOUNCER  
The next event is calf roping. And it's down to a three-man contest for the state highschool championship. Yesiree, this one's tight as a tick on a hound dog's ear.

Jim fidgets in his seat.

JENNY  
I'm hungry.

ANNOUNCER  
First up is Fred Milner, a senior out of Central High.

JIM  
I'll be back in a minute.

He gets up and leaves.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - CHUTE AREA

Jim makes his way toward the pens where the calf roping is set up.

ANNOUNCER  
And here's Fred, ready to go.

A ROAR goes up from the crowd. Jim spots Skip waiting nervously by the calf pen. There are OOOHHHS AND AHHHS of sympathy from the crowd.

ANNOUNCER

Well, Fred had a little trouble with his rope there. But his time was a respectable nine point four seconds. Let's give him a big hand.

APPLAUSE as Jim reaches Skip.

JIM  
Did ya hear that?

Skip is lost in concentration.

SKIP  
What? Oh, hi. Hear what?

JIM  
Milner's out of it. It's down to you and Busby now.

SKIP  
Yeah. I guess.

Jim holds out his hand. Skip takes it.

JIM  
Here's luck. Make it a good run. One you'll always remember.

Skip's face shows his anguish.

SKIP  
Dad -- it can't end here. I'm going to rodeo...

JIM  
It's all settled, Skip. After college you're comin' back to work the ranch with me. Now think about your ride.

Jim turns and stalks off. In another section of the chute area, Laura hangs back in the crowd. Watching. She lets Jim get out of sight then comes up to Skip.

LAURA  
Jenny said to say good luck.

Skip turns, surprised.

SKIP  
Oh, hi. Where is she?

LAURA  
Getting something to eat.

SKIP  
Figures.

LAURA  
But she really does want you to win.  
(motions after Jim)  
So does he.

SKIP  
Yeah.

LAURA

But he worries about you. And he loves you. Maybe too much.

Skip nods, sighs. Eddie, the coach, interrupts.

EDDIE  
Let's go! You're up after Busby.

Laura touches Skip's arm.

LAURA  
Good luck.

They lock gazes. For a beat they're soul mates. Skip leaves. Laura turns to see Jim watching, sad-eyed. He walks to her slowly. Now she's a little misty-eyed.

LAURA  
Don't end his dream, Jim.

JIM  
He's just a kid.

LAURA  
He's nearly a man. Let him decide -- or he'll never forgive you.

JIM  
It's just... He doesn't understand.

LAURA  
He understands more than you know.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - IN THE STANDS

Jim, Laura, and Jenny come back to their seats.

ANNOUNCER  
Next up is Don Busby from Grant High.  
Don's our leader by just two tenths of a second.

ON THE FIELD A calf bolts from a pen, Busby after it. The crowd ROARS. Busby ropes and ties the calf quickly. The crowd goes wild.

IN THE STANDS  
Jim makes a face and punches a fist into an open hand.

ANNOUNCER  
Ooohwhee! Seven point nine seconds.  
That's gonna be hard to beat.

Wild APPLAUSE. Laura and Jenny look solemn, tense.

ANNOUNCER  
But if anybody can do it it's our last roper. Skip McHenry. A senior from Valley High.

Wild SCREAMING, YELLING, AND WHISTLING from the stands. Jim's antsy. Bites his lip. His face shows the strain. He crosses his fingers and leans forward in his seat.

ON THE FIELD A gate opens. A calf charges out. Here comes Skip, determination all over his face. Riding hard.

He ropes and hog ties his calf flawlessly. Throws his hands in the air. The crowd EXPLODES. Skip grins from ear to ear. Dances with glee.

IN THE STANDS

Jim, Laura, and Jenny are on their feet.  
Waving. Cheering.

ANNOUNCER

How about that ladies and gentleman?  
That's as fine a job of calf ropin' as I've  
ever seen in this arena! But Skip needed  
at least a seven point six to take the gold  
buckle. Did he do it?

The stands grow suddenly quiet. Jim's face shows the tension as he waits for the time.

ANNOUNCER

Did he ever! Seven point four seconds!  
Skip McHenry, high-school champ...

The rest of the announcement is lost in THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE AND  
YELLING. Jim is jubilant.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - CHUTE AREA

Jim and Laura mingle with the crowd, looking for Skip. Jim spots him talking and laughing with Ron and Carol. He heads that way. Laura hangs back a little.

JIM  
Skip!

Skip sees Jim approach and his smile fades.

JIM  
Great job, buddy! Seven point four  
seconds! The professional record's only  
six point seven.

He reaches for Skip's shoulder. Skip withdraws. Jim's face shows his surprise and anguish.

JIM  
I thought -- I thought maybe we could  
celebrate a little. You know, grab  
somethin' to eat.

Skip stares back coldly.

SKIP  
Thanks. But I'm going with these guys.

He turns his back on Jim and starts away with his friends. There's hurt in Jim's eyes.

JIM  
Skip! Wait...

Skip stops, turns back. His friends exchange embarrassed glances. Shrug and move along discreetly.

Jim goes to him.

JIM  
I didn't want ya to rodeo because I -- I  
was afraid ya might get hurt -- or

JIM  
worse. I wouldn't be able to stand that.  
If anything happened I -- I'd have you on  
my conscience too.

SKIP  
Dad, you gotta quit blaming yourself. Mom  
did what she wanted to do. You can't live  
people's lives for them. You gotta let go  
of things. Me. Laura. Even those  
mustangs.

Jim's near losing it.

JIM  
It's hard -- when ya love someone. So  
hard...

He reaches for Skip. Takes him by the shoulders.

JIM  
You're the best with a rope I ever saw.  
Maybe you could... I've heard they got  
college scholarships for rodeoin'. I don't  
know much about it, but...

SKIP  
Man, I do! You mean I can...?

Skip's elated. They hug each other warmly.

JIM  
If that's what ya really want.

More hugging and back slapping. A glad, emotional moment. Skip,  
beaming, turns and runs to join his friends.

Laura comes up to Jim, a wistful smile on her face. She takes his  
hand.

LAURA  
C'mon. Let's find Jenny and go home.

Jim looks like he's on top of the world.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jim, Laura, and Jenny come in, tired but happy. Buffy greets them.

JIM  
(to Jenny)  
OK, right to bed, missy.

JENNY  
Do I have to? I'm not tired.

LAURA  
No, you're exhausted. Come on, I'll tuck  
you in.

She puts an arm around Jenny's shoulders and they head for the door.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - JENNY'S ROOM

Jenny, in pajamas, crawls into bed. Laura pulls up her covers. Bends over and gives her a kiss on the forehead.

LAURA  
Sweet dreams.

Jenny smiles, yawns. Laura starts away.

JENNY  
Laura?

Laura stops, turns back.

JENNY  
I'm glad you're here.

They exchange smiles and affectionate looks.

LAURA  
Me too. Now get to sleep.

Laura turns and leaves. She finds that Jim has been watching unnoticed from

INT. RANCH HOUSE - HALLWAY

Jim takes Laura's hand and they walk along the hall.

JIM  
Thanks for takin' care of her.

LAURA  
No thanks necessary. She's very special to me.

JIM  
That cuts both ways.

LAURA  
So is Skip, for that matter.

JIM  
(a beat)  
How about the rest of the family?

Laura's face splits in a pixie grin.

LAURA  
Buffy? Of course. I love golden retrievers.

Jim looks wounded. Then grins. Laura laughs.

LAURA  
It's good to see you smile. Lately you've been looking kind of sad -- or worried.

Jim sobers.

JIM  
The BLM's threatenin' to take away my leases.

LAURA

Why, for heaven's sake?

JIM  
They think I been killin' mustangs.  
They're gonna hold hearings. It could cost  
me the ranch.

LAURA  
That's not fair. Can't you do something?

JIM  
A lotta things ain't fair. Maybe Billy  
Wilson's right after all.

They stop at the door to Laura's room.

LAURA  
You wouldn't sell?

JIM  
I might not have a choice.

They give each other a long, sad look.

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL - NIGHT

Laura's palomino paces back and forth. SNORTING and NICKERING.  
There's an air of tension.

The gray stallion stands by the corral -- the cause of the unrest. He  
eyes the palomino, paws the ground. Then prances and paces back and  
forth. WHINNIES softly. Paws some more.

The palomino gets truly restless. Presses at the gate. It strains,  
finally gives, and she's free. The stallion and the palomino nuzzle  
for a beat, then race away into the darkness.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Jim and Skip wolf down breakfast while Laura and Jenny look on.

LAURA  
Why would she just run off like that?

Jim and Skip finish. Grab their hats and head for the door.

JIM  
I think your palomino may have found  
herself a new boy friend.

SKIP  
You think it was the gray stallion, Dad?

JIM  
We'll see.

He leads Skip out the door while Laura and Jenny watch with worried  
looks.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Laura and Jenny make dinner. The phone RINGS. Jenny answers.

JENNY  
Hello.  
(to Laura)

It's for you. Some guy named Marty.

Jenny looks sheepish as she hands Laura the phone.

JENNY

Before you talk to him -- I gotta tell you something. He called the other day. About a job. I didn't...

LAURA

I know.

JENNY

You do? You didn't say anything.

LAURA

I knew you'd tell me. When you were ready.

Laura takes the phone.

LAURA

Marty, hi. What's up?

(a beat)

You're kidding!

(a beat)

You've got to be kidding! Next Saturday!

Will I! You bet I'll be there. Oh, Marty,

I love you. Thank you, thank you.

Laura hangs up, grinning from ear to ear. She goes to Jenny, hugs her. Holds her at arms length.

LAURA

Oh, Jenny. This is it.

JENNY

What?

LAURA

A job. A big job. I open next Saturday at the Golden Saddle. The new club in Flagstaff.

Jenny tries to smile bravely but doesn't quite make it.

JENNY

Does that mean...? You're not -- leaving?

Laura nods solemnly.

LAURA

I'm afraid so.

JENNY

Do you have to?

LAURA

I told you, singing is what I do.

Laura holds her arms open. Jenny hesitates then moves to her. They hug. Jenny fills up, starts to sob.

JENNY

Please don't go.

Laura, teary now, looks toward heaven for strength. Hugs Jenny closer.

Then a door SLAMS o.s.. Laura wipes at her cheeks as Jim, Skip, and Buffy come in.

SKIP  
We never did see your horse. Sorry.

LAURA  
That's all right.

JIM  
We'll find her.

Now he eyes Laura and Jenny and his look softens. He's suddenly concerned.

JIM  
You guys been singin' them sad cowboy songs again?

Laura forces a weak smile. Jenny can't look at Jim.

LAURA  
I've got something to tell you.

Her face is filled with anguish.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

All is gloom. Laura clears dishes. Jim, Skip, and Jenny play with food remnants on their plates.

JIM  
(to Skip)  
We better see to the chores.

Skip gets up, goes to Laura.

SKIP  
I'll miss you.

LAURA  
I've still got a few days.

They hug. Laura dabs at her eyes. Jim stands awkwardly, hat in hand.

JIM  
I -- I don't want ya to do this. Ya know that.

LAURA  
It's best.

JENNY  
No it's not.

JIM  
No chance ya might...?

Laura shakes her head sadly. Jim looks crushed.

JIM  
Every time things get goin' good between us, somethin' spoils it.

Everybody is downcast, then Laura brightens.

LAURA  
Hey, I've got an idea.

JENNY  
You changed your mind!

LAURA  
Well, no. But why don't you all come to my opening next Saturday?

SKIP  
All right! They say the Golden Saddle's better than Gilly's.

JENNY  
Oh, Daddy, could we?

A long beat, then Jim brightens. He goes to Jenny, puts an arm around her. Looks at Laura, smiles wistfully. He knows he's settling for the best he's going to get.

JIM  
Guess I couldn't say no if I wanted to.

The kids laugh, cheer. Buffy BARKS.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - BILLY'S OFFICE

Sloppy. Billy's at a cluttered desk talking to some man whose back's to the camera.

BILLY  
Too bad about that range fire at the McHenry place.

MAN  
Yeah, there was a lotta lightning that day.

They laugh. The other man turns. It's Blackie, Jim's ranch hand.

BLACKIE  
That fire drove them mustangs wild. Ya shoulda seen 'em tearin' up fences and stompin' pasture. It was a sight.

Billy sobers.

BILLY  
Just don't get carried away. I don't want the place torn up too bad. I can't sell damaged goods.

BLACKIE  
I thought ya wanted it for yourself.

BILLY  
That's why I'm where I am, and you're where you are. Ain't you heard about all these media moguls and movie stars buyin' ranch land? In Montana. Idaho. Places like that?

BLACKIE  
Yeah -- come to think of it I...

BILLY

Don't tax your brain. I already got a buyer with his tongue hangin' out. From Frisco. Owns a bunch a TV and radio stations. But he's gettin' antsy. He won't wait much longer.

BLACKIE

Maybe it's time they found a few more dead mustangs on McHenry's Place.

BILLY

You're not as dumb as you look. That oughta be just about enough for the BLM to cancel his leases. Then it's so long Jim boy.

The conspirators cackle.

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL - DAY

Jenny sits alone on a top rail. Picks at her guitar listlessly, hums softly. Jim rides up, dismounts.

JIM

I just saw the mustang herd and Laura's palomino was with 'em. I'll get her this time.

JENNY

Why bother? She's leavin' tomorrow.

JIM

But maybe she'll come back and ride her once in a while.

Jenny perks up.

JENNY

Good thinkin', Dad!

Jim takes a coil of rope off a corral post.

JIM

You seen Skip?

Jenny shakes her head. Jim secures the rope to his saddle and mounts up. Rides off.

EXT. OPEN RANGE

Jim, twirling a loop over his head, rides hell bent for leather in the midst of the racing mustang herd.

He's right behind the gray stallion. The palomino runs by its side. Jim makes a toss, misses. He backs off to rewind his rope. Sees Skip charging across the prairie.

Skip, rope swinging over his head, races after the palomino. He makes a toss, barely misses. Jim rides to where Skip rewinds his rope.

JIM

I wondered where you were.

SKIP

I thought I could bring her in by myself. But I don't know.

JIM

If anyone can do it, you can. Go for it.

Skip nods at his father's compliment. Digs his heels into his horse's sides and bolts after the herd.

Rope twirling, Skip closes in on the palomino. Riding at top speed he makes a perfect throw. Reins up as the loop settles over the horse's neck.

The herd races on, but the stallion stops. Looks back at Skip and the palomino. Then takes off again.

Skip secures the rope to his saddle horn. Leads the palomino back to where Jim waits.

JIM

Great job. Let's get her home.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

Jim and Skip, leading the palomino, ride easily across the prairie. They hear a WHINNY. Look to a rise and see the mustang stallion watching them -- and the palomino.

A shot rings out. The stallion falls.

JIM

See to that stallion!

He wheels his horse.

SKIP

What're you gonna do?

JIM

See if I can find that bushwacker.

Jim rides to the top of a rise. He sees Blackie, dismounted and crouched by some rocks -- taking aim for another shot at the stallion as it struggles to stand.

JIM

Blackie!

Blackie's caught off guard.

Jim spurs his horse towards him. Takes a flying leap and knocks him down, dislodges his rifle. Blackie gets up, takes a couple of futile swings, and gets knocked down again. Jim grabs his shirt, raises a clenched fist.

BLACKIE

Hold it! Hold it! I ain't takin' no beatin' for Billy Wilson.

JIM

So it is him killin' the horses. Why, Blackie?

BLACKIE

He wants your ranch.

JIM

I know, but why? He's no rancher.

BLACKIE

He's got some rich mucky muck who's willin'  
to pay a fortune for it.

Jim pulls Blackie to his feet. Retrieves his rifle and steers him by  
the collar toward his horse.

JIM

Speakin' a pay, I hope you hit Billy up  
good. I got a feelin' you're gonna do a  
lotta time for it.

BLACKIE

For shootin' a couple wild horses?

JIM

That's just for starters.

Blackie looks sick.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - ANOTHER LOCATION

The stallion, a wound on his shoulder, is on his feet now. He's roped  
to Skip's saddle horn. Along with the palomino. Jim and Blackie ride  
up. Jim checks the stallion.

SKIP

I don't think he's up to walkin' very far.

JIM

You stay with him. Soon as I get Blackie  
to the sheriff I'll be back with the vet  
and a trailer.

EXT. OPEN RANGE

Jim and Skip watch a pickup with horse trailer pull away. The palomino  
and stallion inside. Jim waves.

JIM

Thanks, Doc.

The driver waves back.

JIM

Well, looks like that stallion wound up  
with the palomino after all.

Jim and Skip mount up, break into an easy lope. As they ride, the  
sound of a HELICOPTER starts and builds. They top a rise and stop to  
watch.

A herd of mustangs races before a low-flying chopper.

JIM

Look at that, will ya.

SKIP

Yeah. Gus Hardesty told me about it. He  
said the BLM's got a new plan to round up  
as many horses as possible. Relocate them  
on protected reserves. And they're finally  
allowed to use helicopters.

JIM

Well -- that may be one way to handle it.

But I still got my doubts. And a helicopter'll never take the place of a man on horseback.

SKIP  
C'mon, Dad. The old days are gone.

JIM  
Yeah. A lotta things are gone.

They spur their horses into a slow lope.

INT. WAGON WHEEL - BILLY'S OFFICE

Billy's at his desk, on the phone. He's sweating.

BILLY  
Just gimme a couple more days, Mr. Briggs.  
The deal's just about set and...

There's a knock on the door.

BILLY  
Hold on, Mr. Briggs.

He covers the phone with his hand.

BILLY  
Whadda ya want? I'm busy here.

The door opens. A tall husky SHERIFF wearing a uniform and a badge enters.

SHERIFF  
Billy Wilson?

BILLY  
Yeah?

SHERIFF  
You're under arrest.

BILLY  
What? Arrest for what?

SHERIFF  
For the slaughter of protected wildlife,  
trespassing on federal land, conspiracy  
to...

Billy goes bug-eyed, uncovers the phone.

BILLY  
I'll call ya right back, Mr. Briggs.

He hangs up.

SHERIFF  
You have the right to remain silent...

Billy's dead meat.

INT. BLM OFFICE

Jim and Gus are seated at a desk.

JIM  
Think the bureau'll call off the hearings  
now?

GUS  
Just as soon as I swear out the complaint  
against Billy.

JIM  
Thanks, Gus.

They get up and start for the door.

GUS  
Why don't ya stick around? You might enjoy  
seein' him get what's comin' to him. The  
sheriff'll be here any minute.

They stop at the door.

JIM  
I gotta get goin'. Tonight's a big night.  
Laura's singin' at that new club.

Gus puts a hand on Jim's shoulder.

GUS  
Jim, I'm glad you weren't the one...

JIM  
Me too.

Gus holds out a hand. They shake and Jim leaves.

EXT. WAGON WHEEL

A stretch limo pulls into the parking lot. A uniformed driver opens  
the back door. Briggs gets out, storms into the club. In a moment  
he's out again. The driver opens the door, lets him in the back seat.

INT. LIMO

Briggs settles in his seat. Turns to an unseen companion.

BRIGGS  
Wilson's been arrested.

The companion is Sibyl.

SIBYL  
We knew in high school he'd never amount to  
much.

EXT. WAGON WHEEL

The limo pulls out of the parking lot.

BRIGGS (V.O)  
The land deal's off.

SIBYL  
Good. We don't want to live on some nasty  
old ranch, now do we?

INT. GOLDEN SADDLE - TABLE AREA - NIGHT

A plush restaurant/bar/dance hall. Hip. Western.

BUZZES with conversation. The sound of LAUGHTER. C/W MUSIC. People are having fun.

Jim, Laura, Jenny, and Skip, at a table by the dance floor, finish eating. The band in the b.g. starts a slow C/W TUNE. Jim takes Laura's hand, stands up.

JIM  
Come on. Maybe I can work off some of that food.

LAURA  
I'm on in a few minutes.

JIM  
Just one dance.

JENNY  
Yay, Dad!

LAURA  
Are you sure about this?

JENNY  
Show us a little tush push there, Dad.

SKIP  
How about if he just makes it to the dance floor?

JIM LEADS LAURA TO THE

DANCE FLOOR  
The other couples are dancing very close; very cheek-to-cheek. Now Jim is a little hesitant. He watches the other dancers for a beat. Laura smiles.

LAURA  
Think you can handle it?

JIM  
Yeah -- well... Sure.

He takes her in his arms tentatively. Then draws her closer. She puts her head on his shoulder, caresses the back of his neck. They move slowly with the MUSIC.

Laura continues caressing his neck. Moves her head so her hair touches his cheek. Her eyes are closed. Jim licks his lips, makes little puffing motions with his mouth.

It's the magic moment. They move and sway without speaking. Laura gazes into Jim's eyes. There's a fire burning. Jim presses his cheek to hers. Then they exchange another long, soulful look.

The MUSIC ENDS. They stand for a beat. Staring. Lost in each other, their breathing heavy. Laura moves her head to be kissed. Jim leans to her...

VOICE  
Laura!

They turn to see ROCKY, the band leader, coming across the dance floor.

He grabs Laura's hand.

ROCKY  
Good to see you. All set to go on?

LAURA  
Am I! Rocky, this is Jim McHenry.

Jim and Rocky shake hands.

LAURA  
Rocky was band leader at Billy's.

JIM  
Oh, yeah. I thought you looked familiar.

ROCKY  
I quit there right after Laura left. Then  
this thing opened up and we needed a  
feature singer in a rush so -- here we are.  
(to Laura)  
We better get ready.

LAURA  
I want you to meet someone first.

She takes Rocky and Jim by the arm.

AT THE TABLE  
Jenny and Skip wait, smiling. Laura,  
Rocky, and Jim come up.

JENNY  
(to Laura)  
Oh, you two looked so romantic!

SKIP  
Great footwork, Dad.

Rocky smiles at the kids.

ROCKY  
(to Laura)  
This your family?

JENNY  
Don't I wish.

Laura smiles.

LAURA  
This is Jenny. And Skip.

ROCKY  
Hi.

Laura pulls Rocky close and whispers in his ear. He shrugs, smiles.

ROCKY  
OK by me. But let's do it.

He turns and heads for the stage. Laura takes Jenny's hand. Pulls her  
to her feet.

JENNY  
What's happening?

LAURA  
Just come with me.

Jenny can't believe it. She looks to Jim for approval. He nods, smiles. Laura gives him a lingering look then leads Jenny to the

STAGE  
where she huddles with Rocky. Then  
whispers to Jenny -- who smiles nervously.

ROCKY  
Ladies and gentlemen.

ROCKY  
The Golden Saddle is happy to bring you one  
of country western's fastest rising stars.  
Please give a great big welcome to our  
featured singer, Miss Laura Carter.

The crowd NOISE is replaced by enthusiastic APPLAUSE.

ROCKY  
And singing with Laura is a brand new  
country western talent, Miss Jenny McHenry.  
Let's make her feel real welcome.

Louder APPLAUSE. Then the MUSIC begins. Laura sings the lead and  
Jenny, tentatively at first then with more confidence, joins in. The  
singing is great.

AT THE TABLE  
Jim watches raptly. Proud of Jenny -- and  
Laura. His eyes glisten.

At the other tables, the crowd is enthralled.

The song ends and Jim's on his feet, applauding wildly along with the  
roomful of people. Skip's beside him. Also applauding and whistling.

SKIP  
Man, they're great! They're good enough to  
be -- to be pros.

Jim, suddenly sad, brushes at something in his eye.

JIM  
Yeah.

APPLAUSE AND WHISTLES as Laura and Jenny come back to the table. Jim  
seems almost saddened by the crowd's reaction. Skip beams.

SKIP  
Hey, you guys were somethin' else!

JENNY  
No autographs.

Laura and Jim look deeply into each other's eyes. She's radiant,  
happy. Jim is too, in a sad sort of way.

JIM  
Skip's right. You were great.

Laura nods her thanks, then gives Jim a kiss on the cheek. Jenny's  
ecstatic. She smiles, gives Skip a hug.

JENNY  
Don't get used to it.

Jim takes Laura's hand.

JIM  
I -- I want to ask ya somethin'.

LAURA  
Can it wait till I finish my set?

Jim nods. Laura heads back for the band stand. Jim checks his watch.

JIM  
(to Jenny)  
Way past your bedtime, squirt.

JENNY  
Oh, Dad! I'm not a kid.

JIM  
Sorry. You are tonight.

He gives Skip some car keys.

JIM  
Take the truck.

JENNY  
Well don't expect me to go to bed.

SKIP  
(to Jim)  
What're you gonna do?

JIM  
I'll pick up a ride somewhere.

Jenny pouts but gets ready to go.

JENNY  
Can't I even say goodbye to Laura?

JIM  
Some other time. We'll know where to find  
her for a while.

Skip and Jenny leave the table. Jim turns toward the stage as Laura starts to sing another song.

INT. GOLDEN SADDLE - LATER

Jim sits alone. Nurses a cup of coffee. Laura joins him.

LAURA  
What happened to the kids?

JIM  
It got a little late. Especially for  
Jenny.

LAURA  
I'm sorry. I wanted to...

JIM

I know. She did too.  
(a beat)  
She'll miss ya -- a lot. They both will.

LAURA  
I'll miss them. And you.  
(a long beat)  
A lot.

Jim fiddles with his cup. There's a long, awkward silence, then

LAURA  
You wanted to ask me something.

JIM  
Yeah.

He takes her hand, kisses it. Holds it to his cheek.

JIM  
Laura, I... I'm not good at this. I -- I  
want you to... Will you -- marry me?

LAURA  
Oh, Jim.

JIM  
I love you, Laura.

LAURA  
And I love you, but...

JIM  
But what?

LAURA  
But this is what I've been working for.  
For so long.

She motions around the room.

LAURA  
This is my chance to find out if I'm really  
any... If I'm good enough. On my own.

Jim's in agony. Laura kisses him lightly on the lips then, her eyes  
brimming with tears, touches his hand gently. Jim sighs. His  
shoulders sag. His heart's breaking.

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL - DAY

Jim and Skip stand by the corral. Jim looks wistful.

In the corral, the gray stallion NICKERS softly. Paws the ground.  
Attracts their attention.

JIM  
Looks like he's pretty well healed up.

Skip smiles.

SKIP  
Yeah. Good thing we got the Palomino in  
the barn.

Jim nods in agreement, smiles thinly.

SKIP

The doc says they get hurt a lot worse than that just runnin' free.

JIM

I guess that's the chance we all take in life. Gettin' hurt.

He puts a hand on Skip's shoulder.

JIM

It took me a while to learn that.

EXT. RANCH - DRIVEWAY

A WV Rabbit winds its way up the dirt driveway. Stops at the side of the house.

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL

Jim and Skip start away from the corral, toward the barn.

JENNY

Dad! Dad!

They turn to see Jenny running from the house. She has a big I-know-a-secret smile on her face.

JIM

What's goin' on?

JENNY

She's back.

JIM

Who? Ya mean...?

Laura comes from the house, smiling, and walks to the group. Jenny beams. Laura goes to her and puts an arm around her shoulder. Jim is perplexed. Skip too.

JENNY

And, Daddy, guess what?

JIM

You tell me.

JENNY

I can't. I'm too excited. You tell him, Laura!

LAURA

An A and R man from Silver Spur Records called...

JIM

Whatever that is.

LAURA

...and he wants us both for a...

JIM

Us both. Us both who?

LAURA

Jenny and me. For a recording contract.

SKIP  
All right!

LAURA  
He heard us at the Golden Saddle. We can cut all the records at once and be back before school starts.

She goes to Jim, takes his hand. He's puzzled, not sure what all this means. Laura smiles at his discomfort.

LAURA  
I seem to recall you making a suggestion about -- marriage?

Jim's brow wrinkles deeper.

JIM  
Yeah?

LAURA  
Well, now it's my turn to ask you. Will you marry me, Mr. McHenry?

Jim is speechless. His jaw drops, eyes widen.

Jenny and Skip YELL and HOLLER -- threaten to smother Laura with hugs. There are smiles and tears and dancing and laughing. Buffy BARKS, wags his tail. The kids get quiet. Jim and Laura lock gazes.

LAURA  
Well?

Jim gives an arms-up victory sign.

JIM  
Yahooo!

He grabs Laura and swings her off her feet.

JIM  
Will I? Oh, man!

Jim and Laura kiss. Skip and Jenny CHEER. Buffy BARKS.

Jim breaks away, goes to the corral, opens the gate. For a moment the stallion just stands still. Eyes him suspiciously. Jim waves his hat.

JIM  
Yahhhh!

The stallion bolts out of the corral. Runs a few yards. Stops. Gives Jim a look then heads for the open range.

Jim gets a mock-serious frown on his face.

JIM  
Animals are like people. They need their space. Their freedom.

Now there are ad lib HOOTS AND HOLLERS.

SKIP  
Oh, man, listen to that will ya.

LAURA  
Good Lord, I don't believe you...  
(laughing)  
...but I love you.

Jim grins, goes to his family. Smiling, arms entwined, they all head for the ranch house. Buffy follows, wagging his tail and BARKING.

FADE OUT:

THE END

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