

VERVE

THE BROODMARE

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BREEDING SHED - DAY

A large, rustic barn of rough-hewn timbers and aged wood. Raked dirt floor. Morning sunlight blades through open windows, catching nervous swirls of dust.

Double doors open from an adjacent paddock...

A gorgeous seal brown ARABIAN MARE emerges. Her perfect, flowing mane spills over, shining brilliantly, as her hooves clap proud across the dusty earth.

A creature of incredible power and beauty.

Beside her, a rugged, experienced HANDLER leading her reins. His soft, sensitive eyes watch her every move (we'll call him "SOFTIE" for now).

He jogs the mare in a lazy circle.

The mare NICKERS, excited. A bit flustered. She's in estrous (heat) and, just like us, those hormones can cause some acting up.

The mare kicks out -- her hind hooves like the force of jackhammers.

Softie drops the reins, evades her kick. Doubles back and snatches them up again, resuming control, and easing her down. Never too forceful. A balancing act.

These two have a connection.

He whispers to her, petting her mane. Brings the mare back to a peaceful state. Then --

Softie glances toward the paddock. Gives a cautious nod. A hint of fear in his eyes. Fear for *her*. For what's about to happen...

OTHER HANDLERS enter the shed. They accompany a mighty, black PRIZE STALLION.

A brooding, ominous presence about the stud. He moves slow. Lumbering. Possessed.

The mare WHINNIES at the sight of him. Juts backward, hesitant. Softie stumbles with her AND --

Oh shit... Almost gets his foot caught under her hoof. He slips from harm's way just in time, then motions to the other handlers: *keep him back.*

The stud's handlers oblige, keeping him at a distance.

Softie lets the mare settle as the stallion eyes her, smelling her estrous scent.

The stallion's gaze, unnerving. Hungry.

Softie takes the mare for another circle, then brings her back around, offering her tail end to the stallion.

As Softie whispers to her, the mare senses the stallion approach and whips her tail to the side... a gesture that signals she's ready to mate.

The stud's handlers bring him in closer, checking his underside to make sure he's hard.

He is.

The stallion rears up on hind legs to mount her (a live cover).

The mare bucks in discomfort as the stallion's front hooves slide over her, his weight bearing down on her.

Softie gives the mare all his attention as --

The stud's handlers insert the stallion into the mare (no bullshit, they actually do this).

Softie pets the mare as the stallion thrusts into her. Again, a balancing act.

The mare NICKERS, agitated. Something's not right. She starts to buck.

The stallion arcs down and BITES AT HER.

The mare *freaks the fuck out*. SCREAMING. KICKING.

The stud's handlers try to pull the stallion off, but he won't go. Thrusting. Primal. Vicious.

Softie SCREAMS at the stallion, batting him away.

The stallion stumbles off her.

Softie fights to calm the mare, but he loses the reins.

The mare spins, knocks Softie to the ground beneath her AND --

AAAARRRRGH!

a HOOF comes crashing down on his face --

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

SPLASH! A TIRE hits a puddle spitting muddy water against a road sign:

*WELCOME TO THE BERKSHIRES
AMERICA'S PREMIER CULTURAL RESORT*

INT. RORY'S VOLVO - DRIVING - CONTINUOUS

At the wheel: RORY, 38. Reformed. Recovered. Repentant. Next door: his fiancée, MAXINE. Younger. Yoga-perfect. Plump engagement ring.

RORY
You get the photo?

Maxine checks her phone. Opens an OLD PROM PHOTO of Rory and his cute blonde ex-girlfriend (Kelly) from high school.

MAXINE
She's pretty.

RORY
Yearbook committee voted her Most Affectionate.

MAXINE
What does she look like now?

RORY
Curious about that myself. Her Facebook's all horses and Far Side jokes.

MAXINE
Creepy.

RORY
What?

MAXINE
You don't think horses are creepy?

RORY
 Not really.
 (then)
 She's pretty, right?

MAXINE
 I just said she was.

RORY
 Oh, I didn't hear you.

MAXINE
 Whatever, I'm not jealous of your
 prom date from twenty years ago.

RORY	MAXINE (CONT'D)
I didn't think you were --	Sounds a little desperate to me.

RORY
 What?

MAXINE
 Obviously you're in need of some
 sort of validation.

Rory goes silent.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 Look, you've worked really hard to
 get here. It's important to stay
 focused and honest. What are you
 feeling right now?

Rory exhales deeply, fighting the words.

RORY
 I feel like I want a drink.

MAXINE
 Good. Work the steps.

RORY
I'm working them.

MAXINE
 You're angry. Why are you angry?

RORY
 It's that whole cult mentality
 thing. Like I don't have a say in
 what happens to me anymore.

MAXINE

You haven't seen or spoken to her in twenty years. It's not like she's going to wither up and die just because you need to get something off your chest.

RORY

Yeah, but she thinks we're just there to catch up. I mean, it's a little deceptive.

MAXINE

It doesn't work the same over the phone. Believe me, I'd rather you *declined* the invitation to her hillbilly horse farm, but whatever...

RORY

She grew up around horses. She's not a hillbilly.

MAXINE

Take your time, say what you need to say, but don't pussy out.

RORY

Yessir, Captain Sobriety!

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Late summer sun blazes over a stately COLONIAL FARMHOUSE surrounded by expansive green fields.

A large HORSE STABLE adjacent to the house. Less 'barn', more 'facility'. A professional operation. Horse handlers and grounds crew milling about.

Rory's older-model VOLVO pulls up to an impressive wooden gate (opened). The fence encircles the entire property.

Rory and Maxine take in the smack-mouth beauty of the place.

RORY

Guess it belongs to her husband's family.

MAXINE

What's his name again?

RORY

Jeff? George?

Someone steps out the front door of the farmhouse. Waves at them from the porch.

Rory and Maxine wave back.

MAXINE

You know I love you. Let's just stick to the plan, okay?

RORY

I'll be fine.

MAXINE

I'd rather not stay for dinner if we can help it.

RORY

Just let me feel it out.

Rory drives forward, clutching the wheel white-knuckled.

MOMENTS LATER

Rory and Maxine park at the farmhouse.

KELLY, 38, strides over, arms outstretched:

KELLY

Oh my god, look at you!

RORY

Sorry we're late -- *WHOA* --

Kelly wraps Rory in a tight embrace, lifting him off the ground. Once athletic, now more than slightly overweight. New dress. Layers of make-up. She put a lot into this. (Still, a rather blunt evolution from her prom photo.)

RORY (CONT'D)

So good to see you!

KELLY

You're even more handsome now than you were twenty years ago!

Kelly smiles with such emotion some tears dribble down her face. She quickly wipes them away. Noted by Maxine.

RORY

You look great. Seriously.

KELLY
 Thank you for saying so.
 (to Maxine)
 Hi! I'm Kelly. You're Maxine?

MAXINE
 Very nice to meet you, Kelly.

They hug.

KELLY
 (to Rory)
 Now, *she's* beautiful.

MAXINE
 Oh, thank you.

RORY
 Quite a place you got here.

KELLY
 Isn't it awesome? It's great for
 the horses. Over thirty acres.

RORY
 How many horses?

KELLY
 One stallion, four mares.

RORY
 Lucky guy...

KELLY
 Come on in. Todd should be back
 soon.

As they head inside, Maxine looks over at the stable...

A MAN IN A MASK gapes back at her. Bandages wrapped tight
 around his head like the fucking Invisible Man. He's dressed
 like one of the handlers. Dusty jeans and a wrangler shirt.

Maxine double-takes...

And then he's gone.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Kelly leads her guests in. The farmhouse: as lovely inside as
 out. Crown moulding, braced ceilings, walls adorned with
 framed B&W PHOTOS, all of them of horses.

RORY
Man, this place is beautiful!

KELLY
It's not easy to keep up. We hire cleaners, a grounds crew, handlers for the horses...

MAXINE
Must be expensive.

KELLY
It's an inheritance. Todd's mom. She passed away a few years back.

They walk through a DINING ROOM with a long mahogany TABLE...

A stylized HORSE SYMBOL inlaid in pure ivory across the tabletop. A rendering of an ancient PETROGLYPH. Handmade. Elegant.

RORY
(re table)
Damn...

MAXINE
What this place needs is more horses!

Maxine laughs, but Kelly doesn't. Crickets.

KELLY
Well, they're our life, really. Our whole life.

Maybe a hint of regret in that statement.

RORY
So how did you two meet?

KELLY
Oh, you know, equestrian circles. Todd and his mom were highly regarded breeders.

They continue into the kitchen... as we admire the oddly fascinating petroglyph.

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Kelly gazes across the table at Rory as he and Maxine nibble at a light lunch. Maxine's rock of an engagement ring sparkles in the sunlight.

KELLY

Gosh, your ring is unbelievable.

MAXINE

Thank you. Rory picked it out.

RORY

Uh, with some direction. I'll be paying it off until I'm eighty.

KELLY

How long have you been engaged?

MAXINE

Few months.

RORY

Eighteen months.

Awkward...

MAXINE

It's a work in progress.

KELLY

(to Rory)

I was shocked to get your email.
It's been so long.

RORY

Thought a lot about you over the years. Always wondered what you were up to.

Kelly smiles, touched.

KELLY

How's your dad?

RORY

He's good. You know. Misses mom.

KELLY

And work?

RORY

It's okay. Spreadsheets. Typical accounting stuff. Boring, actually.

KELLY

I never saw you working in an office.

RORY

(explaining to Maxine)

The drama club. I did some plays.

KELLY

Uh, you did musicals, too. And you were phenomenal in both.

MAXINE

We've talked about it.

RORY

Obviously it wasn't something I took all that seriously.

KELLY

Super-talented, and you should've told your parents where to stick it.

RORY

They were just looking out for me.

MAXINE

Exactly. Live in the real world.

Some awkward, painful laughs. Maxine catches Rory biting his fingers, a nervous tick. She whispers:

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Stop biting.

Rory obeys.

INT. BATHROOM - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Rory enters, pensive sigh. His index finger, chewed raw and bleeding.

He washes it in cold water. Then stops suddenly. Shuts the water off, and just stands there. Staring.

The weight of this visit bearing down on him.

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Kelly cracks open a beer.

KELLY

Sure you don't want one?

MAXINE

No, thank you. We don't drink.

KELLY

Oh?

MAXINE
Clean and sober.

As Kelly sits, Maxine rises. Brings her plate to the sink.

KELLY
That's great! Rory was quite a party animal when I knew him.

MAXINE
Oh I know. We met in AA. I'm his sponsor, actually. I know: conflict of interest.

KELLY
It's admirable to admit you have a problem.

MAXINE
Life is hard. You start getting older, realize you can't do the same things you did in your twenties. It just gets ahead of you. That's what happened to me anyway. Well, that and a bad breakup. Nick...

KELLY
Nick?

MAXINE
My ex. He was my soulmate.

Maxine loses herself in that for a beat. Then:

MAXINE (CONT'D)
That is such a pretty dress. Isabel Marant?

KELLY
APC.

MAXINE
Would you mind standing up, just so I can get a sense for the tailoring?

KELLY
Oh... sure.

Kelly stands, faces her. Maxine does a not-so-subtle comparison of their shapes.

KELLY (CONT'D)

It would look way better on you.

MAXINE

Too sexy. You have to be careful of that with my job.

KELLY

What do you do?

MAXINE

Therapy. MSW.

KELLY

Oh, great.

(then)

Do you workout? Your body's amazing.

MAXINE

Thank you. Yoga. Diet. You have to keep up with it, or else...

They link eyes. Kelly nods, tense.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

What about you? Do you work?

KELLY

Riding lessons. Grooming. Some amateur photography.

MAXINE

No kids?

Kelly lingers on that question a beat. Shakes her head no.

KELLY

What about you?

MAXINE

When we're ready. I have time. I'm thirty-two. You're a bit older, right? Late thirties?

Kelly smiles tight.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BATHROOM - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Rory exits the bathroom, hears Kelly and Maxine faux-chatting in the kitchen. Saunters further down the hall.

Picture frames on each side. More B&W horse photography.

He passes a GUEST BEDROOM, then a DEN...

At the end of the hall, a door slightly ajar...

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rory peeks inside. There's a large bed, neatly made. Some dusty clothes strewn over a chair. Silver-tipped cowboy boots.

A spruce GUN CABINET with beveled glass. Five neatly stored hunting rifles.

Rory stares at it. Arched eyes.

He moves to the bedside table. A digital camera set on top. High-end.

Nosey, he tries the bedside drawer. Inside: Moleskin journal. Breath mints. Fingernail clippers. Lubricant.

Rory takes the journal, flips it open.

Handwritten passages marked "PRAYER I", "PRAYER II" and so on. Latin. Carefully transcribed.

Rory examines the pages, trying to figure it out.

KELLY (O.S.)

You always were a snoop.

Rory flinches, shoves the journal back into the drawer. Faces Kelly at the door, embarrassed.

RORY

Sorry. I'm... shit. You caught me.

KELLY

I'd probably do the same in your place.

RORY

You probably wouldn't. My place isn't nearly as big.

KELLY

How's Boston?

RORY

It's good. Better since I sobered up.

MAXINE

Maxine mentioned you were in AA.
That's great, Rory.

RORY

After mom, I kinda hit bottom
and... took a look at my life and
felt... disgust. All the things I
never accomplished. All the people
I hurt. All those years of being so
scared to face it. I didn't
recognize any part of myself. I
still don't, for the most part. But
if I can be honest with myself, and
others, if I can stay that way,
maybe things will turn around.

Kelly approaches him. Takes his hand.

They smile at each other.

EXT. ENTRANCE GATE - FARMHOUSE - DAY

A murder of crows perched on the gate, fighting over some
shreds of meat.

A PICKUP TRUCK peels through the gate on its way up to the
farmhouse. The crows fuck off.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The driver of the parked pickup kicks open the door and
hoists out... Kelly's husband, TODD, 40's. Portly arrogance
busting out of a too-tight flannel.

He nods to some of the handlers by the stable, gives an Ozzy-
like 'Rock On' hand sign.

The handlers erupt in APPLAUSE.

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Kelly gives a back rub to Todd enthroned at the head of the
table with a bottle of scotch while...

Rory and Maxine admire a photo album of Kelly's horse
photography.

RORY
(re photos)
You took all these? They're
beautiful.

MAXINE
I could totally see you doing,
like, Hallmark cards for horse
people.

Kelly grins to herself, digs her knuckles into Todd's back.

TODD
UGH, fuck. Go easy, babe. These
overnights are killing me...

KELLY
(to Rory and Kelly)
Todd's the breeding expert in these
parts.

RORY
Why overnight?

TODD
Foaling. Delivered a filly at the
Bridges Farm in Fitchburg.

RORY
I used to work third shift at a
firm in Boston. It was rough.

TODD
My grandfather was a logger in
Jackman, Maine. During the war he
worked the shipyards. *That's rough.*
That's the thing today, there's no
skilled labor. What do you do if
there's a war?

RORY
Right.

TODD
I'm asking you. What do you do?

RORY
You mean for a job?

TODD
I know what you do for a job. Least
I think I do. I'm asking what you'd
do if there's a war.

Awkward pause from Rory as he sits across from Todd.

TODD (CONT'D)

See what I mean? Not judging you.
Just making a point.

(then)

So tell me about your job.

RORY

Finance. I crunch numbers for an
investment bank.

MAXINE

It means he's cheap.

TODD

You're at a desk all day?

RORY

Well, standing desk, thank god.
It's actually a pretty cool setup --

TODD

See, that's what I mean. People
like you, people who have made a
decision to actually *be* sedentary --

KELLY

I think parents should teach their
kids to follow their dreams.

TODD

It's about feeling like you're
contributing in a real way. Someone
like you, I'm not saying *you*, but
someone *like* you, would probably
cease to exist if, say, there were
no more computers.

RORY

Take my dad... Machinist, retired
now, but real good with his hands.
Skilled. He wanted his kid to be
the same way...

TODD

And you could've if you had some
application.

KELLY

Todd...

RORY

Sometimes you want something so much it ruins your chances of achieving it. He had zero patience. It was like he didn't want to have to teach it. He just wanted me to know it.

TODD

Well then he was frustrated for not realizing his potential.

KELLY

Can we talk about something else please?

RORY

What's this symbol on the table?

Todd receives a quick-fire look from Kelly.

TODD

That's the Uffington White Horse. Prehistoric chalk carving in the English hillside. West Indian mahogany inlaid with Egyptian ivory.

MAXINE

What's the symbolism?

KELLY

It's just a decoration.

TODD

Epona. Celtic deity.
Protector of horses.

Todd and Kelly share another tense exchange. Todd tips back his scotch. Rises. Taps Rory on the shoulder.

TODD (CONT'D)

You workout, dude?

RORY

Yeah, sure.

KELLY

Seriously? Are we doing *this* now?

TODD

Yeah, we're doing *this* now.
(to Rory)
C'mon bud.

Rory stands, slightly begrudgingly, exits with Todd.

Kelly lobs a half-smile at Maxine, who sighs to herself knowing it's just the two of them again.

MAXINE

Would you excuse me? I have to make some calls.

Maxine heads out.

Kelly takes a big pull from Todd's scotch.

INT. BASEMENT - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Todd leads Rory downstairs into a converted basement.

TODD

Sorry if I was a bit of a prick back there. Long night...

RORY

No worries. Breeding expert, huh? Is that like a vet?

TODD

No, it's like a breeding expert. Basically I consult. Breeding season's February to July.

RORY

Do you get paid? I mean, is it something you *have* to do?

TODD

What do you mean?

RORY

Well, you got this massive house. It's like an estate. And with the horses and stuff, I just figured...

TODD

Oh, I see. You think I should just sit on my ass and live off the inheritance.

RORY

That's not what I --

TODD

Some people would, I guess. Not in my nature. That's kind of what I wanted to show you down here...

Todd leads Rory into a home gym area with an odd-looking NAUTILUS MACHINE on rubber mats.

TODD (CONT'D)
 Custom-made. Perfectly calibrated.
 Works every muscle group.

Rory assesses the machine. Sculpture-like. Artful iron wings blossoming from its core. Twisting Gothic cowls. Intricate and cage-like. It looks ripped from a Tim Burton movie.

RORY
 You *made* this?

TODD
 You see a brand name on this motherfucker?

RORY
 It's ... wow ...

TODD
 Bet I know what you're thinking: what's this fat ass cowboy doing with state-of-the-art gym equipment? Am I right?

RORY
 Wasn't thinking that at all, man.

TODD
 Go 'head. Give 'er a spin. What's your max, two-fifty?

RORY
 Uh, probably closer to two.

Rory awkwardly climbs aboard the machine. Grabs the chest press. Grits teeth, popping blood vessels, as he *sort of* lifts the weight. One sad rep.

TODD
 Shit, man. You need some anabol.

Rory gets up and Todd takes his place -- but not before sliding the weight pin up to four hundred pounds.

He LIFTS IT. Not easily. But not laboriously either. One rep. Two reps. Three reps. Rory looks on. *Holy shit*.

TODD (CONT'D)
 You know what that is? Serenity. Utility. Kelly's got it, too. Me and her, we're like a symphony.
 (MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

You got something like that with Maxine?

RORY

Not really sure I know what you're talking about.

Todd climbs off the machine, making sure to look Rory straight in the eyes.

TODD

Look, between us: I'd be lying if I said I didn't think this was a little weird, hanging out with my wife's ex-boyfriend. I mean, you've been inside her, right?

RORY

Uh...

Todd LAUGHS, giving Rory a good 'ol boy slap on the back that hurts.

TODD

I'm just messin' with ya, dude. I know you fucked her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Maxine wanders outside, checking her phone. She watches HANDLERS milling about the horse stable. Some of them lead the MARES in a nearby field.

Some LAUGHTER draws her to the far side of the stable where a group of handlers mingle by a water trough. One of them in particular catches her eye...

Jesus... A twenty-something bandana-clad stud-bolt named, of all things, COLT. Shirtless. Full of dirt. Washing himself in the trough, splashing his comrades.

Maxine checks to make sure no one's watching... and SNAPS A PHOTO of him with her phone.

She opens the photo and enlarges the image. Water glistening off this criminally hot beefcake. And something else... something on his arm. A tattoo.

She enlarges it further. The horse petroglyph. The same symbol inlaid on the dining table. Only it doesn't look like a tattoo so much as a ... scar ...

COLT (O.S.)

Hi there.

Maxine stifles her flinch, trying to act cool, shoving her phone in her pocket. Colt's still shirtless. *Damn...*

COLT (CONT'D)

I'm Colt.

MAXINE

Obviously. Maxine.

COLT

Kelly's friend?

MAXINE

Sort of. She and my fiancée went to high school together.

COLT

Nice! Old flames?

MAXINE

Right. So, what do you do?

COLT

Oh I just help out with the horses.
Little of this, little of that.

Colt decides to throw on his shirt, but Maxine's able to get a pretty good look at his arm -- yep, that's a scar alright. Like he was branded.

MAXINE

That's a pretty tattoo.

COLT

Oh yeah, the White Horse. They say it's magic. It's not a tattoo, though. It's a burn.

(then)

Enjoy that photo.

Maxine stammers awkward -- *fuck, he caught me!* Colt takes leave, smirking all alpha-male as he scuffs away.

Maxine turns from him, flustered. Pulls her phone to delete the photo. Then notices something else in it...

In the background behind Colt and the other handlers... the MAN IN THE MASK... Once again staring back at her. *WTF...*

BEHIND HER

Rory steps outside with Kelly and Todd, the hosts in riding gear. Todd with his silver-tipped cowboy boots.

TODD
Giddy-on-up, motherfuckers!

EXT. HORSE FIELD - DAY

Kelly and Todd ride two ARABIAN MARES over a course of verticals and oxers. Accomplished riders navigating the course with accuracy.

Rory and Maxine watch from the fence. Hard not to be impressed.

Kelly hits a triple bar and lands perfectly. Waves at them, beaming. In her element.

RORY
She's amazing, huh?

MAXINE
When are you going to tell her?

RORY
When I'm ready.

MAXINE
I don't like it here.

RORY
Why?

MAXINE
They're fucking weird, Rory.

RORY
She wasn't always like this. I mean, with all the horse stuff...

MAXINE
Those symbols are all over the house. And one of the handlers has it burnt into his arm.

RORY
What? What handler?

MAXINE
This guy I ran into outside the stable. Total beefcake.

RORY
"Beefcake"?

Maxine smirks as Todd rides over.

TODD
Wanna ride, Maxine?
(pats the horse)
Mabel's a real charmer.

RORY
She doesn't like horses. Afraid of
them, I guess.

Maxine faces Rory. Always up for a challenge.

MOMENTS LATER

Rory and Maxine ride the mares with Todd and Kelly walking
alongside, leading with the reins. Late afternoon sun burning
bright.

TODD
We're doing a serving tomorrow for
some local mares.

RORY
A serving?

TODD
Late season mares that haven't
conceived yet.

KELLY
We've been having some trouble with
Poseidon, our prize stallion.

RORY
Poseidon... cool name.

TODD
He can't run with our mares. Too
much of a badass.

RORY
So they bring their horses here
to...

TODD
Fuck basically.

MAXINE
Lovely.

KELLY

Lot of people don't like to pasture breed when you can artificially inseminate, but we try to do it in a more controlled environment.

TODD

Conception rates are higher in pastures. We have a breeding shed for live cover, but then your handlers are at risk. Pros and cons.

MAXINE

It all sounds so... technical.

KELLY

(then)

So why don't you like horses, Maxine? You have a bad experience?

MAXINE

No, I just --

RORY

She thinks they're creepy.

Bitter silence from Maxine.

TODD

Well, they are creepy. People like to romanticize horses. Like they're spirit animals or some shit. But you get one staring at you, with those big black pearls that see in every direction, sends a chill down your spine like nothing else. If there's a Hell, it's teeming with fucking horses.

KELLY

I think you're born with a connection to them or not. Like something that was meant to be. You can't learn it. It just is. Like soulmates.

Maxine fires a look at Kelly.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Maxine angrily digs through her bag as Rory sits on the bed, arms folded.

RORY

I'm having second thoughts. It doesn't feel right, Maxine. I don't want to mess with her like that.

Maxine grabs a BOOK from the bag.

MAXINE

How am I supposed to trust you if you can't come clean?

RORY

I don't see how my situation with Kelly has anything to do with us.

Maxine flips open the book - the BIG BOOK (AA's Twelve Steps tome) - and reads:

MAXINE

"Above all, we should try to be absolutely sure that we are not delaying because we are afraid."

RORY

And this is why you don't get involved with your sponsor.

MAXINE

"For the readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts is the very spirit of Step Nine."

RORY

Make direct amends whenever possible, *except when to do so would injure them or others.*

Maxine's speechless for a second.

MAXINE

I don't believe this. You're fucking scared.

RORY

You know how delicate this is. Kelly's a total sweetheart, and she's obviously still kind of infatuated with me, or a memory of me. Confessing a betrayal when it'll clearly hurt her is not the way to go.

MAXINE

You don't get to decide that.

RORY
Not telling her. End of story.

Off Maxine, eyes piqued in insult --

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Kelly and Todd prepare dinner. Rory and Maxine's inaudible argument tremors through the walls.

KELLY
She's a disaster. Poor Rory. And by the way, she's still in love with her ex -- "Nick."

TODD
What about *him*? Fucking slouch, wants everything handed to him. *This* is the guy you were obsessed with all those years?

Todd grabs a salad bowl, hauls it into the --

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- and sets it on the table.

TODD
Doesn't seem like the Kelly I know...

Kelly enters with plates of vegetables.

KELLY
He was a significant part of my life. Can't you understand that?

Todd notes a PACKAGE in golden wrapping paper on the table. A card on top.

TODD
What's this?

KELLY
A gift. For Rory.

TODD
What kind of gift?

KELLY
Just something he'll appreciate.

Kelly exits. Todd stares at the package.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

A bloody sunset. The farmhouse in hazy silhouette.

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory unwraps the gift as Kelly looks on, hopeful. Todd and Maxine gnaw on veggies. *MUNCH, CRUNCH.*

Rory opens the box. Finds a colorful ensemble of silk pants, red velvet vest and a fake ruby necklace.

KELLY

It's your costume from *The King and I*.

RORY

Oh... Awesome!

Todd rolls his eyes, gulps his scotch. Pours more.

RORY (CONT'D)

How did you...?

KELLY

I asked Mr. Flynn. He knew we were dating; gave me the costume. I said I was your biggest fan. And I am. ... Was.

MAXINE

Cute. And you kept it all this time...

RORY

Thank you, Kelly.

TODD

You shave your head? To play *The King*?

RORY

Uh, no. Thought about it, but...

TODD

Didn't want to commit?

RORY

Didn't want to emulate Yul Brynner.

KELLY

King Mongkut wasn't bald, actually.

MAXINE

He also wasn't a white kid from Beverly.

RORY

We didn't have that many Thai kids in my school. Did you?

MAXINE

I went to a science and technology school, so yeah, I did, actually.

TODD

Plenty of other musicals out there that don't inspire whitewashing.

MAXINE

Exactly. Thank you.

KELLY

Anyway, Rory, it was just something I thought you'd enjoy.

RORY

It's awesome. Really. Thank you.

Rory and Kelly share a warm smile.

TODD

(to Maxine)

So who's this *Nick* character?

MAXINE

I'm sorry?

TODD

That his name? Nick?

Maxine sets her eyes on Kelly.

RORY

(to Maxine)

How's he know about Nick?

MAXINE

I... must've mentioned him at some point.

(to Todd)

He's an ex.

TODD

Gotta love those exes. They do not
go gentle into the night.

(then)

You folks religious?

RORY

No.

MAXINE

As it relates to the program
we are. We're in AA.

TODD

AA? *Huh*. Well, I guess that makes
sense. You haven't touched a drop.
My father did it for twelve years.
One day he turned to me, drunk as a
syphilitic pirate, having just beat
the shit out of my mother, and
said: "What problem?"

Todd belts a hearty LAUGH. He's the only one.

TODD (CONT'D)

Anyway, I was just going to make
the point that moving on requires
faith. Worship.

RORY

I'm comfortably secular, thanks.

TODD

You don't seem comfortable.

KELLY

He *is* comfortable, Todd. Just cuz
you're not...

TODD

I think the secular perspective
lacks eternal wisdom, that's all.

MAXINE

Rory, maybe this is a good time to
tell them why we're really here.

Awkward pause as Rory and Maxine exchange silent threats.

TODD

Oh?

RORY

It's nothing.

MAXINE

We believe in the steps. We believe in earnestly asking for God's help and guidance.

KELLY

I'm sorry. I don't know what we're talking about so I'm just going to clear some of these plates.

MAXINE

Tell her, Rory.

Rory glares at Maxine.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Tell her.

KELLY

Tell me what?

A long, squeamish pause.

RORY

Part of working the steps is making amends to the people we've hurt. I've been doing that over the past six months or so, kind of working backwards on a time line. And you were the last person on my time line.

KELLY

I mean... you left for college. I was hurt, but it's not something you need to make amends for, Rory.

RORY

I cheated on you.

KELLY

...What?

RORY

Pretty much the whole time we were together. Three years or so.

Beat.

KELLY

Wait... What?

MAXINE

Your whole relationship was pretty much a lie. Look, it was a long time ago. I'm not saying it isn't important, but I think we can all put it into perspective. Rory's trying to better himself and I applaud that. I hope you can too.

Ouch. Kelly looks frozen in fucking carbonite.

Todd catches eyes with Rory. Something cold, decisive and dangerous in it.

Kelly blurts an incredulous chuckle. Eyes well with unwanted emotion.

Todd slowly, very slowly, CLAPS...

CLAP. CLAP. CLAP. CLAP. CLAP.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly shoves out the front door. Heartbreak in her eyes. Rory steps out after her.

RORY

Kelly?

KELLY

You should go, Rory.

RORY

I just wanted to --

KELLY

It's not a big deal. It was so long ago. It's just awkward, you know?

RORY

I didn't want to say anything. I didn't want to hurt you.

KELLY

Like I said, not a big deal. It was good to see you. Make sure you take your costume.

RORY

I went through some tough years as a kid. Had some bad things happen to me. Never told anybody about it.

KELLY

Bad things?

RORY

I don't want to make it sound like some bullshit excuse.

KELLY

No, we wouldn't want that.

RORY

An older kid. Neighborhood kid. He made me do things I didn't want to do, so I was sexualized at a young--

KELLY

Are you fucking kidding me?

RORY

It's true.

KELLY

I know all about bad things that happen. Bad things you don't tell anybody about. Especially after confessing what you just did.

RORY

Kelly, I loved you. As much as a sixteen-year-old knows what that is, I loved you. I just had no idea how to respect you.

KELLY

You still don't.

Kelly continues to the stable. Storms past a crew of handlers hanging out by the fence, smoking weed.

Colt's there. He nods hello but she doesn't acknowledge him. Obviously pissed. Colt looks over at Rory, accusatory.

Rory drops his head, *what a fucking disaster.*

INT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

Kelly leans against the stall, quietly sobbing. Lights on bright in here to simulate longer days and trigger estrous. A MARE whinnies. Nudges her. Kelly pets the horse.

Not surprisingly, the stable's in immaculate shape. Slate stone walls with wrought iron box stalls. Beveled glass and a vaulted ceiling of cherry oak stretching to infinity.

Then...

WHISPERS float into the space. Barely audible at first, then growing louder, more insistent. Coming from another paddock...

Kelly shuts her eyes.

The whispers soon become GASPS. Louder, harsher. Tormented cries.

Kelly covers her ears, trying to drown it out, as it reaches a high pitch AND:

COLT (O.S.)

Kell?

The whispers CUT OUT sharply. Kelly wipes her eyes as Colt approaches.

COLT (CONT'D)

You okay?

KELLY

Feel like I'm in high school all over again. Crazy, right? So long ago. It's just so stupid.

COLT

It's not stupid. Hell, you never forget your first.

KELLY

I've always liked the douchebags.

COLT

We're typically more interesting.

Kelly smirks. Colt takes her hand.

COLT (CONT'D)

Come on, let him see you.

KELLY

No, don't bother him.

COLT

Aw hell, he don't care none. Mares been teasin' him all day...

Colt leads Kelly past the mare stalls, the horses staring at them, heads turning as they go. Toward...

The STALLION PADDOCK. Above the doorway, the horse petroglyph carved into a slab of mahogany.

Four additional stalls, but just one horse back here -- the PRIZE STALLION. POSEIDON.

His pitch black coat like a void gleaming in the artificial light. An unnatural stillness about him. As if he's just... watching them. Calculating.

Kelly observes him, cautiously.

KELLY

It's getting worse. The voices...

COLT

Yeah... Not ideal.

KELLY

It never happened before. Only since the offerings ramped up.

COLT

You know how many we got out there now?

KELLY

Running out of rocks.

COLT

Todd's probably gonna talk to me about your friend.

KELLY

I'm sure he will.

COLT

What do you want me to do?

KELLY

Nothing. Roll with it. We'll see what Poseidon wants.

COLT

I got some "friends" coming over tonight. Should I cancel?

KELLY

No... at least *someone* should have some fun around here.

Off the stallion -- his glistening eyes gazing upon them.

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine helps Todd clear the table.

MAXINE

I want to apologize for Rory...

TODD

So all this "catching up" was just pretense, huh?

MAXINE

It's supposed to be face-to-face.

TODD

Courageous.

MAXINE

I think there's something to be said for looking someone in the eye. Don't you?

TODD

You bet your perky little tits I do.

Maxine sets the dishes down.

MAXINE

Well. I guess I should be going.

Todd smiles petulant. Unnerved, Maxine quickly exits.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine grabs her bag, getting ready to leave AS --

Todd moves into the doorway.

Maxine stops. A beat. Offers her hand to shake.

MAXINE

Thank you for your hospitality. I'm sorry it couldn't be under better circumstances.

Todd accepts. A firm grip.

TODD

You know that song "Policy of Truth"?

MAXINE
Duran Duran?

TODD
Depeche Mode.

MAXINE
What about it?

TODD
Just feels appropriate.

Maxine pries her hand away, waits for Todd to move aside. But he doesn't budge.

And now Maxine gets her shrink on.

MAXINE
You know, Todd, I'm the last person you want to fuck with. I clocked your inadequacies the second you parked your silly, provincial ass at the table.

TODD
Is that right?

MAXINE
It's something men like you never seem to figure out until it's too late: porn rewires your frontal cortex so that the only way you can get it up is if you're watching a bunch of hard, perfect dicks fire loads into girls half the size of your wife's thighs. It's an *addiction*. And it can be solved much in the same way Rory is solving his. By facing the truth.

Todd's eyes go blank. For a moment it seems like he might take a swing at her...

But then he counters with a fake, distant smile. Shit, he'd be lying if he said he wasn't impressed.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine stomps outside, finds Rory leaning against the Volvo, pissed.

MAXINE
Ready to go?

RORY
I told you I didn't want to tell
her. *I told you.*

MAXINE
And?

RORY
And what? What the fuck kind of
sponsor are you, Maxine?

Todd slinks up behind them.

TODD
You folks know anything about
eugenics? Or paganism?

Their voices overlapping:

MAXINE
It's done, Rory. Okay? Let's
just get the fuck out of here
please.

TODD (CONT'D)
Been around a long time.
Older than Jesus...

RORY
I really don't want to go
anywhere with you.

TODD (CONT'D)
Something goes wrong, we
don't "ask for guidance" from
some holy ghost...

MAXINE
What, you wanna stick
around...for *this*?

TODD (CONT'D)
But we *do* reconcile. We do
quite a bit of reconciliation
around here.

MAXINE
That's great, Todd. I can tell
you're really on top of things.

KELLY (O.S.)
Everything okay?

Kelly walks over.

MAXINE
We were just leaving.

Kelly glances at Rory, who can barely look at her.

KELLY
You forgot your costume.

Kelly runs into the house.

Another supremely awkward beat with Todd staring down the guests.

Eventually, Maxine decides to wait in the car.

Now it's just Rory and Todd.

RORY

Look, man, I'm sorry it went down like this. It's been a real battle for me with the program and --

TODD

Fate brought you here, Rory. It wasn't your precious twelve steps.

Rory meets Todd's gaze.

Kelly comes back out with the costume. Hands it off.

KELLY

You're still the most talented person I've ever met. Nothing will ever change that.

Kelly gives him a quick hug. Rory's a lump of self-loathing, but he works a thankful smile.

RORY

It was really good to see you, Kelly. I'm really sorry.

With that, Rory climbs into the Volvo, starts the engine and backs out, revealing...

A black puddle of oil dripping from the undercarriage.

TODD

Like I said...

Rory and Maxine get about twenty yards down the driveway before the car seizes up and sputters the fuck out.

Todd cracks a shiteating grin and kicks some dirt over the oil slick.

Kelly looks back at him.

INT. RORY'S VOLVO - CONTINUOUS

Rory tries the engine over and over. It won't go. Thick smoke bleeds from the hood as Maxine borders on eruption.

MAXINE

No way. *No fucking way.* Somebody did this to us. *He did this...*

RORY

Calm down please.

MAXINE

He did this!

RORY

It was my fault.

Maxine's got lasers shooting out her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly powers up an electric tea kettle. Packs loose leaf tea into an infuser. Rory's on his phone as Maxine eyeballs him from the doorway and Todd washes his oily hands in the sink.

MAXINE

You "Googled it"?

RORY

I was trying to save money.

MAXINE

It's an oil change.

RORY

(into phone)

...No, the oil cap is gone. There's oil all over the engine and, and...

(to Todd)

What happened again?

TODD

It starved the pump.

RORY

(into phone)

It starved the pump...

Todd grabs a beer from the fridge and cracks it open in front of Maxine, spraying her with the spit from the can.

RORY (CONT'D)

(hanging up)

Triple A can't get out here until tomorrow.

(off Maxine)

I fucked up, alright?

MAXINE

Call a Lyft.

RORY

Back to Boston? It's a hundred-and-fifty miles. What about my car?

MAXINE

I'll be waiting outside.

KELLY

You don't have to wait outside.

MAXINE

I'd prefer it, actually.

Maxine directs her ire at Rory, then Todd, and bolts.

KELLY

There's a hotel a few miles --

TODD

Aw, Kell, come on. They're guests. They should crash here for the night.

RORY

Uh, yeah, that's probably not the best --

KELLY

It's late... and getting a car service out here is like...

TODD

Hey you guys should stick around for the serving tomorrow.

RORY

I'm sure Maxine would love that.

TODD

It's a hell of an experience.

RORY

I'm sure it's fascinating, I just think Maxine would --

TODD

She can't decide everything for you, right? Or can she?

KELLY

Todd...

TODD

Alright, whatever. I got some things to do in the shed. You decide on a hotel, I'll give you a lift. Let me know.

Todd gives Kelly a deep, forceful kiss that makes both Kelly and Rory uncomfortable.

The kettle SCREAMS and clicks off. Todd separates from Kelly and exits.

Kelly and Rory face each other.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine's sitting on the steps with her phone as Todd shoves out the front door scaring the shit out of her.

TODD

Tough day, huh? Been feeling a little insecure, to be honest. Those two really have a connection, huh?

Todd and Maxine share a beat of pensive silence over it.

TODD (CONT'D)

(then)

Greenleaf Farm's going artificial with their broodmare.

MAXINE

Like I know what a "broodmare" is.

TODD

Oh I'm sorry. Figured it was obvious. It's a horse used for breeding.

MAXINE

How wonderful for her.

TODD

If you see Colt around, tell him I need him in the shed. He's usually down at the fire pit, smoking bowls.

Todd points to the back of the house and heads to the stable.

Off Maxine --

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly sips her tea while Rory lingers in the doorway.

RORY

I'm so sorry, Kelly. I didn't want it to come out like that.

KELLY

It was difficult to hear, but I really do appreciate your honesty.

(then)

Who was it? I mean, just curious. The girls you were with?

RORY

You know. Like I said, it was over the course of --

KELLY

Allison? Allison Ames?

RORY

To be honest, I'm surprised you never knew.

KELLY

She was my best friend! Was it like a one-time thing or --

RORY

I was basically drunk throughout high school --

KELLY

We *all* were. We were getting drunk and stoned every weekend.

RORY

Yeah, but that was me during the week.

KELLY

Yeah, but did that mean you had to go and fuck all my friends?

RORY

They weren't your friends. Neither was I.

The rub. They're staring at each other.

Rory looks away. Notes a framed knitted panel on the wall -- the horse petroglyph.

RORY (CONT'D)
So this White Horse thing...

KELLY
I know. It's... different.

RORY
Which is totally fine, it's just not how I remember you.

KELLY
We have a communal bond with the horses. To us, they're purity, strength and virtue. Virtue above all else. We worship the goddess Epona.

RORY
Worship like...?

KELLY
Christianity.

RORY (CONT'D)
Cults?

KELLY
Faith.

RORY
Oh. Okay...

Kelly grabs the bottle of scotch and spikes her tea with it. Rory can practically smell the booze from across the room.

KELLY
I mean, it's not...

RORY
What?

KELLY
It's not necessarily what I pictured for myself.

RORY
What do you mean?

Kelly struggles with this. How to put it, how not to put it.

RORY (CONT'D)
Todd?

KELLY
He's trying to get me to convert... it's complicated. He has a very rigid belief system.

RORY
 Kelly, are you okay? I mean, do you
 need help?

Kelly looks at him. Rory goes to her.

RORY (CONT'D)
 I want to help you but I need to
 know what's going on.

KELLY
 I can't... I can't...

As Kelly tries to stifle her emotion, she and Rory fall into
 a tight embrace. One that lingers. Pressing into each other.
 A powerful, nostalgic attraction between them. Still.

Then:

MAXINE (O.S.)
 Rory?

A jolt. Kelly peels away from Rory and runs out as --
 Maxine eye-fucks him from across the room.

RORY
 She's upset.

MAXINE
 So?

RORY
 What do you mean, *so*?

MAXINE
 I can't get a car service, can you?

RORY
 They offered to put us up for the
 night.

MAXINE
 Oh, so we're doing a fucking
sleepover now, is that it??

Rory SHUSHES her, pulls her into the --

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- where they bark at each other in hushed anger:

RORY

What do you want me to do? You want a hotel? How much you think *that* costs in The Berkshires?

Maxine gives him the finger with her engagement ring.

MAXINE

You want the fucking thing back?

RORY

You know, Maxine, you haven't made this very easy on me.

MAXINE

On *you*? Oh I see. A few minutes in the presence of honesty and we've regressed to narcissism and self-pity. Sounds familiar...

RORY

Okay, you want honesty? Fine. I want to stay. I want to hang out with her. Right now, I'm feeling about *this fucking big* after you hijacked my recovery and I'd like to feel better. How's that?

MAXINE

Romancing the fat girl you fucked over in a drunken stupor? *So sweet.*

RORY

Wow, you are *such* a bitch right now.

MAXINE

We have *no* reason to stay here.

RORY

I think something's going on with Todd, okay? I think he's in a cult. I think he's forcing it on her.

MAXINE

A cult?

RORY

A horse cult. A horse worshipping cult.

Maxine stares intense, and then...

BUSTS THE FUCK OUT LAUGHING.

MAXINE

Oh my god, you are *in love* with her! I should've fucking known!

RORY

You're the one who freaked out over all the horse shit!

MAXINE

You're the one who's using it as an excuse to rub her down!

RORY

I want to help her! I owe it to her and *so do you!*

Maxine glares, tempering herself.

MAXINE

Okay, Rory. You wanna stay? Let's stay.

RORY

I need you to be on my side a little bit here.

MAXINE

No, I get it. If she's in crisis, we should help her out. It's only right.

A peaceful beat. Rory vents a charged breath. A battle he thinks he's won.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

I left my bag in the car. I'm gonna go grab it. Okay?

Rory nods. Maxine gives him a distant kiss and, with that, she's gone.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine exits, bottled rage. Looks around the back of the house... where Todd mentioned Colt might be...

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory wanders back in. Finds the bottle of scotch on the counter, calling to him.

KELLY (O.S.)
She's a real firecracker.

Rory turns to Kelly, who's holding a decorative STORAGE BOX in her arms, which she sets down on the kitchen table.

KELLY (CONT'D)
I wouldn't have put you two together.

RORY
She's been good for me in a lot of ways. Keeps me focused and, you know, she's a therapist, so...
(then)
Who *do* you see me with? Out of curiosity?

KELLY
Someone who appreciates you.
Someone who sees the artist in you.

Kelly opens the storage box, allowing Rory to see inside...

Mix tapes, board games, CDs, journals, empty perfume bottles, folded notes. High school era shit.

RORY
Oh... what?? My notes? My mix tapes? Look at all this stuff!

KELLY
Basically everything you ever gave me. You might even find an STD in there if you look hard enough.

He gives her a look. They begin sifting through the box. Rory takes out a folded chess board.

RORY
Nice, our old chess set!

KELLY
I used to kick your ass.

RORY
Yeah, cuz the loser had to drink.

They chuckle morbidly at that fact.

EXT. TERRACE - NIGHT

A gorgeous summer night, and out here you can see about a million stars.

Maxine follows a cobblestone path to the terrace at the rear of the farmhouse. A fire pit blazes, surrounded by lounge chairs.

A MAN with his back turned stands before the fire pit, smoking a jay. Must be Colt.

Maxine wanders over...

MAXINE

You wouldn't happen to be *man*
enough to know how to fix a '96
 Volvo, would you?

The MAN turns. It's not Colt... unless his face suddenly took a vicious kick from a horse leaving him horribly disfigured.

Maxine GASPS, backpedaling at the sight of him, his face punched in, smeared to the side and framed by a weal in the shape of a fucking horseshoe.

Seconds before Maxine belts a scream, Colt runs over:

COLT

No, no, no, it's okay, it's okay!

The MAN fumbles something from his pocket and quickly pulls a bandage MASK over his face. Name's RAYMUNDO, 40's, a handler (or "Softie" from the beginning of the movie).

COLT (CONT'D)

It's just Raymundo. He works here.
 It's okay, seriously. He's cool.

Raymundo lumbers off, tugging the mask tight over his head.

MAXINE

I'm sorry. Jesus. I just -- didn't
 expect that.

COLT

Poor Raymundo got kicked in the
 face on a serving. Lucky to be
 alive. Doctors tried to fix it but
 with all the coke he did over the
 years his nasal cavity was like a
 sinkhole.

MAXINE

Shit... So he just wears a mask
around everywhere?

COLT

Well, yeah. I think he's more
comfortable with it. He's a good
dude, though. Loyal.

Maxine sighs, plops herself down on a lounge chair.

MAXINE

Our car broke down. Looks like
we're staying the night so my
fiancée can suck up to his ex-
girlfriend.

COLT

You don't sound too happy about
that.

MAXINE

Would you be?

Colt grins, lights a jay.

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory and Kelly play old mix tape tracks on their phones,
singing along to the lyrics. They know the words by heart.

RORY

Nice... I still listen to this one.

KELLY

Oh my god, *love it!*

Before long, Kelly pulls off her shoes and starts dancing.
Rory stays seated, watching her. Enamored.

RORY

We went to their concert at the
Garden, remember that?

KELLY

Uh-huh...

RORY

We took a "limo"!

KELLY (CONT'D)

We took a "limo"!

RORY

(laughing)

That was friggin' awesome!

(MORE)

RORY (CONT'D)

Those tickets were scalped, too. I was so impressed with myself...

KELLY

I was *always* so impressed with you. You were like... I was *so* into you.

Their eyes link for an extended beat. But then Rory starts thinking about what a dick he was back then... and looks away.

The music cuts out as Kelly's phone BUZZES.

She checks the number...

KELLY (CONT'D)

Oh, it's the Bridges Farm, I should take this.

RORY

Sure.

Kelly takes the call in the other room.

While she's gone, Rory keeps looking through the storage box. Memories take him back.

He finds a folded piece of notebook paper. Opens it up...

A sketch of a monster drawn by Rory in high school. A demon of some sort. Black eyes. Razor jaws. Pale face peppered with lipstick kisses.

The handwritten caption over the sketch:

"I AM DRUNK DEMON..."

Rory stares, recognizing it. Disturbed. Then:

KELLY

(returning)

It's about the foal. I'll have Todd call them back. He's in the shed.

She sits to put on her shoes. Rory folds the sketch, stuffs it deep into the box.

RORY

Don't bother, I'll go. You mean the stable?

KELLY

Are you sure? Yeah, all the way to the back. Just tell him Don Bridges called -- you know what? I'll go.

RORY

Don't worry about it. Seriously. Keep your shoes off. I always liked your toes.

Rory flirts a smile at her as he walks out.

After he's gone, Kelly admires her toes a beat. Then --

She looks at the chess board displayed on the table. Some of the pieces are missing. She folds the board, drops it into the box.

A white pawn falls out.

She picks it up, thinking about it.

INT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

Rory enters. Lights on in the mares' paddock. Saunters past the box stalls. The mares gape back at him. Anxious.

He moves to the entrance of the...

STALLION Paddock

Glancing at the horse petroglyph above the doorway, Rory enters.

Lights on in here as well (artificial light increases sperm count). But cooler. Cold, actually.

Passing Poseidon's stall... The prize horse. Watching him. The big stallion's stillness, unsettling.

A BRIGHT FLASH draws Rory's attention. He looks to an opened DOORWAY at the end of the paddock...

INT. BREEDING SHED - NIGHT

Large space, vaulted ceiling, dirt floor. Todd wears a welding helmet as he blowtorches the metal frame of some sort of device.

When he's finished, he flips the helmet off and sets the torch down. Grabs a beer from a nearby workbench.

Detailed pencil sketches of these "devices" occupy the bench.

Rory idles in the doorway. Watches him. Unnoticed. Or so he thinks...

TODD

What can I do for you, Rory?

RORY

Oh. Hey. Kelly just wanted me to let you know that Don Bridges called about the foal...

TODD

She's sending you on errands now, huh?

RORY

What? No, no, I just --

TODD

Don't take long, does it? Falling back into familiar patterns... For you, though, I imagine that's the last thing you wanna do.

RORY

I'm not falling back into --

TODD

I get it, Rory, I do. I went to high school, too. It's hard to shake. ... Course, my experience was a little different than most. We moved around a lot.

Rory walks closer, looking for a way to connect with this guy.

TODD (CONT'D)

Dad was a "man of faith" who didn't really know the first thing about divinity, but used it as a way to control people. My mom most of all. He started his own church at one point.

RORY

Is that what you practice here, with the horses?

TODD

Kelly tell you that?

RORY
She just said --

TODD
To answer your question, no. My father didn't have anything to do with my beliefs. Least not directly.

RORY
But indirectly.

TODD
Let's just say... he scarred me. Early on. And Mom let it happen.

Todd plods back to the device he was just working on.

TODD (CONT'D)
This one needed repair. It's about ready to go now. You wanna give me a hand?

Rory approaches the device. Todd and Rory flip it over. *Damn, it's heavy!* Must be about two hundred pounds. A padded shell on top. Like a gymnast's pommel.

RORY
What is this thing?

Todd grins, guzzles down his brew.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly steps outside, looking out at the stable. She spots Raymundo (masked) hauling bales of hay into stacks...

KELLY
Raymundo? Que pasa?

Raymundo doesn't acknowledge her, enters the stable.

INT. BREEDING SHED - NIGHT

Rory watches as Todd adjusts a pin on the stabilizing leg, then crosses to the workbench to grab something.

TODD
You mind holding this?

Todd sets a cylindrical TUBE in Rory's arms, about two feet long, six inches wide. Then heads out the double doors to the stallion paddock.

RORY

Uh, what am I supposed to do with --

TODD

Do me a favor. Slide that thing into the receptacle at the end of the phantom.

Rory can see Todd meet up with someone in the stallion paddock, then disappear behind the doors...

RORY

The phantom?

Puzzled, Rory looks back at the "phantom." There's a hole on the end of the padded layer.

He approaches the hole and awkwardly slides the cylinder into it. It doesn't go in all that easy and he has to fuss with it a bit.

With his back turned, he doesn't notice Todd and Raymundo leading POSEIDON up behind him...

RORY (CONT'D)

(locking the cylinder in)
Alright, I think I got it...

Rory turns around AND --

RORY (CONT'D)

Ohhhhh shit!

POSEIDON CHARGES AT HIM -- Rory stumbles back as the stallion hoists up on hind legs and MOUNTS THE BREEDING PHANTOM.

Rory SMACKS to the dirt floor as Poseidon THRUSTS into the artificial vagina. GRUNTING. POWERFUL. PERVERSE.

TODD

Get in there, boy! Get 'er good!

Rory gapes back in terror as Poseidon **comes**, staring right at him, and dismounts. SPITTING and NICKERING VICIOUSLY.

Then Raymundo leads the horse back to his stall as Todd breaks out LAUGHING at Rory.

And Kelly arrives, arms folded.

KELLY
(to Todd)
Happy now?

TODD
Hahaha! I think your boyfriend just
shit himself!

As Todd doubles over, Kelly goes to help Rory.

KELLY
Are you okay?

RORY
I...

TODD
You did great, man! Your first
collection! Congratulations!

Kelly helps Rory to his feet.

Todd goes to the breeding phantom and pulls the collector
(artificial vagina) from the mount, inspecting the contents.

TODD (CONT'D)
Damn, that's a big load. You
inspired him, Rory!

KELLY
(to Rory)
It's a collection for artificial
insemination.

RORY
Oh.

KELLY
You could've really hurt him, Todd!
What the fuck is wrong with you?

TODD
(capping the collector)
Aw, come on. No hard feelings,
Rory. Seriously. Me and Raymundo
had your back. Right, Raymundo?

They turn to the masked man standing in the doorway, who
doesn't say a word.

KELLY
He works for us.

RORY

Okay...

Kelly leads Rory out.

TODD

Hey, where ya going, Rory? We're cutting heads off chickens next!

Kelly gives Todd a nasty look. Todd keeps laughing. Kelly and Rory exit through the paddock.

As soon as they're gone, Todd's laughter abruptly drops out.

Raymundo walks over. Todd hands him the collector, the gears behind his eyes churning with menace.

EXT. HORSE STABLE/FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory and Kelly exit the stable. Rory, shellshocked:

RORY

I think we should probably be going now.

KELLY

He's a dick. He just -- he gets carried away.

RORY

He literally almost fucked me with a horse.

KELLY

He's threatened by you.

RORY

I need to find Maxine.

KELLY

I'm not good at this. I'm not good at asking for help.

RORY

Your husband's hobby is *breeding phantoms*. I'm not sure there's a crisis hotline for that.

KELLY

Please stay.

RORY

I came here to tell you how bad I fucked you over -- and your husband wants to feed me ass first to a horse that should be listed as a registered sex offender. Clearly, I've overstayed my welcome.

KELLY

I'm trying to figure out how to...

RORY

This isn't you. This isn't even close.

KELLY

I have things I want to say to him and I... I don't know how to...

RORY

You don't know how to what?

KELLY

Tell him.

RORY

Tell him what?

KELLY

That I can't be with him anymore. I don't want to be with him anymore.

Rory pauses, gets the gravity of it.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You're right. This isn't me. No one knows me like you do.

RORY

But then I think: I don't *really* know you. I knew you in high school. That's it. I'm not the same person I was in high school. Least I *hope* not...

KELLY

I'm trying to figure out when to tell him. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe after the serving. I just need some support. Is that okay? Is that too much to ask?

Rory shrugs. Giving in.

EXT. TERRACE - NIGHT

Colt hands Maxine his jacket, a dusty suede blazer that's been lived in.

Maxine wraps the jacket over her shoulders. It smells like him. They're sharing the joint.

MAXINE

So you live in "town," wherever that is, but you hardly ever go home...

COLT

Not much during the season. They put some of us up at the house.

MAXINE

What about girlfriends and stuff like that?

COLT

What, you mean like privacy and that sorta thing? The property's huge. I know every inch of it.

MAXINE

Always wondered about the sex lives of horse whisperers.

COLT

Farrier, technically. Horseshoes.

MAXINE

You must get a real kick out of your friend's complexion.

COLT

I'mma tell him you said that.

Maxine laughs, catches herself gazing at him.

COLT (CONT'D)

But really what draws me to this place is something kinda... well... spiritual. I found "God" in a way.

MAXINE

Oh, that reminds me. Rory thinks your boss is in a cult.

COLT

Does he now?

MAXINE

He's neurotic and needs to feel superior in light of his shortcomings.

COLT

It's no cult. Just a way of thinking about things. Hell, I'da never been able to handle the White Horse without it.

MAXINE

Oh right... the burn. And why did you burn yourself?

COLT

Rite of passage.

MAXINE

From cowboy to cow?

Colt moves closer.

COLT

No different from any other time-honored tradition.

He takes her hand, holds her engagement ring to the light.

Their eyes locked. A charged moment.

Maxine puts some distance between them as Colt grins at a thousand watts.

INT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

Todd exits through the mares' paddock. Checks his watch. The lights are on timers. He waits.

The lights CLICK OFF. As he heads for the door...

WHISPERS... layering on top of each other. Desperate cries. They could be words... *HELP ME*... but it's hard to discern.

The chorus ECHOES from Poseidon's stall as the mares SNORT, ears flicking back. Terrified.

Todd ignores it... continues out of the stable.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory lies in bed watching a YouTube video on his phone.

RORY

You know how many views these horse breeding videos get? This one's got ten million.

Maxine's in the adjacent GUEST BATHROOM washing her face.

MAXINE

Ten million and one.

RORY

You should've seen that thing pounding away... Terrifying.

MAXINE

And you want to see more of it.

Rory puts the phone down, crosses to the bathroom doorway.

RORY

I think she's leaving him. She asked me to stay. Offer support.

MAXINE

That is *not* your responsibility.

RORY

Look, I know this is messed up, but she's my oldest friend. I want to be here for her.

MAXINE

You said you *weren't* her friend because of the way you treated her.

RORY

You know what I mean.

MAXINE

Rory, these people are... simple.

RORY

Simple?

MAXINE

Easily manipulated. People like that are dangerous. So are their horses, apparently.

RORY

You need to stop judging people. Fuck, when was the last time you had a good time *anywhere*?

MAXINE

This is a good time? You're having fun?

Maxine sneers, brushes past him.

Rory glances at a decorative tile over the sink...

Another fucking petroglyph.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly slides the storage box back into the closet as Todd sits on a chair, taking off his clothes.

TODD

What's in the box?

KELLY

Just some high school stuff.

TODD

He seems like a real catch.

Todd pulls off his shirt. The petroglyph burned into his arm, just like Colt. Kelly shuts the closet and takes a nightgown from the dresser.

KELLY

He's trying to turn his life around.

TODD

Yeah, I noticed.

Kelly disrobes before a mirror, appraising her body. Full-figured. No petroglyph scar.

She's beautiful, but she doesn't see it.

TODD (CONT'D)

I remember when Mom ditched the preacher. The thing that finally broke her wasn't the booze, his fists, his lies... It was that when she looked in his eyes, it wasn't her he was seeing. Men like that don't change.

KELLY

Not everybody's a version of your father.

TODD
That's for sure.

Still seated, Todd removes his underwear. And something else. A tube and a pouch. Only a glimpse. He's fully nude now.

He rises, crosses to her. His back to us, his bare ass jiggling toward her. They stare at each other in the mirror.

TODD (CONT'D)
I couldn't be more unlike him. But every time I look in the mirror... all I see is him.

In the reflection, Todd reveals a castration scar. No cock. No balls. Just a rough, discolored patch of scar tissue between his legs.

TODD (CONT'D)
If you think about it, this all works out perfectly. Doesn't it?

Todd kisses her. Deeper than she wants. Kelly pulls away, avoiding his eyes as she slips on her nightgown.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Crystalline night sky. Moonlight casting bright against the farm.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Rory lies awake in bed. Maxine's asleep beside him. He's anxious. Angry. Pent up.

After a beat, he rises.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Kelly and Todd are asleep as... a soft THRUSTING SOUND rumbles beneath them.

Todd stirs awake.

THRUST, THRUST, THRUST...

He sits up, checks the clock: 12:14 AM.

INT. HALLWAY - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Todd exits the bedroom (in pajama bottoms). Down the hall, the door to the basement lulls open.

The THRUSTING comes from downstairs.

INT. BASEMENT - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Todd descends the stairway. Someone's in the gym area. He turns the corner and finds...

Rory on the exercise machine, doing reps.

Todd watches him a beat before announcing himself by flicking on the overheard lights.

RORY

Oh, hey man. Sorry if I woke you.
Hope you don't mind. Couldn't
sleep.

(re machine)

This thing's awesome. You're an
artist.

Todd just stares at him.

Rory climbs from the machine. Wipes off with a towel. Notes the petroglyph burn on Todd's arm.

RORY (CONT'D)

Kelly says you worship Epona. The
horse god, right?

TODD

The Mother Goddess. Protector of
Horses.

RORY

Right. So, how did you get into all
this?

Todd smiles to himself, moves to the machine. Starts pulling pins, adjusting the arms and seat. Bars and supports slide fluidly and lock in.

TODD

You try the back press? Now *that's*
the sweet spot, if you ask me.

RORY

Kelly was agnostic when I knew her. I went to Bishop Fenwick before high school. She'd always get so pissed when I tried to get her to Sunday mass.

TODD

Comfortably secular, huh?

RORY

Well, maybe that's why I liked to drink. The Irish-Catholic in me runs deep.

TODD

(re machine)
Go for it.

RORY

Looks like a tight squeeze.

TODD

You don't want too much wiggle room. Targets the muscles better.

Rory works himself into the machine, facing downward, his chest pressing against the bench.

Once he's in position, Todd slides a bar across his back, locking him in.

TODD (CONT'D)

Now press upward; works your abdominal obliques.

Rory presses the weight.

TODD (CONT'D)

So, you wanna know about Epona?

RORY

If you don't mind.

Again, Todd smiles at that, appraises the machine with an engineer's eye as Rory continues pressing the weight.

TODD

We're servants of the Mother Goddess.

RORY

The Mother Goddess... okay. Can anyone be a servant?

TODD
No, man. This ain't fucking Costco.
You have to prove your devotion.

RORY
How?

TODD
With a sacrifice.

Rory laughs.

RORY
A sacrifice?

TODD
Yeah, a sacrifice. Like Lent. You
give something up. Something
important. Fuck are you laughing
at? This is serious shit.

Rory keeps laughing, slaps the weight down -- *CLANG!* --
collapsing against the bench.

RORY
Sorry. I don't mean to... And
Kelly's down with all this?

TODD
She's getting there.

RORY
See, that's the thing, man. You
just wanna make sure she's not
feeling... you know... cornered.

Todd adjusts something on the machine.

TODD
Try that.

Rory tries to press the weight back up, it's heavier now. He
lowers back down, but the bar doesn't catch this time.

TODD (CONT'D)
Cornered?

RORY
Uh... can you help me out of this
thing please?

Todd doesn't respond. Rory gives him a look like:

RORY (CONT'D)
 Seriously, I need some help.

Todd watches him, head tilted, as if pondering something existential.

TODD
 You ever feel cornered, being in a program? ... But you persevere. You endure. Because it's that or...

RORY
 Todd, help!

Just as the weight becomes unbearable, Todd reaches in with one hand and hoists the bar off.

Rory spills from the machine -- and Todd lets go of the weight, letting it SMASH down. BANG!

RORY (CONT'D)
 (gasping)
 Shit...

TODD
 Feels great, right? Now *that's* a fucking set, dude! It's at the point where you think you're gonna break, see? That's when you make gains.

Todd offers his hand. Rory reluctantly accepts.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine stirs awake. Notices Rory's absence. Sits up. Looks around the room. Full of shadows and faint moonlight.

Some commotion out the window. Maxine rises, looks outside:

Colt's out back with two WOMEN. They're laughing, drunk, stoned.

Maxine watches them.

At one point, Colt gazes up at Maxine in the window. Smiles at her.

Maxine rescinds, *can he see me?*

She watches them sneak into the stable.

INT. BASEMENT - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Classic rock playing on a turntable. Todd digs a beer from a mini-fridge. Tosses Rory a bottle of water.

TODD

I mean, look, it was like twenty years ago, right? I get it. It's just... my thing is like, dude, just keep it to yourself.

RORY

It's part of the steps, man. You make amends. You own up to it. I committed to this. I need this kind of structure in my life.

TODD

Okay, I think we can both agree: women don't want you to cheat on 'em. But if you do, I'm thinking they don't wanna fucking know about it. They may not say that, but they're sure as hell thinking it.

RORY

You think that's what Kelly's thinking?

TODD

I know it.

RORY

I dunno, man. I think she's thinking something else. I think sometimes you get so caught up in what you *think* you know, it ends up taking you by surprise.

Todd thinks about that. Then:

TODD

Women are fucking deadly, man!

Todd laughs. Rory laughs a little too.

INT. HALLWAY - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine exits the guest bedroom and stops at the basement door. She can hear Rory and Todd laughing, chatting it up.

She passes the doorway and continues onward.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maxine steps outside, careful not to make much noise. The moon, big and bright, casts a pale sheet across the farm.

Maxine makes her way toward the stable.

INT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

The door cracks open and Maxine slips inside.

The lights are off, but she can hear... *sounds...* back toward the stallion paddock. Giggles... and giggles... footsteps sliding across the floor.

Maxine hesitates. She can see the mares quiet in their stalls. Barely moving. Barely breathing.

More laughter. Maxine heads toward the paddock.

INT. BASEMENT - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Todd and Rory are playing darts. Todd pulls open a cabinet and takes out a bottle of añejo. Swigs it as Rory sticks a bull's eye.

TODD

Damn, you're a fucking marksman!

RORY

I told ya, I've spent a lot of time in bars. I got my name engraved on a foosball table at McSorley's.

TODD

It defies conventional wisdom, but I'm better at this drunk.

RORY

An exercise in futility, my man. There's two things in this world at which I am virtually unbeatable: self-loathing and darts.

Todd takes another swig, sets the bottle down on a small table between them.

TODD

Tell you what. Best of ten. Loser empties this three-hundred dollar bottle of Gran Patron.

RORY

(laughs)

I'm not wagering my sobriety on a
dart game.

TODD

You're not wagering your sobriety.
You're wagering my respect. You
want my respect, don't you? I want
yours.

RORY

Todd, why does it always have to be
some sort of challenge--

TODD

Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. It is what
it is, big boy. This is a peace
offering. A reconciliation.

RORY

I'm not gonna --

TODD

You hurt my wife. In my home. You
wanna bury the hatchet? Now's your
chance.

Rory stares, torn and guilt-ridden.

TODD (CONT'D)

(then)

Hell, if you're as good as you say
you are, I'm the one's gettin'
drunk!

INT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

Maxine quietly makes her way toward the stallion paddock. She
can still hear the women giggling, and Colt whispering things
to them.

A flicker of light shines from a crack in the paddock doors.
Maxine approaches, peeks through the crack:

There's Colt, leaning over Poseidon's stall. He's holding a
Zippo lighter, gazing in at something. Cowboy smirk flashing
mischievous.

COLT

Get a little closer. That's it. He
won't hurt you. He loves it.

Maxine angles her view through the crack.

A RUSTLING within Poseidon's stall. She can see the horse, chest up, and... *his black, beady eyes... Is he looking at her?*

Then --

MOANING. Hard. Grinding. Deep, dark fucking pleasure.

Maxine stares through narrow slits in the stall. Seeing fragments of:

THE WOMEN... doing things... *to the horse. With the horse. With each other.* As Colt watches.

ON MAXINE, eyes wide, turning away, then back again.

The Women drift up, entwining in Poseidon's mane. The stallion leans into them, soaking in their touch.

Maxine can hear the WHISPERS... Faint gasps... Tortured screams... Agony.

EXT. HORSE STABLE - NIGHT

Maxine exits, lightheaded. Shuts her eyes, leaning against the door. *Breathe...*

She opens her eyes and --

BAM. There's RAYMUNDO, right in front of her, his bandage mask gaping back like a killer scarecrow.

MAXINE

Oh shit...

He SPEAKS, his voice graveled and soft:

RAYMUNDO

(Spanish)

You shouldn't be here.

MAXINE

I... I'm sorry, I was...

He steps toward her, almost lunging. Maxine tenses up, anticipating... who the fuck knows.

But Raymundo moves past, sets his ear against the stable doors. Hearing their sick mischief.

RAYMUNDO

(Spanish)

The God's hunger can no longer be quenched in a natural way.

(then)

It's HIM. Him and his... "people." They have no respect for the beauty of these animals. All they've done is twist them into lechery. They took everything from me. Ruined my mare. My Lucy...

(then)

We will destroy them all. Soon.

Raymundo throws a fist at the stable door, spins at her:

RAYMUNDO (CONT'D)

(Spanish)

This place is evil. Leave while you still can.

With that, Raymundo storms off, leaving a stunned Maxine.

INT. HALLWAY - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Todd helps Rory (totally fucking tanked) up the basement stairs.

TODD

One more step... there you go.

RORY

Hold up. Maxine... What do I tell her?

TODD

What do you mean? You're the Truth Will Set You Free guy, aren't you? Unless of course you think she might not wanna know...

RORY

It's not like I can hide it from her.

TODD

But you would if you could. Because the consequences of this are... fuck, knowing her? Kill me now.

Rory stares back, unsteady. Sweatin' it.

RORY
You planned this, didn't you?

TODD
Told you, drunk darts are my thing.
Least we're square. Man to man.
That's something, right?

Rory stares, assessing him through his drunken lens.

Todd spots a DADDY LONGLEGS skitter across the hallway. He reaches down for it, lets the spider creep into his hand.

RORY
I know you, Todd. Guys like you
always have an angle. You never let
anybody see the real you.

TODD
I don't?

When Todd turns around...

...a MONSTER gapes back. Pale-skinned. Black eyes. Lipstick
kisses. Smears and smudged. Rory's "DRUNK DEMON" --

DRUNK DEMON
Then what the fuck is this?

Drunk Demon's RAZOR JAWS spread WIDE, eyes spinning shark
white, AND --

Rory shudders, backpedaling...

FALLING BACK... AND BACK... AND...

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Rory snaps awake in a bed of thorns. Punctured and scratched.
Disorientated. Pain everywhere. AS --

An ORDERLY reaches in and helps him up. An empty bottle falls
from his lap, SMASHING to the sidewalk.

ORDERLY
Rory?

RORY
What happened?

ORDERLY

You passed out. Your father's
looking for you.

Rory tries to stand on his own but can't. The Orderly assists him. He's covered in blood and booze.

ORDERLY (CONT'D)

Rory, your mother's getting ready
to go. Do you understand what I'm
saying to you?

It takes a moment for that to sink in, then Rory moves forward anxiously as the Orderly tries to help him.

He shuffles along a winding walkway through this lush garden (which is actually part of a hospice facility)...

And approaches a patio with a sliding glass door. Curtains drawn.

Rory stumbles to the glass door and pulls it open, slapping the curtain back...

INT. PATIENT ROOM - HOSPICE - CONTINUOUS

Rory enters. His MOTHER is in bed... She's already gone.

His FATHER hovers close to her. He looks at Rory. The state of him. Disgust.

Rory approaches his mom's bedside. Takes her hand. Cold. Swollen.

His blood drips between their fingers.

Something SLURPS from below...

Rory looks down...

DRUNK DEMON's on the floor, eagerly slurping up the drops of blood, its tongue flapping wild, perverse.

Rory tries to scream, but he can't. Nothing comes out.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

A red horizon over the farm.

EXT. HORSE STABLE - MORNING

Handlers open the stable, prepare for the day. Lead the MARES out to pasture.

INT. BREEDING SHED - HORSE STABLE - MORNING

Todd welds the frame of a new breeding phantom. Angry sparks spit into the mask shielding his face.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Rory stirs awake. Vicious hangover. Finds Maxine sitting across the room. Waiting. Anxious.

RORY

I'll get to a meeting as soon as --

MAXINE

I take the blame for some of this.
I pushed too hard.

RORY

No. No, this is me. All me.

MAXINE

I wanted you to get hurt. I mean,
I... I think I wanted you to suffer
for it. Not for what you did to
her, but for what Nick did to me.

RORY

You were just trying to help me.

MAXINE

No.

A beat. Rory looks at her.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(then)

I saw something last night... One
of the handlers, he was with some
women. They were in the stable and
they were... with the horse.

Rory stares, sits up, wipes his face.

RORY

What?

MAXINE

It doesn't matter. Just get up and walk with me out the front door.

RORY

I'm trying to understand what you're say--

MAXINE

I am not staying here another fucking minute. That's what I'm saying.

RORY

I told Kelly I would be here for her.

MAXINE

Fuck Kelly. Fuck her. Duplicitous bitch. Takes one to know one. Let's go.

RORY

What were you doing in the stable with one of the handlers?

Maxine rises, slings her bag over her shoulder.

MAXINE

I think these people want to hurt us.

RORY

So do you apparently.

MAXINE

I am walking out the fucking door.

RORY

Go.

Maxine stares, helpless. Eyes brimming. She heads for the door. Stops. Then:

MAXINE

My Spanish sucks, but I caught some of it. He said this place is evil.

RORY

Maxine, I think --

Maxine walks out and shuts the door, cutting him off.

Rory looks at the bedside table... where Maxine's engagement rings sits.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Maxine shoves out the front door and keeps walking. Down the driveway. Past the Volvo. Past the gate. Doesn't stop.

Todd and Colt exit the stable just in time to catch her vacate.

TODD
That's one down.

Todd gives Colt a playful smack on the shoulder.

INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Kelly's in her bathrobe, sitting alone, sipping tea, staring off.

Rory appears in the doorway, watches her unnoticed for a few beats. Then:

RORY
She left.

KELLY
I'm sure she just needs some space.

Rory looks down at the engagement ring in his hand.

RORY
Yeah, no.

Kelly sees the ring, but doesn't comment. Rory scuffs to the table and sits.

RORY (CONT'D)
Do you have any... ?

Kelly opens a sugar jar... filled with Ibuprofen. Rory downs a few tablets.

KELLY
Was this your first time?
Relapsing?

RORY
No. But it's been awhile. So
stupid.

KELLY

Todd put you up to it?

RORY

It wasn't his fault. I wanted to beat him. I'm an idiot.

KELLY

He's manipulative. Like his father.

RORY

I tried to get him to talk about your...

KELLY

It's just gonna piss him off if he thinks you're mocking him.

Rory grabs some coffee from the counter. Through the kitchen window, he can see Maxine walking off toward the main road.

RORY

Mom always thought you were the one. I keep thinking about when she died, what she had to hold on to. Only son's a drunk. No kids. Total fuck up.

(then)

If I could do it all over again, and I know that's silly to think about, but if I could... I never would've left.

Kelly rises. Sets her cup in the sink. Beside him.

KELLY

You know how I was always obsessed with that painting -- *The Storm* -- by that French guy, what's his name?

RORY

You had it framed above your bed.

KELLY

Right. The reason I liked it so much was because I thought it was us. Running from the storm. It always just felt exactly right. It still does.

They're staring at each other.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Kelly exits the farmhouse followed by Rory a few steps behind.

KELLY

They should be here soon. I'm not sure if we'll do a live cover or pasture breed.

RORY

So the mares they're bringing, they've met the stallion before?

KELLY

They've run together a number of times, but it *has* been awhile.

Todd meets up with them. A wary look from Rory.

TODD

Morning! We let the mares out. We'll do three live covers in the shed, space 'em out a few hours apart.

(to Rory)

You good?

RORY

Sure.

TODD

Saw Maxine a little while ago. I woulda' given her a ride somewhere.

RORY

She's upset. I think she wants to be alone.

TODD

Shit, man, I'm sorry. We hit it too hard last night. I shoulda' known better.

KELLY

Ya think?

TODD

You gotta admit though, Rory -- that's some of the best worm juice you ever had. Am I right?

Todd goes in for another back slap --

But Rory swerves out of the way.

EXT. HORSE STABLE - DAY

A small fleet of HORSE TRAILERS parked beside the stable hauled by rugged pickup trucks and SUVs.

The horse petroglyph can be seen as an emblem affixed to the rear bumpers on some of the vehicles. Like the Christian ichthys (Jesus fish).

INT. BREEDING SHED - DAY

Handlers lead a silver-gray BROODMARE into the shed and fit her hind hooves with boots attached to ropes that prohibit her from kicking.

Rory and Kelly enter with the BREEDERS, who have traveled with their mares for cover by Poseidon. Experienced farmers. Beards, double-knit sweaters (even in summer) and baseball caps abound.

KELLY

Usually he's at eighty percent fertility but, I don't know what it is, the mares aren't responding to him.

BREEDER

Well, he's older now; hormones, different phenotypes...

KELLY

I know but adult stallions produce more sperm, and Todd's been very selective with his broodmares...

Behind them, Todd, Colt and Raymundo (masked) lead Poseidon from his paddock. The mighty stallion is as intimidating as ever. The fucking grim reaper.

Kelly watches Poseidon. Vacillating somewhere between terror and reverence. She's not alone. Just about everybody quiets down for the stud's big entrance...

Including the Broodmare awaiting her mate. The Breeder explains to Rory:

BREEDER

What's happening now is, he's gonna tease her a little. Make sure she's ready to mount.

Todd leads Poseidon closer to the broodmare, who NICKERS and trots a bit as her handlers try to keep her calm.

The Breeder zeroes in on Poseidon's underside, gaping at his emerging member.

BREEDER (CONT'D)

Okay, you see that? You see his cock hanging out there? See how it's growing? He can smell her. He's hard now, see?

RORY

Is it weird that we're all just standing around watching this?

BREEDER

We're watching to see if she rejects him.

RORY

Why would she reject him?

BREEDER

Nature gives her a sixth sense for studs with the highest probability of success. Genetics, virility, intangibles like pheromones...

RORY

How does he know if she rejects him?

BREEDER

See her tail, how it's whippin' to the side like that? That's telling him she's ready. He can smell her, too, like I said. I gave her an ultrasound this morning. She's estrous. She's ready.

RORY

What if she rejects him? What then?

BREEDER

Depends on whether or not he still wants to bother. And if he *does*, whether or not she can make him pay for it.

The Breeder's excited, which is fucking strange, but there *IS* a certain electricity in the room.

Rory can't take his eyes off the horses, even though something about this is... well, fucked.

Todd leads Poseidon closer...

ON KELLY, watching Poseidon mount the broodmare. As the event unfolds, these two massive animals fucking before a live audience, her eyes fill. And fill. And spill over.

It takes all of twenty seconds. When it's done, and Poseidon hops off the mare, the Breeders give both horses a healthy APPLAUSE.

A successful cover.

Todd congratulates Poseidon with a warm pat, combing his mane, whispering to him.

Kelly wipes her eyes, slaps on a fake smile, shaking hands, giving hugs.

As the Breeders mingle and the horses are lead back to their stalls, Kelly tries to sneak away unnoticed...

But Rory sees her... and follows her out.

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Kelly takes a new bottle from the liquor cabinet. Pours herself a double and shoots it down.

Rory comes in.

RORY

You okay?

KELLY

I don't like to watch it so much anymore.

RORY

It's definitely strange. Like the coordination of it all, how manipulated it is.

KELLY

That's not the part that bothers me. It's just... Lately it's just making me think about getting older, shit like that.

(then)

KELLY (CONT'D)

We're not really set up for it. Me and Todd. And even if we were...

Rory moves closer, looking at the petroglyph etched in the dining table.

RORY

Epona's the goddess of fertility, right?

Kelly pours another shot.

KELLY

She is. But I'm not part of the family yet. Still have to convert.

Rory watches her as she downs it.

RORY

Todd mentioned something about a sacrifice.

KELLY

It's more like an offering. A vice.
(holds up her glass)
Like this.

RORY

Like me.

Kelly looks at him. Forces a laugh.

KELLY

Are you volunteering?

RORY

You know me, I'm all about recovery.

KELLY

(then)
You wanna take a walk?

RORY

You think that's a good idea?

KELLY

I dunno. Probably not.

Off Rory --

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Slow rolling THUNDER on the horizon. A summer storm approaches.

Rory and Kelly head outside. Kelly grabs Rory's hand and leads him around the far side of the house, away from the stable.

REVERSE ON TODD, hanging outside the stable, watching them depart.

EXT. FIELD/COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Winds picking up. Rory and Kelly walk beside a stone wall. Rory looks up at the darkening clouds.

RORY

We're gonna get caught in it.

KELLY

We won't be gone long. I just want to show you something up here.

RORY

Feeling a little guilty about Maxine. Maybe I should've gone with her.

KELLY

Maybe you should've.

RORY

But I want to be with you.

Kelly smiles, links arms with him.

RORY (CONT'D)

Are you really gonna leave him?

KELLY

Why?

RORY

I dunno, I'm just trying to think about how all that's gonna play out. Won't my being here make it worse?

KELLY

For him maybe.

Kelly pulls him off into the woods.

EXT. FOREST/POND - DAY

Kelly leads Rory to the edge of a small pond filled with lilies. The lilies blanket the surface with soft pink and yellow flowers. Dandelion florets drift through the air like cinders.

Kelly approaches the shoreline, staring up into the darkening sky. Blades of sunlight shifting as storm clouds move in.

KELLY

Did you know that Poseidon is the god of horses? Most people think it's just the seas. They forget all about the horses.

RORY

Earthquakes too, right? I remember that from Ms. Connolly's class.

Rory stands behind her, watching as the sunlight blankets her in ethereal sheets.

KELLY

The spirit of Poseidon was cast from the water into a mighty stallion, who roams the mortal Earth collecting the souls of the wicked.

INT. STALLION PEN - HORSE STABLE - DAY

ON POSEIDON -- waiting. Perfectly still. Bulbous eyes glistening.

EXT. FOREST/POND - DAY

Rory shields his eyes from the wind as Kelly stares transfixed into the coming storm.

KELLY

Poseidon chose our leader. The purest, most reverent.

RORY

Todd.

KELLY

He's lost. Damaged. He has to go, but he has their support.

RORY

Who?

KELLY

The breeders. Every farm we work with. They have to go too.

RORY

I don't understand. Are you worried they'll ostracize you if you leave him?

Kelly turns to him.

KELLY

No.

RORY

Good, because I think --

Kelly sinks a deep kiss to his lips. Rory falls into her embrace. Hungry hands all over each other.

This freight train ain't stoppin'.

Cinder-florets dance about, as if drawn to them, in a swirling funnel.

INT. STALLION PEN - HORSE STABLE - DAY

ON POSEIDON -- staring back at us.

EXT. PASTURE/COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Rory and Kelly hurry back across the field, hand in hand, as the storm intensifies.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - FARMHOUSE - DAY

The gun cabinet. Todd stalks over. Yanks it open.

INT. HORSE STABLE - DAY

Kelly and Rory run into the stable just as the sky opens up in a DOWNPOUR.

They're laughing, exhilarated, UNTIL --

They're greeted by Todd. Holding a rifle. Colt and Raymundo at his side. The Breeders flanking them. As if they were all just waiting for them.

Rory looks at Todd, holding the gun tight. Then he turns to Kelly, who's looking back at him, not laughing anymore. Face blank.

KELLY

I'm sorry.

RORY

For what?

TODD

For what's about to happen to you.

Kelly locks the stable doors behind them. Thunder CRACKS from outside. Rory laughs uncomfortably.

RORY

What's going on here?

TODD

You've been chosen. You're the unclean.

Rory turns to Kelly, gauging her vacant stare.

RORY

What the fuck is this?

TODD

Rory... did you just fuck my wife?
I think you might've just fucked my wife. Is that accurate?
(to Kelly)
Honey?

KELLY

That's accurate.

Rory's like: *uhhh.....*

TODD

Well alrighty then!

RORY

Wait a minute. We... she has something to say to you.

TODD

I think she said it, don't you?

Todd RACKS the action. Steps toward him.

TODD (CONT'D)

Rory, we have a code here. A very strict code of conduct. And you... have basically shit all over it from the second you arrived. I mean, even your own bony-ass bitch of a fiancée couldn't deal with your incessant fucking weakness. All you had to do was walk away. Instead, you fucked my wife.

Todd raises the rifle at him.

Rory goes fifty shades of *oh fuck*.

RORY

Todd...

TODD

Rory...

RORY

I love her.

Beat. And then everybody busts the fuck out LAUGHING. THUNDER and LIGHTNING screaming from outside.

And Rory, gaping back at the insanity of it, and thinking... *fuck this*.

Rory spins around, tries to unlock the doors. Frantic. *Fuck, how the fuck do you open the --*

WHAP!

Rory's body seizes. He stumbles, falling to his knees, gasping, as his body fails him.

A TRANQUILIZER DART STICKING IN HIS BACK.

He slaps to the floor, paralyzed.

Kelly and Todd approach, staring down at him.

TODD

You should be honored. It's supposed to be someone important.

OFF RORY, gaping back, unable to move, as we --

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. BREEDING SHED - HORSE STABLE - DAY

FROM BLACK -- **A HAZY POV** -- EYELIDS SLOWLY OPENING...

Kelly and Todd come into focus. Then the Breeders.

TODD

Can you hear us, Rory?

Todd splashes a bucket of water INTO CAMERA.

REVERSE ON RORY -- DRENCHED.

Blinking awake from a heavy drug-induced state. Immobile.
Wearing his costume from *The King and I*.

RORY

Wha... What's going on?

TODD

You're about help us with Kelly's conversion.

RORY

I don't... I can't move.

TODD

No, it's better if you don't move around too much when he's mounting you. Otherwise it gets messy.

RORY

Wait... What the hell is this?

KELLY

This part was Todd's idea, Rory. I just want to make that clear.

For Rory, the implication slowly sinks in as he realizes: he's strapped to a fucking breeding phantom. Locked in place by welded bars and leather belts. Ass up. A fuck cage.

TODD

I've been trying to crack this design for awhile. Seeing you on my machine helped me understand how to modify the phantom. *Application*, remember? Ya gotta have fucking hobbies, dude!

RORY

Wait... You can't do this. Kelly help me...

KELLY
I can't. We had a deal.

RORY
What fucking deal?!

KELLY
Todd and me. I get your sperm, he gets your ass.

RORY
WHAT??!

TODD
Like a collection, Rory. I can't really provide for her in that way, unfortunately. But, you know, she really wants to be a mom, so... In exchange, I get my sacrifice.

The Breeders separate, allowing Colt and Raymundo to bring in Poseidon.

The stallion froths and kicks, eyeing Rory. Lascivious.

RORY
OH GOD... What the FUCK, Kelly!

Rory battles against his restraints. Poseidon NICKERS and struts, kicking up dirt as Colt and Raymundo pull his reins.

RORY (CONT'D)
Kelly, please! Please don't do this!

KELLY
You didn't think I'd forgive you for what you did to me back then, did you?

RORY
It was TWENTY YEARS AGO!

KELLY
Twenty years of lies.

Todd throws a thick leather pad over Rory, securing it tight around the phantom.

RORY
What the fuck are you doing?! Get off me!

TODD

Relax, Romeo. This is just to protect Poseidon from hurting himself while he fucks your ass.

RORY

Todd... Todd, don't do this, man. Please.

TODD

All this bitchin' and moanin's a bad look for you, bud.

Colt and Raymundo loosen the reins, allowing Poseidon to approach Rory. The horse SPITS at him.

RORY

NO! GET AWAY FROM ME! FUCK OFF!

Poseidon sniffs and kicks near Rory, getting aroused. Our Breeder/pervert with the play-by-play:

BREEDER

Okay, you see that? You see his cock hanging out? See how it's growing? He can smell him. He's hard now, you see?

RORY

I'm a PERSON! I'm a fucking PERSON!

TODD

Not to Poseidon you're not. You're the **broodmare**, Rory. First for Kelly, now for us. What do you think I poured all over you? That's estrous urine, tough guy...

Poseidon attempts to mount the breeding phantom. Rory SCRREEEAMS and FIGHTS him off.

TODD (CONT'D)

Aw, come on, Rory. Don't be that way. Poseidon's had so much trouble with mares this season... I'm worried about his confidence.

RORY

You people are SICK! **FUCK YOU!**

TODD

Maybe we need a little easier access...

Todd pulls a pocket knife. Slices into the back of Rory's costume pants, exposing his ass.

Poseidon drags his hooves across the dirt floor like a bull.

RORY
HELP ME, SOMEBODY FUCKING HELP ME!!

TODD
Ezekiel 23:20 -- *"There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of HORSES."* Man, that is just FUCKED UP. You Christians are something else...

Poseidon rears up and mounts.

Rory SCRRREAAAMS until he's pressed so hard he can barely breathe.

Kelly looks to Raymundo... Raymundo to Colt... Conspiracy passing between them.

Kelly grabs Todd's rifle --

Colt and Raymundo pull SERRATED HUNTING KNIVES. The storm shorts the lights, snapping in strobes AS --

Kelly starts taking SHOTS at the Breeders --

WHAP, WHAP, WHAP!

Tranquilizer darts slap into them, one after the other! SCREAMS and CHAOS.

Poseidon leaps off the phantom, leaving Rory gasping.

THEN --

Colt and Raymundo attack the Breeders in a bloody frenzy, cutting throats, stabbing chests, splaying arteries. Blood sprays in terrible gouts.

Fast and brutal. Todd doesn't know what the fuck's happening until it's too late.

The Breeders' bodies hit the floor. A vicious bloodbath.

Finally, Kelly takes aim at Todd. The last of them.

TODD (CONT'D)
What the fuck are you doing?!

KELLY

Rory isn't the sacrifice... you are.

TODD

I run this fucking place! Poseidon chose ME!

KELLY

You're right. He did.

Poseidon creeps behind Todd, arcing over him and --

BITES the top of his head, slicing off a layer of scalp!

TODD

AAARRRRGH!

Todd tumbles to the ground, writhing. Blood cascades down his face. He glares back at Kelly:

TODD (CONT'D)

Faithless WHORE.

WHAP!

Kelly FIRES a tranquilizer dart into Todd's chest. Todd arches, gasping.

Raymundo releases Rory from the phantom. Rory spills to the dirt, pure trauma in his face.

Kelly goes to Poseidon:

KELLY

You want him?

Poseidon smiles. *FUCK YES.*

Raymundo and Colt grab Todd, rip his jeans off, and drag him to the phantom, locking him in the cage.

Rory stumbles to his feet, retreating, as Kelly, Colt and Raymundo CHANT:

ALL

("Please accept this
sacrifice, Great One...")
*Placet accipere hoc sacrificium
unus Magna...*

Poseidon circles around, dragging hooves.

Todd wakes to find himself locked in the cage, awaiting penetration. Defiant:

TODD

Fuck it.

Poseidon draws near.

Rory looks away in total revulsion as Todd SCRRREEEEAAAAMS.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

Sunlight piercing heavy clouds. Todd's broken body is thrown into a ditch behind the stable.

Kelly, Rory, Colt and Raymundo surround the grave. Rory in a fragile, post-traumatic glaze.

KELLY

(to Rory)

Sorry I had to put you through that. We had to take them off-guard.

(then)

I mean, maybe there was a small part of me that wanted to scare you. Just a little.

Rory looks at her.

KELLY (CONT'D)

It's not like you didn't deserve it.

Colt and Raymundo grab shovels and cover the grave.

A SHORT TIME LATER

With the grave completely covered, Colt and Raymundo set white rocks on top of it. Like gravestones.

Going WIDE OVERHEAD ... the white rocks fill the pasture in a large design... the petroglyph... stretching the length of the field.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

A TOW TRUCK pulls up in front of the Volvo. A MECHANIC hoists out... followed by...

MAXINE, climbing from the passenger side.

INT. DINING ROOM - FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Kelly's seated at the dining table, her finger outlining the ivory petroglyph. At the window, Rory, dressed, cleaned up, spots Maxine and the tow truck.

RORY

I used to think about how our lives would be... if I never lied to you.

KELLY

I wonder how they'd be if you *kept* lying.

RORY

Aren't you worried I'll say something? About all this?

Kelly thinks about it... then:

KELLY

You're an awesome actor.

Rory turns to her. Grim.

INT. TOW TRUCK - DRIVING - DUSK

Hauling the Volvo. Rory and Maxine seated beside the Mechanic.

MAXINE

Well? Did she leave him? What did he say? Was he pissed? Did he try to hurt you?

Rory doesn't even begin to know how to answer that.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Rory? ... Rory?

RORY

They're gonna try counseling. Try to work it out. They might even try the steps. I told them, "You know, being in a program isn't easy. A lot of ups and downs. But if you commit to it, if you really give yourself over to it, it can save your life." They want to be honest with each other. Like us.

Maxine tries to wrap her head around that, given everything.

Rory looks out the window at the beautiful sea of green.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

The tow truck speeds away in the opposite direction of the road sign:

*WELCOME TO THE BERKSHIRES
AMERICA'S PREMIER CULTURAL RESORT*

EXT. TERRACE - DUSK

Raymundo pulls a red hot BRANDING IRON (in the shape of the petroglyph) from the fire pit. Hands it off to Colt, who then hands it off to Kelly.

Kelly takes the branding iron and... presses it to her arm.

SSSSSSSS... leaving a deep burn.

INT. STALLION PADDOCK - HORSE STABLE - DUSK

Kelly enters, approaching Poseidon's stall. The stallion gapes back at her as TODD'S CONDEMNED SOUL screams from within:

TODD (V.O.)
*Help me... Help me... **HELP ME!!!***

Kelly smiles. Poseidon smiles back.

EXT. HORSE STABLE - DUSK

Raymundo and Colt throw open the stable doors. Kelly bursts from the stable, riding Poseidon.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

Kelly races Poseidon across the open field, a vapor trail of dust in their wake...

It looks like fire.

FADE OUT.

THE END