

HOTSHOT

Written by

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Based on a true story.



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INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY (1902)

A large open room blanketed in muted floral wallpaper with oak trimming and floors. A brick fireplace hosts a blazing fire that crackles in unison with a phonograph that carries a melancholy melody.

Amidst floral tapestry couches, chairs, and rugs, MABEL (5), with long brown curls and pale blue eyes in a navy dress, sits on the floor by the fire and plays with a tattered doll.

The slow thud of heavy footsteps grows until old cowboy boots appear at Mabel's side. She lifts her head.

ISAAC (late 50s), leathery skin, dark green eyes, and wild gray hair, the denim- and flannel-clad man towers over her. The weight of his presence far exceeds his average stature.

Tears pool in his eyes as he studies his daughter.

ISAAC
It's your turn.

Mabel slowly shakes her head from side to side.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Go on now. You'll be all right.

Clutching her doll to her chest, she slowly stands.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Be strong now.

MABEL
(softly)
Yes, Sir.

KUHN HOME - HALLWAY

Mabel shuffles toward a closed door at the end of the hall.

She stops, hugs her doll tighter, places one hand on the knob, and takes a deep breath.

KUHN HOME - EMMA'S BEDROOM

The door creaks open, and Mabel surveys the elegant, simple space lit by several flickering candles.

She fixes her gaze on EMMA (36), sallow with brown hair and bright blue eyes, who lies on a large bed covered in mauve and pink blankets.

Emma forces a smile on her emaciated face as she glances back at Mabel, who stands frozen at the doorway.

EMMA

Come on. It's okay.

Mabel carefully steps to her mother's bedside.

Emma's hand trembles as she gently touches Mabel's doll.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You're still playing with this old thing?

Mabel cries as she turns and storms out of the room.

KUHN HOME - HALLWAY

The door flings open, and Mabel smacks into Isaac's hip.

He kneels and holds his crying daughter.

MABEL

You said I'd get her sick if I got too close, and now--

ISAAC

It's time to say goodbye.

Isaac tenderly wipes tears from his child's bright red cheeks and kisses her forehead.

KUHN HOME - EMMA'S BEDROOM

The floorboards creek as Mabel tiptoes to her mother.

Emma reaches for Mabel, who immediately throws herself on the bed, melting into her mother's embrace.

EMMA

There, there. You'll be all right.

MABEL

You can't go!

They hold each other and cry.

EMMA

Look under the bed.

Mabel slowly pulls away and drops to the floor.

MABEL
There's presents under here.

EMMA
Bring 'em up.

A wrapped gift lands on the bed, then another, then another.

MABEL
My birthday isn't until next week.

EMMA
Is it okay with you if we celebrate
a little early this year?

Mabel smiles as she opens the first gift: A new doll.

She frowns as she places it back in the box.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Don't you like your new doll?

Mabel plucks her old doll from the bed and cradles it.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Honey, I made Pearl for you when
you were a baby. It's time to let
her go now. Don't you think?

MABEL
No.

EMMA
What were you hoping for instead?

Silence. Mabel looks down at her doll.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Go on an' open your next gift.

She opens another box; it's a set of books and paper dolls.

MABEL
Thank you, Mommy.

Emma's hand trembles as she brushes Mabel's hair from her face. Mabel grabs her hand and squeezes it three times.

EMMA
(smiles)
I love you, too.

Emma gently squeezes her daughter's hand three times.

Mabel squeezes Emma's hand three more times.

Emma squeezes back three more times, and they laugh.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Ouch!

MABEL

Do you want me to get Daddy?!

EMMA

No. Something's poking me. Pull the blankets down. Will ya?

The blankets fly back, revealing a small wrapped package.

MABEL

What's that?

EMMA

Beats me. Why don't you find out?

Wrapping paper falls onto the bed. A GASP!

MABEL

Spurs with my name on them!

(pause)

Does that mean I can have Polly?

EMMA

We gave Polly to Mike and Anna.

Mabel's shoulders slump. She sinks onto the bed.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You're ready to ride Hotshot.

MABEL

But Hotshot's your horse.

EMMA

He used to be.

MABEL

How am I going to learn to trick ride without you?

EMMA

Daddy'll help.

MABEL

But you're better than him.

EMMA

He don't show off like most, but
he's one of the best there is.

MABEL

He can't make me show costumes.

EMMA

Anyone who cares more about your
costume than how good your ridin'
is...is stuck-up. And we don't pay
no mind to stuck up people, do we?

The spurs glisten, even in the dimly lit room.

Mabel's bottom lip quivers, and Emma lifts her chin.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You be sure to straighten up and
move forward after today. Okay?

Tears stream down Mabel's face.

MABEL

Hotshot's gonna miss you.

EMMA

I'll always be with you. Right
here.

(points to Mabel's heart)
You understand?

MABEL

But you're going away, and I'll
never forgive you!

Mabel collapses onto Emma's chest and sobs.

EMMA

Listen up.

(beat)

You show this big, bad world just
how tough you are. Can you do that
for me?

The last gift slides toward Mabel.

She opens it and pulls out a black lace and silk dress.

Mabel places it on the bed and lies next to Emma.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - CHURCH - DAY

A small wood building with light oak walls. Several rows of pews face a clean, white coffin.

A DOZEN teary-eyed ATTENDEES dressed in all black fill the seats behind Mabel, who clutches Pearl in her new dress.

Isaac approaches, slow and steady.

ISAAC

You ready?

MABEL

Can I talk to her alone?

Mabel tiptoes up to Emma's coffin. Pulling a stool from the side, she steps on it and looks at her mother.

A few flies circle. Mabel swipes them away as she leans over, reaches down and squeezes Emma's lifeless hand three times.

Mabel lays Pearl next to Emma and then touches her heart.

MABEL (CONT'D)

I've got you right here.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - MABEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

A small space covered in rust and mustard hues with a hint of teal. Books and paper dolls lay scattered on the floor.

A beam of light from a nearby window spotlights Mabel, who lies on her bed in her new dress. She sniffles and cradles her new doll.

A KNOCK. Her door swings open.

Isaac, still donning his funeral attire, steps in.

ISAAC

What do you say we do something special for you today?

Mabel doesn't move.

MABEL

Maybe later.

ISAAC

All right. Just let me know.

Isaac turns and closes the door.

The light shifts to Mabel's new spurs resting on her nightstand. She glances up at them and reaches...

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - BARN - DAY

Horses neigh, stomp, and chew from the two rows of stalls in the large, hay-covered area.

A light gray American Quarter Horse with a flowing silver mane pokes his head over his stall door.

Mabel steps up to him, and he sneezes. She giggles.

The gate swings open.

KUHN HOME - HOTSHOT'S STALL

Hotshot towers over Mabel as she feeds him a carrot.

He sneezes again.

Isaac peers over at them from another stall.

ISAAC

He's been doin' a lot of that lately. Might want to steer clear of his mouth so you don't get sprayed.

MABEL

Do I really get to keep him?

ISAAC

Can you get on him by yourself?

Mabel gawks at Hotshot's giant hooves then tilts her head back as her eyes slowly travel up to his face.

KUHN HOME - BARN - LATER

A saddle lands on a brown horse's back with a cloud of dust.

Isaac buckles his horse's saddle as he watches his daughter with Hotshot.

She traces her fingers over Emma's name engraved on Hotshot's black leather saddle.

With a long, steady breath and a hop, Mabel hoists her foot up to the stirrup and falls with a thud.

ISAAC

Got it?

MABEL

Yes, sir.

Mabel dusts herself off as she stands.

Hotshot sways as Mabel shoves her boot into a stirrup. She steadies herself, then thrusts her other leg over his saddle.

Mabel takes off. At first, with a trot, then a gallop.

Isaac smirks as he mounts his horse and follows her lead.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

A fire smolders in the dimly lit space.

Isaac snores softly in his big leather chair. An open book rests on his chest, and his glasses sit on his chin.

Mabel cradles her new doll as she sleeps soundly atop piles and piles of blankets of every color.

A blaring snore erupts from an unseen source.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - DAWN

A horse-drawn carriage pulls up to the house.

Steam surges from the horses' nostrils; they neigh and snort.

The carriage door swings open.

The plump and well-groomed AUNT HELEN (40s) steps out.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

A symphony of SNORES accosts Aunt Helen as she creeps in.

She recoils and pinches her nose.

AUNT HELEN

Dear, god.

Aunt Helen plucks a lamp from a table and scans the room.

Mabel opens her eyes but quickly squeezes them shut.

Aunt Helen stomps over to Isaac and shoves him.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Wake up.

Isaac snorts and coughs as he sits up. He rubs his eyes.

ISAAC

Helen?

AUNT HELEN

What are you doing out here at this hour? And what is that stench?

ISAAC

Nice to see you, too.

AUNT HELEN

I tried to make it to the funeral, but a tremendous sandstorm rolled in.

ISAAC

A telegram woulda worked just fine.

A loud SNORT.

Aunt Helen glares at Mabel, who remains still.

AUNT HELEN

My! Is she sick?

Isaac tosses his book and glasses aside.

ISAAC

How was your trip over?

AUNT HELEN

Long and bumpy.

(beat)

She shouldn't be on the floor!

Aunt Helen charges over to Mabel and the giant pile of blankets near the large couch.

Mabel squeezes her eyelids tighter.

ISAAC

Helen, it's too early, even for the chickens. Head over to the spare room while I put her to bed.

AUNT HELEN

Nonsense. I'm right here.

She bends; a GIANT HORSE'S HEAD emerges from the blankets.

Aunt Helen and Hotshot stare at each other, nose-to-nose.

Hotshot lets out a loud, wet SNEEZE.

Aunt Helen SCREAMS.

The horse cowers behind the blankets.

Mabel leaps to her feet.

MABEL

It's okay, Aunt Helen. This is
Hotshot. Mommy gave him to me.

Aunt Helen whips out a handkerchief and wipes her face.

The floor rumbles as Hotshot stands, dwarfing the room.

Hotshot STOMPS as Isaac darts over and strokes his mane.

ISAAC

It's okay, boy.

AUNT HELEN

Isaac!

ISAAC

It's her special day.

AUNT HELEN

So you let her bring a horse into
the living room?!

ISAAC

Make yourself some tea while I put
Hotshot away.

MABEL

I can do it, Daddy.

AUNT HELEN

You can't let her go outside.

ISAAC

We'll be right back.

The horse avoids Aunt Helen as he steps past her.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - BARN - DAWN

Isaac and Mabel lead Hotshot to his stall in silence until...

MABEL
Daddy, why is Aunt Helen here?

ISAAC
I have no idea.

Hotshot ambles into his stall and plops down on a pile of hay as Isaac shuts the gate.

MABEL
Daddy?

ISAAC
Yes?

MABEL
Is it just me, or are you a little
afraid of Aunt Helen, too?

Isaac lets out a chuckle and Mabel giggles.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Aunt Helen paces the room; her purse hangs from her wrist.

The front door swings open.

She stops and watches as Isaac and Mabel step in.

ISAAC
Go brush your teeth. I'll heat up
some bathwater.

Mabel tilts her head at Isaac.

MABEL
Mommy'd never make me take a bath
in the morning.

ISAAC
She'd never let you sleep with a
horse, either. Besides, you're
going back to bed after.
(beat)
Say goodnight.

MABEL
Goodnight, Aunt Helen.

Mabel opens her arms, and Aunt Helen dodges her embrace.

AUNT HELEN
Perhaps after you've had a bath.

Mabel rolls her eyes and traipses down the hall.
She turns, crouches behind a chair, and spies on them.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Isaac enters with Aunt Helen on his heels.

In the background, Mabel darts across the living room and hides behind a cabinet.

AUNT HELEN
I can only stay until noon.

ISAAC
Why such a short visit?

AUNT HELEN
I've prepared a room for Mabel.

ISAAC
You came to take my girl?

KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM

Mabel scowls and stands in protest but remains hidden.

KUHN HOME - KITCHEN

Isaac places two large pots of water on the lit stove.

AUNT HELEN
You're not equipped to raise a
little girl on your own.

ISAAC
And you are?

AUNT HELEN
Well, I would need more money.

Mabel leans in, barely able to stay behind the cabinet.

ISAAC
How much do you need this time?

AUNT HELEN
The house needs some upkeep.

Isaac pulls a checkbook and pen from a drawer and writes.

ISAAC

You don't need that big ole house.

AUNT HELEN

Mabel likes me, doesn't she?

Mabel grips the side of the cabinet, ready to charge.

ISAAC

I feel for you. I do. I know you
and Willard wanted for a family
awfully bad before he passed, but
you can't have my girl.

Mabel smiles and leans back behind the cabinet.

A ready check waits in the book in front of Issac.

Aunt Helen glances at it and presses.

AUNT HELEN

Don't let me distract you.

Isaac rips the check from the book and hands it to her.

She quickly stuffs it in her purse.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

She needs a mother.

Isaac turns the stove off and hands a pot to Aunt Helen.

He picks up the other pot.

ISAAC

She had a great one. That's more
than what most get.

Isaac strolls toward the living room.

AUNT HELEN

You're nearly sixty, Isaac.

He stops short of the exit.

KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM

Mabel presses her back into the wall behind the cabinet.

ISAAC

If you wanna be welcome back into
my home, you'll drop it.

Mabel smiles and quickly disappears down the hallway.

Isaac steps into the living room.

Water splashes onto the floor as Aunt Helen chases after him.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A chest swings open. Mabel stuffs it with folded blankets.

Aunt Helen strolls in and offers her a sticky-sweet...

AUNT HELEN

Well, good afternoon, young lady.
Did you get some sleep?

Mabel glares at Aunt Helen, then looks away.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Mabel, I'm speaking to you. Would
you like to help me in the kitchen?

MABEL

No, ma'am.

Aunt Helen encroaches, hovering.

The chest slams shut. Mabel quickly moves away.

AUNT HELEN

Do you want to learn how to cook my
special potato cakes?

Mabel rips the last blanket from the floor.

MABEL

Daddy said I can ride Hotshot after
I clean up.

AUNT HELEN

Young lady, face me when I'm
talking to you.

Aunt Helen grabs Mabel, who turns and stomps on her foot.

BOOM! Aunt Helen theatrically crashes to the ground.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Why you nasty little...Help me up!

She thrusts her hand up toward Mabel.

The front door glides open.

Isaac slips in unnoticed. He watches.

Mabel reaches back and plucks a pillow from the floor.

She tosses it on the couch as Aunt Helen hobbles to her feet.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Don't you wanna come home with me?
I'll fill your room with dolls and--

MABEL

Why would I wanna come home with
you?! I hardly know you at all!

ISAAC

Helen!

AUNT HELEN

What?!

(angry and surprised)

I see you and Emma have done a
fiiiine job!

(a breath)

If she doesn't fix that attitude,
she'll be the town menace before
you know it.

ISAAC

(to Mabel)

He's all saddled up.

Mabel storms off toward the front door.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I'll be out shortly.

The door slams shut, Mabel's gone.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I reckon you should get a leg up on
your journey home.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - ARENA - DAY

Giant horse teeth crush a bright orange carrot.

Hotshot eagerly nuzzles Mabel for another.

MABEL

Eh! No, sir! Hold still.

She hoists herself up onto his back.

They trot to one end of the arena, turn, and pause.

In unison, a breath.

They gallop, and then they fly across the arena.

Isaac enters. He smiles and nods, then WHISTLES.

ISAAC
We're goin' out!

MABEL
Daddy, I just got out here.

ISAAC
Suit yourself. Thought you'd like
to come to the rodeo with me.

Mabel glances down at Hotshot.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Hotshot can come, too.

Isaac mounts his ready horse, and they ride out together.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - RODEO SHOW ARENA - NIGHT

TWO COWBOYS race around the ring in front of a LARGE CROWD.

Isaac and Mabel watch from the front row.

Mid-gallop, the Cowboys stand on their horses' backs and wave
as the crowd cheers.

Mabel's eyes light up as her jaw drops.

A MAN leans over and inaudibly chats with Isaac.

Next to Mabel sits GIRL (11), in a pink silk dress. The Girl
glares at Mabel, and Mabel glares back...

MABEL
Why are you staring at me?

GIRL
What are you wearing?

Mabel looks down at her denim overalls.

MABEL
Clothes.

GIRL
Those are dungarees.

The Girl flips her hair and straightens the hem of her dress.

Mabel looks at the Girl's pretty nails and then looks down at the grime under her own. She hides her hands under her legs.

MABEL
So?

GIRL
You poor or something?

MABEL
Well, we already know you're stuck
up...and my Mommy says to pay no
mind to stuck-up people.

The Girl stands and moves to another seat in a huff.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's pitch black.

ISAAC (O.S.)
(excited)
Okay! Open your eyes.

Two horizontal slivers reveal bits and pieces of the room.

MABEL
I can't see anything.

ISAAC
One second.

The view opens, revealing the entire room. She stands in front of a long mirror and studies her reflection.

She wears old jeans and a flannel shirt stuffed with straw. A potato sack with slits for eyes sits atop her head.

Isaac stands behind Mabel, eagerly awaiting her reaction.

Stunned, her eyes well up.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Oh. You don't like it?

MABEL
I'm a...what am I, Daddy?

ISAAC
You're a scarecrow!

Mabel hesitates...

MABEL
Daddy, are we poor?

ISAAC
Now, why would you go and ask a
question like that?
(beat)
Would you rather be a clown? I can
ask your Aunt Helen--

MABEL
No. I love it. Thank you.

Mabel sniffles as she forces a smile on her face.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

A bright, lively carnival booms in the distance. Costumed
FAMILIES giggle and chat as they travel down the road.

Mabel sits atop Hotshot and adjusts the sack on her head to
get a better view. Isaac leads the way on foot.

A MAN hands out treats to ready CHILDREN. Isaac stops.

ISAAC
Wait here, I'll be right back.

TWO BOYS (9) stroll up to Mabel. Both are dressed as cowboys.

BOY 1
That you, Mabel Kuhn?

MABEL
Who's that?

Mabel continues to adjust the sack on her head.

BOY 1
That's a big ole horse you got
there. Too big for you.

BOY 2
I bet that runt can't even get up
on her own.

MABEL
I can, too!

BOY 1
(to Boy 2)
Why is she wearing a potato sack on
her head?!

BOY 2
Because her face makes everyone
sick!

The Boys laugh. Mabel rips the potato sack off her head.

MABEL
I can do a trick from the rodeo!

BOY 1
I bet you can't!

MABEL
Can too!
(beat)
Sit still, Hotshot.

Mabel grips the saddle as she steadies herself and stands.

MABEL (CONT'D)
See!

Mabel's boot slides off, and she crashes to the ground.

The Boys laugh and point.

Isaac approaches with his hands full of treats.

The Boys hush.

ISAAC
What happened here?

MABEL
I'm fine, Daddy.

Isaac reaches down and helps Mabel to her feet.

ISAAC
Why were you boys laughing?

Silence. The Boys cower.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Come on now. Out with it.

BOY 1
Sir. She fell tryin' to stand on
that there horse.

Isaac watches his daughter blush, confused and proud.

ISAAC

Can you boys stand on a horse?

BOYS

No, sir.

ISAAC

Would you like to?

BOYS

Yes, sir.

ISAAC

Well, maybe she'll teach you how
the next time you see her.

Mabel expertly glides onto Hotshot's saddle.
She glances back at the Boys, who shuffle away.

Isaac hands her a bag of treats, and they press on.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Who told you that you could stand
on Hotshot?

MABEL

The cowboys at the rodeo did it.

ISAAC

Yeah, well, it takes trainin'.

MABEL

Mommy said you're the best rider in
the whole wide world and that you'd
teach me.

ISAAC

She did, did she?

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - ARENA - DUSK

The sun peaks over the vast plains beyond wide open doors.

Isaac sits behind Mabel on Hotshot.

They move to a slow and steady gallop.

ISAAC

Are you ready?!

MABEL

Yes, sir.

Isaac grips Mabel's waist as she stands.

Her legs shake, then steady.

Isaac slides off Hotshot's rear.

Mabel holds firm with a gleaming smile.

She looks back; her father isn't holding her anymore.

She crashes into the dirt.

ISAAC

Eyes forward. Do it again.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - RODEO SHOW ARENA - NIGHT

Mabel gallops Hotshot around a dirt ring in front of a small CROWD OF PARENTS. Her knees wobble as she stands mid-gallop.

Her legs grow steady; her feet stand firm.

ALL applaud, except for the TWO Boys from Halloween who BOO and HISS. Their moms hush them.

Mabel leans forward and whispers to Hotshot...

MABEL

Those boys couldn't even get up on their knees.

She assimilates into a line of FOUR BOYS on HORSES.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And the winner is...

(beat)

Mabel Kuhn!

Mabel smirks at the two Boys.

They stick out their tongues.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - ARENA - DAY (1912)

The sun beats down on the tall grass beyond the open doors.

A sixteen-year-old Mabel stands on Hotshot in a full gallop.

She moves into a handstand and holds it steady.

Mabel lowers her legs and loses her balance. She falls hard.

Isaac rushes onto the dirt.

She's back up before he can reach her.

Mabel goes through the move again and nails it.

Isaac retreats to the railing and watches on with a smile.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Isaac scoops food onto two plates and turns.

Mabel does a handstand on her chair.

ISAAC

What are you doing?

MABEL

What do you think about putting on
our own rodeo show?

Isaac places a plate on the table.

He strolls over to Mabel and sets her plate on the floor.

ISAAC

Sounds like a lot of work.

MABEL

I don't mind. And you know Hotshot
doesn't, either.

ISAAC

As long as you graduate first.

MABEL

Awe. Daddy! That's years away.

ISAAC

So be it.

She lowers herself to her food, attempting to eat, and falls.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - ARENA - DAY (1913)

Isaac leans back and naps on the sidelines as a seventeen-year-old Mabel rides Hotshot.

She wraps the leather reins tightly around her hands and lowers her feet to the ground.

Her heels skim the dirt, leaving a trail of dust.
Isaac gags as he wakes, waving the dust away with his hat.
Mabel attempts to flip back into the saddle but overshoots.
Her boot gets stuck in a loop, and she crashes to the ground.
Hotshot unwittingly drags Mabel across the arena floor.
Isaac bolts over to her.

ISAAC
Whoa boy! Whoa!

Hotshot halts.

Mabel cries as she holds her ankle.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - MABEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Curtains sway from an open window.

The room is empty; a pile of bandages sits on the floor.

A KNOCK.

Isaac carries in a food tray.

ISAAC
Mabel, I've got some--

Isaac scans the empty room.

He sets the tray on the nightstand and looks out the window.

Mabel rides by on Hotshot.

Isaac plops on the bed and takes a bite of her sandwich.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Emma, what are we going to do with
her?

Isaac lifts the food to his mouth again, but before he can
take a bite, he launches into a coughing fit.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - BARN - DAY

Mabel brushes Hotshot. Isaac enters but keeps his distance.

ISAAC
Ankle's feelin' better, I see.

MABEL
It will soon enough. What time are we headin' out? I want to get there early so I can ask to audition.

Isaac looks down at his boots.

ISAAC
Mabel, we talked about this. It's--

MABEL
Summer's comin', and it's just one small show.

ISAAC
Look, I'm gonna have to skip this one, and I want you to stay in.

MABEL
Daddy! You promised.

ISAAC
I did, and I'm sorry. Got news the heifers are ready early. I need to pick 'em up. Be gone two days.

MABEL
I don't mind goin' alone.

ISAAC
That won't do.

MABEL
But Daddy--

ISAAC
This isn't a conversation. You hear?

MABEL
Yes, sir.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - RODEO SHOW ARENA - DAY

TWO HUNDRED ATTENDEES pack around a wood railing.

Mabel wades through the onlookers to the front.

SILVER TIP (18), a strapping cowboy with untimely silver hair rides a white stallion in the center ring.

A gust of wind sends a WOMAN'S HAT into the dirt.

Silver Tip gallops his stallion over to it, slides down, and picks it up without stopping.

He rides up to a WOMAN'S ready hand and returns the hat.

Girls giggle and wave.

He looks in Mabel's direction and waves.

Mabel's face lights up as she waves back with a shy smile.

TWO GIRLS (18) laugh.

GIRLS

Hey, scruff, he was wavin' at us...

Silver Tip rides over to the GIRLS and hands one of them a flower. Mabel looks down and disappears into the CROWD.

INT. OKLAHOMA - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Isaac sits on an exam table with his sleeves rolled up.

DR. CLEMONS (60s), a slow-speaking, heavy-breathing, large gentleman with a thick Southern accent, administers a tuberculosis test to Isaac.

Isaac turns and coughs. Dr. Clemons quickly steps back.

DR. CLEMONS

How long ya been coughin'?

Dr. Clemons examines the rag Isaac coughed into. It's clean.

ISAAC

Little over two weeks now. Am I contagious?

DR. CLEMONS

Well...

(gasps for air)

...it's the only symptom ya got at this point...

(gasps for air)

...so I wouldn't worry. However...

(gasps for air)

...another week of it, and if the tuberculosis test comes back positive--

ISAAC

How long will that take?

DR. CLEMONS

In three days, if these here
bumps....

(gasps for air)

...raise more than one centimeter
ya got it.

(gasps for air)

If the coughin' hasn't stopped by
week three...

(gasps for air)

Well, then we'll know it's active,
and you'll be contagious, too.

ISAAC

What happens if I've got it?

DR. CLEMONS

You get back here right away.

(gasps for air)

We'll transfer you to a sanitarium
immediately.

Isaac grips the table and nods slowly.

ISAAC

Okay.

DR. CLEMONS

How many people live in your
household?

ISAAC

Why's that?

DR. CLEMONS

If ya got it, then everyone else
will need to be tested, too.

(gasps for air)

Positive or not, those under
eighteen will be transferred to a
preventorium.

Isaac rolls his sleeve down and buttons the cuff.

ISAAC

My wife died some years ago. My kid
is grown and out of the house.

DR. CLEMONS
Lucky for you. If kids don't have
TB before they get to a
preventorium...
(gasps for air)
...they'll have it shortly after.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Light floods through the windows.

A TICKING clock echoes in the otherwise silent space.

Isaac rests in his old chair and pulls out a measuring tape.

He rolls up his sleeve, exposing three large red bumps and
places the measuring tape next to one of the bumps.

ISAAC
Oh, hell.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - DIRT ROAD - DAY

Aunt Helen's black stagecoach approaches the Kuhn home.

RURAL KANSAS - FIELD

Mabel grazes Hotshot. The sound of Aunt Helen's galloping
stagecoach horses grows. Mabel fixes her gaze on the road.

MABEL
What's she up to now?
(to Hotshot)
Should we find out?

Hotshot glares at Mabel as he chews a mouth full of grass.

MABEL (CONT'D)
Oh, don't give me that look.

RURAL KANSAS - DIRT ROAD

Aunt Helen checks her makeup in a hand mirror.

It catches Mabel's reflection.

Aunt Helen pokes her head out the window and waves at Mabel,
who rides Hotshot next to the stagecoach.

Mabel stands on the saddle and waves back.

AUNT HELEN

Sit down!

Aunt Helen's hat flies off her head. Mabel dips down, grabbing the hat before it touches the ground.

She hands the hat back to Aunt Helen.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Don't you do that again!

Mabel rides up to the two stagecoach horses and makes eye contact with the driver, JACOB (50s), who is stocky and bald with a wide smile.

JACOB

Hi there, Mabel!

MABEL

Wanna see a trick?!

JACOB

Sure do!

MABEL

Hand over the reins.

Mabel reaches her hand out, and Jacob hands them over.

AUNT HELEN

Mabel, no!

Mabel hops to a stagecoach horse as Hotshot keeps up.

She places her other foot on the other horse and rides the stagecoach Roman Style as Aunt Helen SCREAMS in the wind.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - DAY

Isaac steps out the front door and waits.

MABEL

Whoa! Whoa! Easy boys!

The carriage halts; Mabel and Jacob hop off.

JACOB

Mabel, you haven't changed a bit.
When are you gonna be the star of
your own rodeo show?

MABEL
Daddy won't let me until I've
finished school.

Aunt Helen stomps over; her hands shake as she fixes her hat.

AUNT HELEN
(laughs)
Star?! Does she even know how to
brush her hair?

ISAAC
Helen--

MABEL
It's okay, Daddy. Some of us just
aren't used to a woman doin'
something other than spending other
people's money.

AUNT HELEN
Well!

ISAAC
Both of you, stop. Food's ready,
and I'm hungry.

Hotshot SNORTS as Aunt Helen passes.

MABEL
I need to put Hotshot away.

Jacob takes Hotshot's reins and whispers to Mabel.

JACOB
Better head in. She was in a big
hurry to get here.

MABEL
What's she in a huff about this
time?

Jacob's chin quivers as he turns and leads Hotshot away.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Full plates wait on the table; a near-out candle burns on the
table's center. Aunt Helen sits opposite Isaac.

Mabel slides her chair near Isaac's.

Aunt Helen pulls it back.

AUNT HELEN
Sit next to me, dear.

A long, heavy silence.

Mabel plops down and reaches for a grape.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)
Did you wash up?

Isaac nods at Mabel; she stands and storms off, hiding behind the living room cabinet.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)
I told you this would happen. It's
a shame what you did to that girl.

ISAAC
You're sure you won't take her in?
Mabel's jaw drops, and she leans in.

AUNT HELEN
I'd take her, but I can't handle
her riding that horse all day long.
It's embarrassing.

ISAAC
Well, I do know you care a lot
about the way you look.

AUNT HELEN
Oh, stop. I'm near death's door
myself. What do you expect from me?

ISAAC
Too much, I guess.

Isaac reaches into his pocket and hands Aunt Helen a check.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
This'll be the last.

AUNT HELEN
Don't be like that. I'll find her a
man who will take her in. Of
course, he'll deal with the horse
as he sees fit.

Mabel barges into the kitchen.

MABEL
You're marrying me off?!

Isaac stares at his plate. He sighs.

ISAAC
I can't do this.

AUNT HELEN
Sweetie, your father has
tuberculosis.

MABEL
What?!

ISAAC
If anyone finds out about this,
we'll be locked up in hospitals for
the rest of our lives.

MABEL
I'm not sick.

ISAAC
It doesn't matter. I'll be
contagious soon.

MABEL
What about the rodeo? We're a year
away from--

ISAAC
I need to sell the ranch. This
house is all we'll have left.

Mabel charges into the living room.

AUNT HELEN
Told you.

Mabel barges back in.

MABEL
Daddy, this is our dream!

ISAAC
Honey, I'm as mad as you are. But
I've had days to figure out what to
do with the rest of our lives.
(beat)
I can't take care of you anymore.

MABEL
I can figure something out. Please
let me try!

Mabel steps toward Isaac. Aunt Helen stands in her way.

AUNT HELEN
Stop this nonsense!

Mabel glares at Aunt Helen, who quickly jumps back to protect her feet from a stomp.

They stare at one another. No one moves.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)
It's time to go.

Jacob enters with Mabel's suitcases.

MABEL
I'm not leaving!

AUNT HELEN
(to Isaac)
We need to do this quickly.

ISAAC
Wait outside, Helen.

AUNT HELEN
Isaac!

Aunt Helen storms out of the room in a huff.

ISAAC
I found you a good man, and he
promised to take Hotshot in, too.

MABEL
But Daddy--

ISAAC
I wish I could have done better,
but that's not how it worked out.

KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM

Isaac keeps his distance as he ushers Mabel toward the door.

ISAAC
You have to go.

MABEL
Don't do this.

ISAAC
What'd your Ma say the day you said
goodbye?

Mabel opens the door and glares at Isaac...

MABEL

She said to show the world how
tough I am.

(beat)

Now I know she really meant...buck
up 'cause I'm not gettin' help from
nobody at all.

Mabel SLAMS the door. Isaac falls to his knees and cries.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - DAY

Jacob opens the stagecoach door for Mabel. Aunt Helen waits
inside. Mabel charges past Jacob.

AUNT HELEN

Where are you going?

Mabel storms off toward the barn.

JACOB

He's tied up on the side.

MABEL

Thank you, Jacob.

AUNT HELEN

Get in. We'll send for him.

MABEL

I don't believe you!

AUNT HELEN

We'll see what your new husband has
to say about that.

(beat)

It's a long ride!

Mabel unties Hotshot, and they take off.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - RODEO SHOW ARENA - DAY

The audience is gone, and the PERFORMERS pack up to leave.

Silver Tip tosses props over the railing, takes his hat off,
and runs his fingers through his white hair.

Mabel trots Hotshot toward the railing and WHISTLES.

SILVER TIP

Help you?

MABEL

Who can I talk to about riding in
the show?

Mabel jumps Hotshot over the fence.

Silver Tip barely glances up as he packs his gear.

SILVER TIP

We've already got a girl.

Mabel jumps off Hotshot, storms up to Silver Tip, and draws a
line in the dirt with her boot.

MABEL

Don't you move.

Mabel hops back onto Hotshot, trots him to the other end of
the arena and pauses for a breath.

They turn and charge toward the line.

Mabel pulls the reins all the way back.

Hotshot slides...and his front hooves stop on the line.

MABEL (CONT'D)

Can your girl do that?

Silver Tip waves his hat in the air and glances up at Mabel.

INT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A large space packed with gaudy furniture, art, and
knickknacks. This is how Aunt Helen spends Isaac's money.

Aunt Helen sits across from Mabel on a plush velvet couch.

A coffee table covered in tea and cookies sits between them.
Mabel reaches, and Aunt Helen slaps her hand away.

Mabel hunches over in her delicate dress with lace edging.

She fidgets.

AUNT HELEN

Sit up, please.

MABEL

Where I'm from, cookies are for
eatin'.

AUNT HELEN

These are not for us.

Mabel pulls her dress' high lace collar away from her neck.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Stop fidgeting.

MABEL

Why do I have to wear this thing?

AUNT HELEN

It's called a dress.

MABEL

I feel like a corpse.

AUNT HELEN

Don't be crass.

Aunt Helen lifts her teacup but stops short of a sip.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Most women wear far more
constricting styles without any
complaints.

Proudly lifting her chin, Aunt Helen takes her sip of tea.

MABEL

Would anyone listen if they did?

Aunt Helen sets her cup down on the table and leans in.

AUNT HELEN

You're exhausting.

(long sigh)

Listen to me. The man your father
has chosen for you...

MABEL

The Colonel.

AUNT HELEN

The Colonel.

(beat)

He's a...a well-respected man.

Mabel leans into Aunt Helen with equal measure.

MABEL

And I'm the best trick rider in all
of Kansas...well...I will be.

Aunt Helen rolls her eyes.

In the distance hangs an oil painting of a beautiful young
woman in a silk dress, prim and proper.

AUNT HELEN

Hmm. Don't get your hopes up.

MABEL

My hopes?! I hope this is all a
nightmare and--

AUNT HELEN

Heavens. Stop. Many women don't
get such a gentle nudge from
reality.

(beat)

I was thrust into the world all
alone when my dear Willard passed.

MABEL

What about the money you've been
takin' from Daddy?

AUNT HELEN

That is none of your business.

MABEL

I don't see why Hotshot and I
aren't welcome here. You got plenty
of room.

AUNT HELEN

People in this part of town don't
take kindly to girls who sleep with
horses.

MABEL

But they're fine with beggars as
long as they're dressed in lace and
silk?

Aunt Helen stiffens and clears her throat.

AUNT HELEN

I'm merely trying to tell you that
I, too, have selected a man for
you, Mr. Gilbert.

(MORE)

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

You'll be cared for, and most importantly, he's a sure thing. He's a simple man with money, and he needs a simple wife.

MABEL

Mommy used to say that some people are so simple they think everyone within reach is even simpler.

A dog BARKS, and Aunt Helen looks away.

Mabel shoves a cookie into her mouth and lifts her teacup to mask her chewing.

Aunt Helen glares at Mabel, suspicious.

Mabel fusses with her dress and itches her neck. She tucks the lace edge under her collar, and her top button flies off.

AUNT HELEN

You've ruined your dress!

Aunt Helen drops to her knees and searches under the couch.

Mabel sneaks a couple more cookies; crunching as she chews.

As Aunt Helen quickly jerks her head up, her long necklace gets caught in between two floorboards. She's stuck.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Don't just sit there! Help me!

INT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - BARN - DAY

Hotshot NEIGHS when he hears the distressed women.

MABEL (O.S.)

Stop your fussin'!

He leaps over the stall door and charges out.

EXT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - DAY

TWO stagecoaches pull up simultaneously.

MR. GILBERT (50s), far too large for his sloppy, sweat-stained clothes, heavy on the creeper vibes, GRUNTS as he wiggles out of his carriage.

COLONEL WELKER (37), well-groomed, tall, fit and incredibly attractive, steps out of his carriage.

The Colonel straightens his jacket as he nods at Mr. Gilbert.
They proceed to the front door. Both KNOCK.

INT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mabel shoves Aunt Helen's head down as she attempts to free her from the necklace. It's looped twice and doesn't move.

MABEL

I never asked for this dress! I
never asked for a husband!

AUNT HELEN

You're ruining my hair!

MABEL

I never asked for anything except
for Daddy to let Hotshot and me
ride at the rodeo. It won't be long
before I graduate, and you are--

AUNT HELEN

Stop!

Aunt Helen fights with both the necklace and Mabel.

Mabel rams Aunt Helen's head down one more time as she pulls on the necklace. It SNAPS.

Aunt Helen tumbles back onto Mabel.

Both women land on the coffee table.

It tips over. Tea and cookies fly everywhere.

The women lie sprawled out on the floor in a mess.

EXT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - DAY

Jacob opens the door with a wide smile.

JACOB

Gentleman! We've been--

The men jump back just as Hotshot barges into the house.

INT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Knickknacks, lamps, and art rattle and rumble.

Hotshot charges in, sliding on the rugs as he reaches Mabel.

MABEL

Hotshot?!

AUNT HELEN

For the last time! Horses do not
belong in the--

Mabel leaps to her feet and calms the agitated horse.

MABEL

He's just worried about me, is all.

Jacob leads Mr. Gilbert and the Colonel into the room.

The men stand dumbfounded.

JACOB

You have guests, ma'am.

Aunt Helen frantically dusts herself off and fixes her hair.

Mabel laughs as she strokes Hotshot. She shyly glances at the
Colonel but blushes and looks away as soon as he looks back.

COLONEL

Are you ladies all right?

The Colonel smiles at Mabel and straightens his shirt collar.

AUNT HELEN

Yes. Excuse us, Colonel, we're...

(beat)

You're far too early, Mr. Gilbert!

COLONEL

(laughs)

If I had known better, I would have
parked the carriage inside.

AUNT HELEN

Oh, don't be a tick. This beast
just barged right in an'--

MR. GILBERT

Who's this here fella?

MABEL

You mean Hotshot?

MR. GILBERT

That's Hotshot? Well, sure enough,
we'll make a pretty penny off him.

Aunt Helen staggers to her feet with the Colonel's help.

AUNT HELEN
Thank you, Colonel.
(to Jacob)
Please escort Mr. Gilbert to the
barn...I...I mean kitchen...and
take Hotshot back to the barn.

MR. GILBERT
Now, wait a minute! I--

JACOB
I believe we have fresh pie, sir.

The Colonel helps Aunt Helen and Mabel clean the mess.

Mr. Gilbert sucks his teeth as he studies Mabel.

MR. GILBERT
(whispers to Jacob)
She don't look like much, does she.

JACOB
The pie is getting cold, sir.

MR. GILBERT
Heck. Long as she can do her
womanly duties, we'll be all right.

Jacob exits with Mr. Gilbert and Hotshot.

The Colonel's and Mabel's eyes meet.

COLONEL
You must be Mabel.

MABEL
I am.

AUNT HELEN
Pardon the mess. Mabel's button
shot right across the room and--

COLONEL
Quite the mess for a little button.

AUNT HELEN
You'd be surprised what Mabel and
that horse are capable of.

Mabel glares at Aunt Helen as she bends and picks up a tray.

MABEL

Hotshot thought we were hurt.

The tray catches Mabel's delicate reflection on its surface.

MABEL (CONT'D)

Speaking of messes. I'll need to excuse myself so I can freshen up.

AUNT HELEN

You'll do no such thing. We're on a tight schedule today.

Aunt Helen rips the tray away from Mabel.

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

I'll be right back.

Aunt Helen piles the soiled cookies and trash onto the tray and scurries off to the kitchen.

AUNT HELEN'S HOME - KITCHEN

A fork stabs at a near-gone slice of pie.

Mr. Gilbert sits at the breakfast table with a dirty face.

Jacob gags a little as he looks away.

Aunt Helen enters with the tray full of cookies and dishes.

Jacob springs into action and takes it from her.

AUNT HELEN

(whispers to Jacob)

I need to get back out there before she ruins everything.

JACOB

Are you sure you don't want to pay a visit to the powder room first?

Aunt Helen plucks another tray from the counter and studies her disheveled reflection.

AUNT HELEN

Lord. I've got the weight of the world on my shoulders today.

(to Mr. Gilbert)

You enjoy your pie now, and don't come out until I get you.

Aunt Helen steps toward the living room.

JACOB
Ma'am...your hair.

AUNT HELEN
Oh! Yes! Thank you.

Aunt Helen disappears through another door.

Jacob smiles as he peeks into the living room.

He looks back and scowls at Mr. Gilbert.

AUNT HELEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM

The Colonel pushes the coffee table back into position.

Mabel collects Aunt Helen's necklace beads.

COLONEL
So you had her stuck to the floor
and didn't take advantage?

She pauses and studies him.

MABEL
What was I supposed to do?

COLONEL
I've been told you're exactly the
type who could've thought of
something.

Mabel broadens her shoulders.

MABEL
After I finish school, I'm going to
headline all the best rodeos.

COLONEL
I see you've got the horse for it
and everything.

MABEL
I can take care of myself, and I
most certainly don't need your
pity.

COLONEL
All right. To clarify, it's I who
needs your pity.

They face one another.

The Colonel strides past Mabel and does a turn, as though he's up for auction.

MABEL

What on Earth are you doing?

COLONEL

I'm giving you time to evaluate me.
What do you say? Am I fit to be
your husband?

Mabel smirks but stops and swipes a napkin from the ground.

MABEL

Don't you dare mock me!

COLONEL

I would do no such thing. I know
that you have...other suitors...
(nods to the kitchen)

I want you to make an educated
decision.

She turns toward the couch. A cookie hangs from the lace on her dress. The Colonel glances down and clears his throat.

MABEL

What?

The Colonel points at Mabel's dress.

COLONEL

You have a...there's a...cookie.

Mabel twists her skirt around and finds the cookie.

MABEL

Huh.

She pulls the cookie from her dress and lifts it to her mouth. The Colonel clears his throat.

COLONEL

You'd be sitting on that right now
if I hadn't stopped you.

Mabel breaks the cookie in two, and hands him a piece.

Mr. Gilbert storms into the living room, dripping in sweat.

MR. GILBERT

(groans)

All right! I gotta hustle outta
here. That pie ain't sittin' right.

(MORE)

MR. GILBERT (CONT'D)

(to Mabel)

Can you let my trousers out when we get home?

Aunt Helen charges in with her hands still in her hair.

MABEL

Home?!

Mr. Gilbert bends, holding his stomach as he moans.

MR. GILBERT

Yeah. Home. Where we're headed.

AUNT HELEN

Jacob?! Where did Jacob go?

MR. GILBERT

Gettin' some fresh air. My bubble guts sent him a runnin'.

Mr. Gilbert's stomach grumbles as he reaches for Mabel's arm.

MR. GILBERT (CONT'D)

Let's get on the road now.

The Colonel charges over and shields Mabel from Mr. Gilbert.

COLONEL

Now, wait a minute--

Mr. Gilbert lets out a long and loud FART.

Everyone recoils.

MR. GILBERT

(grunts)

I was told to come here to collect Mabel, and that's what I intend--

AUNT HELEN

Mr. Gilbert! I said no such thing!

(to Mabel)

Unless it's not going well with--

Mabel glares at her Aunt Helen and turns away, disgusted.

COLONEL

Perhaps we should ask Mabel which of us she'll have.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - DIRT ROAD - DAY - DAYDREAM

Still in her dress, Mabel and Hotshot charge into the great unknown. They disappear, leaving a trail of dust.

CLERK (PRE-LAP)
I now pronounce you man and wife.

INT. URBAN KANSAS - COURTHOUSE - DAY - BACK TO REALITY

The Colonel and Mabel stand before CLERK (70s), a man with a full mustache, a partially bald head, and thick eyebrows.

Aunt Helen bounces her leg as she watches from a bench.

The Clerk reads from a document, nasal and monotone.

CLERK
You may kiss your bride.

The Colonel leans down, and Mabel offers him her cheek.

COLONEL
Oh. All right.

The Colonel lands a soft, quick kiss on Mabel's cheek.

AUNT HELEN
Honestly, Mabel.

Mabel whips her head back and glares at Aunt Helen.

The Clerk prepares the paperwork.

CLERK
(glances at Aunt Helen)
I suppose you're the witness.

The Clerk holds out a pen. Aunt Helen sighs as she stands and slowly shuffles to the Clerk. She takes the pen and signs.

AUNT HELEN
(to the Colonel)
Don't worry, my bags are packed.
(to Mabel)
I'll be training you to manage the house, starting immediately.
(back to the Colonel)
Of course, I'll need compensation.
She needs a lot of work.

Mabel glares at the Colonel.

COLONEL
 (whispers to Mabel)
 First time I've heard it.

MABEL
 (coldly)
 Goodbye, Aunt Helen.

COLONEL
 (to Aunt Helen)
 We appreciate the offer, but we'll manage.

AUNT HELEN
 Really, I must insist.

COLONEL
 Get home safely.

The Colonel pats Aunt Helen on the shoulder. He takes Mabel's hand, and they stride toward the exit.

Aunt Helen watches with a gaping jaw.

AUNT HELEN
 (to the Clerk)
 Just watch. He'll be begging for my help in no time.

CLERK
 (to the open door)
 Next!

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT (1914)

An opulent space covered in mahogany wood accented by burgundy, burnt orange and gold textiles.

Mabel glides past massive picture windows and a large stone fireplace in a decadent white silk robe.

A fire roars and crackles as she removes a hairbrush from a dresser and sits on the edge of a silk-covered kingsized bed.

She slips off, falling onto the hard floor with a THUD.

A KNOCK. Mabel bolts to her feet.

MABEL
 Come in.

The Colonel enters in hunter-green silk pajamas.

COLONEL
You look stunning.

Mabel crosses her arms and steps back.

The Colonel strides up to the bed and pulls the covers down.

MABEL
Oh.

He freezes.

COLONEL
What's that?

MABEL
It's just...where will I sleep?

The Colonel slowly pulls the blankets back over the bed.

COLONEL
I was just...
(beat)
Are you comfortable?

MABEL
Yes. Thank you.

The Colonel presses on the mattress.

COLONEL
It's nice and firm.

MABEL
(smiles)
Great.

COLONEL
Okay.
(beat)
Sleep well, then.

The Colonel's shoulders stiffen as he plods to the door.

He stops, turns, traipses back to the bed, and removes a pillow. He smiles and nods...

COLONEL (CONT'D)
On loan for the night. The ones in
the guest rooms aren't quite
as...soft.
(beat)
Goodnight.

CPL. ROBBINS (PRE-LAP)
Take more time before you attempt
to mount, Jones!

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - TRAINING FIELD - DAY

24 SOLDIERS mount ready HORSES.

The Colonel charges up to CORPORAL ROBBINS (25).

CPL. ROBBINS
Everybody off!

The Soldiers GRUMBLE as they dismount in unison.

CPL. ROBBINS (CONT'D)
(salutes)
Colonel Welker.

COLONEL
(returns salute)
Corporal Robbins. Please continue.

The Colonel strolls the line of Soldiers.

CPL. ROBBINS
Yes, sir.
(to the Soldiers)
Mount!

The Soldiers mount in unison.

The Colonel studies their form one by one.

COLONEL
(to a Soldier)
Stellar Military Seat, Hatton.
(to the next Soldier)
Release those fingers, Regan. You
mustn't choke the reins.

The Colonel strides up to Cpl. Robbins.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
How soon can they be ready?

CPL. ROBBINS
We have a ways to go, sir.

COLONEL
We leave in two days.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

A large, open space with a pristine mahogany dining set.

At the table sits AGNES (50s), a sturdy German with curly brown hair, and SHIRLEY (late 30s), a zoftig Southern blonde.

A uniform-clad Colonel enters. Agnes crosses her arms.

AGNES

(growls)

What have you done?

COLONEL

Good evening, ladies.

SHIRLEY

Evenin'.

COLONEL

Whatever it is, I assume it can wait until after dinner?

The Colonel gestures toward the stairs.

SHIRLEY

Sure thing, I--

AGNES

It cannot.

The Colonel sighs as he shuffles to the table and sits.

COLONEL

Look, ladies, it's cruel to confront a man before he's had a chance to take off his work boots.

AGNES

What do you know about cruel?

The Colonel glances at Shirley.

SHIRLEY

She's a fine girl, Colonel.

COLONEL

Thank you. I was hoping--

AGNES

Fine girls don't destroy schedules.

SHIRLEY

She sure knows how to ride.

AGNES
All day. Aaalll day on that horse.

COLONEL
Well, I hope she was outside.

AGNES
I am being serious.

COLONEL
So am I.

SHIRLEY
I'll check on dinner.

Shirley stands.

AGNES
Dinner will be fine.

Shirley sinks back down into her seat.

AGNES (CONT'D)
We beat the rugs. She dirties them.
We polish the floors. She scuffs
them. That Hotshot ate my--

Shirley clears her throat as Mabel enters.

SHIRLEY
Evenin' Mabel!

Mabel leaves a trail of shoes and socks as she stomps to the table. Agnes looks away, scowling.

MABEL
Evenin' ladies, and Colonel.

Silence from Agnes.

COLONEL SHIRLEY
Evening. Evenin'.

MABEL
When's supper?

COLONEL
(to Agnes and Shirley)
I need to change.

The Colonel stands. Agnes clears her throat. He pauses.

AGNES
Colonel.

The Colonel plops back down and removes his boots.

COLONEL

Mabel, dear...it appears Agnes and Shirley would appreciate it if--

Mabel reaches across the table and plucks some hard candy from a bowl. She pops it in her mouth and CRUNCHES.

She reaches for another. Agnes slams her hand on the bowl.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Agnes.

MABEL

What's the matter?

COLONEL

Agnes and Shirley would appreciate it if you were a little tidier.

MABEL

I offered to help clean today.

AGNES

That is our job.

COLONEL

What she means is that she'd appreciate it if you didn't make such a mess in the first place.

MABEL

(sullen)

I see...of course.

Mabel turns and collects her items, one by one.

Agnes smiles and nods at the Colonel.

MABEL (CONT'D)

It's just...

(beat)

...rather cowardly to go tellin' the Colonel instead of talkin' to me yourselves.

SHIRLEY

I'm awfully sorry, Mabel.

The Colonel shrugs and looks at Agnes.

COLONEL

Agnes, she has a point.

AGNES

Fine. Now, place your boots outside.

Mabel strides up to the table, setting her boots on the clean, white tablecloth.

MABEL

Colonel's boots are worse than mine, but you've never demanded the same from him...have you?

Agnes' face turns red. The Colonel slides his chair back.

AGNES

No.

MABEL

Next time, please talk to me yourselves. I'll be happy to help.

AGNES

(furious)

Could you please go and--

MABEL

I said...next time.

Mabel slides her boots aside, leaving a long, muddy streak behind. She plucks more candy from the bowl and CRUNCHES.

The Colonel laughs, and Agnes glares at him.

COLONEL

The men's wives want to meet you.

MABEL

I don't know about all that. Hotshot keeps me pretty busy.

SHIRLEY

You're two peas in a pod.

AGNES

(grumbles)

Barn animals.

Mabel plucks the Colonel's boots from the floor and SLAMS them on the table next to hers. She sits next to the Colonel.

COLONEL

Making a few friends around here wouldn't be a bad idea.

MABEL

Do the other wives ride, too?

SHIRLEY

They go dress shoppin' a lot.

MABEL

What do I need a dress for?

COLONEL

Could we get a minute, ladies?

Agnes and Shirley reluctantly nod, stand, and drift away.

They pretend to clean.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

I'm asking you to give them a chance. That's all.

MABEL

What am I supposed to talk to them about?

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

Havin' babies and--

MABEL

What?!

COLONEL

Ladies. Do you mind?

Agnes and Shirley shuffle to the kitchen.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

I'll be leaving the day after tomorrow. We'll host a party when we get back. You'll need a dress.

(beat)

I'll have them stop by to take you shopping next week.

Agnes enters with a tray of drinks and food. She cringes as she navigates around the two pairs of dirty boots.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - RANCH - DAY

Mabel and the Colonel ride side-by-side along a stream. She's relaxed and soft on Hotshot. He's rigid and proper.

COLONEL
You sure did make an impression on
Agnes and Shirley.

MABEL
I'm not sure that house is big
enough for the three of us.

COLONEL
Really? Most would say it's quite
large.

Mabel glares at the Colonel.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
Oh. Right. Well. Everyone needs a
little time to adjust, that's all.
(beat)
They're glad you're here.

MABEL
Agnes shook her fist at me when I
rode past her this morning.

COLONEL
Shirley and I are glad you're here.

The Colonel studies Mabel's riding posture.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
You'd have a hard time passing
calvary training with that form.

MABEL
I do wonder why no one snatched you
up earlier.

Their horses stop to graze.

COLONEL
I had a close call once.

MABEL
What happened?

COLONEL
I was sent to Spain for a while.
She wasn't there when I returned.

MABEL
I'm sorry to hear that.

Snow flutters down. He admires Mabel as her face lights up.

COLONEL
I consider myself a lucky man.
(beat)
Aside from your horrendous riding
posture.

MABEL
Horrendous?

A wild boar approaches from a distance.

Mabel glances at it.

MABEL (CONT'D)
And what exactly would you change
about my form, Colonel?

COLONEL
Well, to start, your forearm should
be in line with the reins if you'd
like proper control of Hotshot.

Mabel sits up and fixes her grip on Hotshot's reins.

MABEL
Like this?

She backs away and smiles as the wild boar closes in.

COLONEL
A little more like this.
(shows her)
It's for your safety. You would
fall off Hotshot if you were ever
in danger.

MABEL
Would I?

COLONEL
Well, of course, you wouldn't need
to worry about that with me around,
but--

The wild boar charges, startling the Colonel's horse.

It rears up and throws him into the mud. Mabel laughs.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - RANCH - DAY

Mabel watches WORKERS build a new arena.

A Ford Model T pulls into the driveway and HONKS.

She leaps onto Hotshot, and they bolt to the house.
 The Colonel carries a large duffle bag to the car.
 Mabel dismounts Hotshot and runs up to the Colonel.

MABEL

I thought you weren't leaving until
 after supper.

COLONEL

I'm sorry. I did, too.

MABEL

How long will you be gone?

COLONEL

Six weeks. Maybe longer.

(beat)

Promise me you'll spend some time
 with the other wives?

MABEL

I can promise you I'll be here when
 you get back.

The Colonel tosses his bag into the car, then gently touches
 Mabel's chin and kisses her cheek.

He turns, steps into the car, and it drives off.

Mabel watches the car disappear down the road.

A MAIL CARRIER pulls up.

He places a few letters into the mailbox.

A FATHER and his YOUNG DAUGHTER stroll by.

Mabel quickly turns and mounts Hotshot. She rides off.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - STUDY - DAY

Mabel reads a large book at a desk.

Shirley traipses in and places a letter on top of her books.

Mabel glances at it, then pushes it away.

MABEL

You know by now I don't want that.

Shirley plucks it off the desk and steps up to a shelf.

She balances it atop a large stack of others and pauses.

SHIRLEY

It's not my business but--

Mabel looks up from her book.

MABEL

Then let it be.

SHIRLEY

When I was twelve, my Ma and Pa pushed me out of they house to go find my own way.

(beat)

I consider myself lucky to work here...a lotta people don't get it this good.

(beat)

Your Pa...he made you Colonel Welker's wife. He's givin' you an education. He made you wait on your dreams, but he didn't kill 'em.

Shirley charges up to the stack of letters, picks them up, and slaps them down on top of Mabel's desk.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Not a one of us is free of tragedy, but it always seems that the entitled folks are the ones who let it twist they thinkin'.

Shirley exits.

Seconds pass. Mabel reaches for the letters.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The large pile of Isaac's letters rests on a coffee table.

Mabel sits on the couch and stares at them.

She picks up an envelope, breaks the red wax seal, and reads.

Shirley prances by and smiles, proud of herself.

ISAAC (V.O.)

Dearest Mabel,
I sure would love to hear from
you...

INT. URBAN KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

By ritual, Isaac sits back in his plush old chair and lights a pipe. He pulls a blanket up to his neck and reads a book.

THREE LOUD KNOCKS followed by the patter of small feet running away.

Isaac leans back, peers through a window, and taps the glass.

He waves with a smile.

ISAAC (V.O.)

The neighbor boy drops food off
twice a week, so I'm well-fed,
warm, and as happy as could
be...all things considered.

Isaac pulls the blanket down; he's underweight and frail.

He struggles to stand.

INT. KANSAS - DRESS SHOP - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

TWO posh WIVES (20s) drink tea and eat pastries on a plush couch. WIFE 1 cradles an INFANT. WIFE 2 is very pregnant.

The room is packed full of dresses.

WIFE 1

Makes me wonder if she's ever worn
a dress in her whole life.

WIFE 2

Why did you agree to this?

WIFE 1

What do you do when the Colonel
himself asks a favor?

WIFE 2

I can't understand why a man like
him would marry such a--

Mabel stumbles in with her arms full of dresses.

MABEL

Why are you makin' me try all these
on? I only need one, and we've been
here all day.

WIFE 1

Because we've seen your wardrobe.

WIFE 2
(under her breath)
The lack of it.

The Wives snicker.

Mabel unloads the dresses onto a nearby table.

Wife 1 hands her baby to WIFE 2.

She stands and helps Mabel into a dress.

MABEL
We've gotta get a move on it. I
can't be late for the rodeo.

WIFE 1
That's hardly a priority.

MABEL
Don't you have anything you just
know you were born to do?

Wife 1 takes great care buttoning Mabel's dress.

WIFE 1
I used to dream about making
dresses...before.

WIFE 2
(giggles)
A seamstress?

WIFE 1
Designer, actually.

WIFE 2
(laughs)
That's even funnier!

MABEL
I don't think that's funny at all.
What's stopping you?

WIFE 1
I grew up, Mabel.

MABEL
That's no excuse.

Wife 1 fluffs Mabel's dress.

WIFE 1
I have kids to raise.

WIFE 2

And a mother-in-law to drink away.

Wife 1 and Wife 2 share a glance and laugh.

MABEL

But what about you?

Wife 1's face drops as she chews on Mabel's words.

WIFE 2

You'll see. Things will change for you, too. Soon enough.

MABEL

Sure as heck won't. That'll never be me. I won't stop till I get where I'm aiming to go.

Wife 1 quickly fixes Mabel's hair to go with the dress.

WIFE 1

I think it's time someone is honest with you...

MABEL

About what?

WIFE 1

I'm sure all that talk about your rodeo dreams was cute when you were a girl...but you're a woman now... and you sound downright silly.

MABEL

What's silly is the time we're takin' to buy dresses when I have a rodeo to get to.

Mabel pulls away, unbuttoning the dress.

MABEL (CONT'D)

(to the attendant)

Please send these to my house.

(beat)

I need to go.

EXT. NEW MEXICO - ARMY CAMP - COLONEL'S TENT - DAWN

The Colonel rests at his desk and admires a photo of Mabel.

ALARMS BLARE. Cpl. Robbins barges in...

CPL. ROBBINS
Colonel! Pancho Villa just ambushed
Columbus.

The Colonel pockets Mabel's photo and studies his maps.

COLONEL
Have we heard from 13th Calvary?

CPL. ROBBINS
I'm afraid we lost communication
five minutes ago.

COLONEL
How many men does he have with him?

CPL. ROBBINS
About 600.

Colonel scans the roster. He lands on "OFFICERS: 12," the
next line reads, "COMBAT-READY: 270"

COLONEL
Looks like we're headed to
Columbus. Gear up.

Cpl. Robbins jogs out.

The Colonel leans over and picks up a radio receiver.

EXT. KANSAS - RODEO SHOW - STANDS - DAY

A CROWD of 50 fills the benches in front of a small arena.

Mabel sits in the back and clutches a journal.

She pulls out another letter from Isaac and reads.

ISAAC (V.O.)
I sure do miss you. As much as I'd
like to see you again, the greater
gift is knowing you're safe.

The crowd GASPS. Mabel looks up.

COWBOY (40s) does a backflip off his horse.

The crowd CHEERS as he lands.

Mabel places the letter and journal on the bench.

COWBOY
That's the show, folks. Have
yourselves a good evening.

The Cowboy waves to the dispersing crowd.

Mabel jogs up to him.

MABEL
Sir?!

COWBOY
How can I help you, little lady?

MABEL
I'd like to audition for the show.

He spits on the dirt and offers an apathetic...

COWBOY
Sure, kid. Why not.

RODEO SHOW - ARENA

Mabel pulls Hotshot to the dirt.
About 10 people stay back and watch from the benches.
The Cowboy leans on the railing and watches.

RODEO SHOW - STANDS

Isaac's letter waits on the bench.
Mabel does a suicide drag and ends with a backflip.
A MAN from the front row grumbles...

MAN
That a boy or a girl?!

The OTHERS laugh.

RODEO SHOW - ARENA

The Cowboy observes Mabel's uncouth stance and attire.

COWBOY
Sorry, kid. I don't think so.

MABEL

I nailed the routine, and I'd bet even you can't ride as good as me.

COWBOY

Ridin' in the rodeo's more than knowing how to do the tricks.

(beat)

You gotta win the crowds, too.

MABEL

I can do that.

COWBOY

Not with that scowl, you can't.

(beat)

Crowds'll tolerate a rodeo queen, but you look like you'd put my meanest bull to shame.

MABEL

But--

COWBOY

You've had your chance. Now, take your answer and go.

Mabel's chin quivers, but she holds strong and storms off.

RODEO SHOW - STANDS

Mabel marches up to her seat.

She runs into the TWO WIVES, who laugh at her.

WIFE 1

I sure am the silly one between us.

They turn and stride away, still laughing.

WIFE 2

You were right. That was worth it.

Isaac's letter waits on the bench...

ISAAC (V.O.)

You'll be livin' your dream soon enough...you've just got a little more growin' up to do. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me and write back soon.

Mabel collects her things and charges off in tears.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - RANCH - DAY

Mabel grazes Hotshot as she reads another of Isaac's letters.

She wipes a tear from her eye as Hotshot nuzzles her.

MABEL

Okay. Okay. I know.

Mabel tucks the letter away and stands on Hotshot's saddle.

ISAAC (V.O.)

You're bound to get lost in the
dark if you focus on the night's
void instead of each star's light.

(beat)

Dim as they might be, that one key
shift is more than enough for any
journey. Even on the darkest night.

(beat)

I need to know that you're okay.
I'm holding onto the hope that I'll
hear from you. Love Always, Daddy

Mabel practices backflips. Again and again, she lands
successfully. She takes a bow in front of an imaginary crowd.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Mabel sits before a plush vanity and applies lipstick.

Shirley folds towels nearby. She glances over at Mabel.

SHIRLEY

What are you doin'?

Mabel turns. Her face is covered in far too much makeup.

Shirley strides over, wets a washcloth, and takes a seat.

MABEL

You don't like it?

SHIRLEY

Why would you go and do such a
thing to that pretty face of yours?

Mabel leans forward as Shirley removes her makeup.

MABEL

(grumbles)

The other wives made fun of me.

SHIRLEY

All the magazines say women look best untouched and exactly as God made 'em.

MABEL

I guarantee the other wives would disagree.

Shirley places a jar of moisturizer in front of Mabel.

SHIRLEY

'Cause they ugly. That's why. This here cream's all you need.

Mabel applies the lotion to her face.

MABEL

And I auditioned for the rodeo, and the man said I look mean.

Shirley stands and pulls Mabel's shoulders back.

SHIRLEY

I think some hard things took your smile away, and that's natural for a time...best not to force things.

(beat)

Why do you wanna be in the rodeo so bad anyways?

MABEL

I never cared about anything else as much as I do about riding. It's been that way ever since I can remember.

Shirley opens a drawer and pushes the makeup inside.

She pauses and pulls out one of Isaac's letters.

SHIRLEY

You write your Daddy back yet?

Mabel's shoulders slump.

MABEL

What's there to say? I only got failures to talk about.

SHIRLEY

Progress is progress.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - DAY

A BOY (12) steps up with a wagon full of groceries.

Isaac watches from a window with a big smile on his face.

The Boy unloads the pile of groceries onto the porch, plucks money from a chair and jogs off.

Isaac TAPS on the window.

The Boy stops and turns. Isaac points to the door.

Hustling back, the Boy pulls chalk out of his pocket and studies a game of tic-tac-toe on the door. He adds an "X" to the grid and scampers off with a quick wave goodbye.

Isaac opens the door and finds a letter atop his groceries.

ISAAC

Oh. Emma, she wrote back...

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Isaac eats dinner and reads Mabel's letter at the table.

The same near-out candle sits center.

It goes bright, then dies.

MABEL (V.O.)

Dear Daddy,
I'm ashamed of the way I acted. I
love you dearly, and I worry you
don't know that.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Isaac sits on his chair under a blanket and reads.

MABEL (V.O.)

The Army sent the Colonel to New
Mexico days after I moved in. When
he came home, we went on a tour of
fancy dinners and galas. Then, in a
flash, he was gone again.

Isaac vividly pictures everything Mabel describes...

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - LAWN - NIGHT

A lavish party. 150 GUESTS mingle, chat, and drink in formal attire. SERVERS brandish trays of cocktails and appetizers.

An ORCHESTRA shares a stage with THREE TANGO DANCERS.

MABEL (V.O.)
I wish you could see me in all my
beautiful dresses and gowns.

Mabel stands alone, captivated by the dancers.

COLONEL'S HOME - ON STAGE

Two male Tango Dancers battle over a female Tango Dancer.

Back and forth, she's pulled between the two men. At the finale, she jumps from one man to the other.

COLONEL'S HOME - LAWN

APPLAUSE. Mabel's chest heaves with excitement.

The Tango Dancers exit the stage as the Orchestra plays Aerosmith's DREAM ON.

Mabel approaches the Two Wives, who quickly turn and join a larger group.

She spins around, sees Agnes, and approaches her, but another GUEST pulls Agnes away.

Mabel spots the Colonel laughing with other GUESTS.

She looks out toward the barn and trudges off.

The Colonel turns from his conversation and watches Mabel.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BARN - NIGHT

Mabel cradles Hotshot's muzzle as she looks into his eyes. Tears roll down her cheeks. DREAM ON continues.

She disappears into an empty stall and emerges in a beautiful cotton chemise carefully tucked into her bloomers.

Mabel pulls Hotshot out of his stall and removes a second horse from its stall. She lines it up behind Hotshot.

She hangs a rope on a beam and stands on Hotshot's backside.

Rope in hand, she gracefully flips from Hotshot to the other horse as the music swells. The Colonel enters and watches.

COLONEL

Mabel...

Mabel jumps down and approaches the Colonel.

He wipes her tears. They stare at one another.

Mabel rests her head on his shoulder. They dance.

MABEL (V.O.)

It seems that the only thing
military men do is go to war and
parties. It's quite the life.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - RANCH - DAY

Mabel practices her routine.

MABEL (V.O.)

I'm graduating soon and plan to
join the rodeo after. As soon as
one accepts me, that is. Of course,
I have yet to tell the Colonel.
I'll let you know how that goes.

Agnes hangs clean clothes on a line.

She shakes her head in disapproval as she watches Mabel
practice with Hotshot in the arena.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shirley offers Mabel a cookie from a serving tray.

Mabel selects one and brings it to her mouth.

Agnes quickly rips the cookie from Mabel's hand, places it on
a small plate, and then hands it back.

MABEL (V.O.)

The Colonel has two maids, Agnes
and Shirley. Shirley is as sweet as
can be, but Agnes is...well...a lot
like Aunt Helen, to be honest.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Isaac looks out the window.

MABEL (V.O.)
There's nothing I wouldn't give for
one more day, riding by your side.

Isaac launches into a COUGHING FIT. He wipes his mouth.
He takes out a pen and writes on a piece of paper.
He seals it with red wax.

EXT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - DAY

Isaac opens his front door and takes a deep breath.
He smiles when the sunlight hits his pale, gaunt face.
He cautiously shuffles to the edge of the property and places
the letter and some money inside his mailbox.
For a few sweet seconds, he stands, looks out at the horizon,
and watches KIDS play in the distance.
He returns to the house.
With one last glance, he closes the door and locks it.

INT. RURAL KANSAS - KUHN HOME - ISAAC'S BEDROOM - DAY

Isaac crawls into bed and takes a few strained breaths.
He plucks a photo of Emma and Mabel off his nightstand,
kisses it, and brings it to his chest.
Smoke creeps into the room from under the door.

ISAAC
Emma, honey, I'll see you soon.

He squeezes his eyes tight as tears roll down his face.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - STUDY - DAY (1915)

Mabel does her homework at her desk.
Agnes briskly enters and drops two letters in front of Mabel.

MABEL
Let me guess. Colonel and Daddy?

AGNES
You are able to read, no?

Shirley enters with two empty trash bins and sets them down.

SHIRLEY
Give her a break.

AGNES
I've never seen her do anything but
study or ride that horse.

MABEL
(looks up)
I'm right here--

AGNES
You have no friends. The Colonel
will be gravely disappointed.

MABEL
Who has time to gossip and shop?

AGNES
You are rude.

SHIRLEY
It'll be worth it, Mabel.
(beat)
Wait'n'see.

Shirley pats Mabel on the arm with a smile.

Agnes LAUGHS as she storms out.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Never mind her. What'd your Pa say?

Mabel breaks the red wax seal and reads the first letter.

ISAAC (V.O.)
Dear Mabel,
Just remember that pressure is how
diamonds are made. You be tough and
don't stop until all your dreams
come true. Love Always, Daddy

MABEL
Not much. He must be tired. I'm
going to send some books his way.

Mabel stands and plucks a couple of books off a nearby shelf.

SHIRLEY
Set 'em by the door. I'm goin' to
the post today.

Shirley strolls out.

Mabel breaks the red wax seal on the second letter and reads.

COLONEL (V.O.)
Dearest Mabel,
I miss you dearly. I look forward
to hearing about your tutoring and
adventures with the other wives.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - ARENA - DAY

Agnes steps up to the railing and watches Mabel laboriously
position a horse near Hotshot's rear end.

MABEL
Stay there, Blitzen.

Mabel stands on Hotshot and does a backflip. She aims for
Blitzen but misses and crashes onto the ground.

AGNES
Why would you do such a--

Debris, carried by a giant gust of wind, pelts the women.

They search the horizon and spot an enormous wall of dust
approaching in the distance. The horses NEIGH.

AGNES (CONT'D)
Shirley isn't back yet!

MABEL
Where is she?

AGNES
The post!

Mabel mounts Hotshot.

MABEL
Put Blitzen away and get yourself
inside. I'll fetch her.

AGNES
Nonsense! It's too dangerous! Come
inside with me!

MABEL
Let us in when we come knocking!

Mabel and Hotshot take off toward the storm.

Agnes takes Blitzen's reins and runs to the barn.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - ROAD - DAY

The wind HOWLS as Mabel and Hotshot approach the dust wall.

Drool and foam drip from a tired Hotshot's mouth.

Mabel pushes him to continue on. The wind beats them back.

Hotshot glances at Mabel, begging her to turn around.

Just as she pulls the reins back to turn, Mabel spots Shirley inside the storm. They lower their heads and forge on.

A wall of red dirt pelts them as they reach Shirley. Mabel pulls her onto Hotshot, and they take off.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - DAY

The storm at their heels, Mabel rides Hotshot up to the door.

MABEL

Agnes! Let us in!

Agnes swings the door open, and they leap in.

The door slams shut, and the wall of dust consumes the house.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - FOYER - DAY

Piles of red dirt cover the floors and walls. The wind HOWLS and ECHOES as the storm bears down on the house.

Agnes jumps into action with ready buckets of water.

Mabel wipes the dust out of Hotshot's eyes and nose.

AGNES

Don't you ever do that again!

Shirley COUGHS and WHEEZES. Agnes wipes her face with water.

SHIRLEY

You saved my life!

MABEL

Can I have a cloth for Hotshot?

Agnes wrings out a clean cloth as Mabel reaches.

Agnes pulls away and cleans Hotshot's face and nose.

AGNES

It is the least I can do.

Shirley removes her dusty clothing.

Mabel spots the books she gave Shirley on the floor.

MABEL

Weren't you on your way back from
the post?

Shirley slowly pulls a letter out of her pocket and hands it to Mabel.

Mabel stares at the white envelope lined with a black border. She flips it over. A black "X" covers the back, and it's sealed with black wax.

Mabel weeps.

SHIRLEY

I'm awfully sorry, Mabel.

Mabel slowly breaks the black wax seal and opens the letter.

MABEL

No, Daddy!

EXT. COLUMBUS, NM - TOWN - DAY

ONE HUNDRED U.S. ARMY SOLDIERS dig trenches at the border.

HUNDREDS of MEXICAN REFUGEES scramble to safety.

Buildings and cars lay in ashes and rubble on the ground.

The Colonel weaves his way down the wreckage-strewn street. Cpl. Robbins catches up and hands him a letter.

CPL. ROBBINS

Colonel. Mail.

A WOMAN (20s) clutches her crying INFANT as she forges past them. The Colonel stops and opens the letter.

CPL. ROBBINS (CONT'D)

What's the plan, sir?

COLONEL

We deploy in one week.

The Colonel glances down at the letter: "Come home immediately. Love, Mabel"

EXT. KANSAS - CEMETERY - DAY

Mabel weeps in front of Isaac's urn as the Colonel waits at her side. Aunt Helen slithers up to the Colonel and leans in.

AUNT HELEN
Has she made you happy?

COLONEL
Hello, Helen.

Mabel rests her hand on Isaac's urn.

MABEL
Goodbye, Daddy.

Mabel turns and takes the Colonel by the hand. He smiles and interlocks his fingers with hers as they stroll to the car.

Aunt Helen shuffles behind them and taps Mabel's shoulder.

AUNT HELEN
Before you leave, we need to talk
about your Daddy's will.

Mabel stops and turns to Aunt Helen.

The Colonel shakes a few GUESTS' hands.

MABEL
That's hardly a concern of yours.

Aunt Helen rips a stack of documents from her purse.

AUNT HELEN
Well, I noticed his new will names
you as his sole beneficiary.

MABEL
So?

AUNT HELEN
So, I used to be in here, too.

MABEL
Maybe when I was a child. Of
course, not anymore.

AUNT HELEN

But honey, your father has always
taken care of me.

(grabs her chest)

I'm not doing so well these days,
and I could use the help.

The Colonel turns back toward the women.

COLONEL

Helen--

Aunt Helen thrusts the papers toward Mabel.

AUNT HELEN

Please, Mabel. I'm asking you to--

JACOB (O.S.)

Hi, Mabel!

AUNT HELEN

Not now, Jacob!

Mabel waves at Jacob. He stands next to a new Cadillac.

MABEL

Hi, Jacob!

JACOB

How's the rodeo goin'?

MABEL

(to Jacob)

Still tryin'.

(to Aunt Helen)

No wonder you're not well. The
price of that new Cadillac's liable
to give anyone heart palpitations.

(to the Colonel)

Let's go.

AUNT HELEN

But Mabel!

The Colonel and Mabel stride away.

COLONEL

She'll be back.

MABEL

Let her try.

EXT. KANSAS - CAR - DAY

The Colonel opens the door for Mabel.

She pauses, leans forward, and kisses him on the lips.

A NEWSPAPER BOY (13) passes by on a bike as he tosses an advertisement their way and yells...

NEWSPAPER BOY (O.S.)
The Miller Brothers 101 Wild West
Show is at Fort Riley! Tickets are
on sale now!

The Newspaper Boy's announcement iterates as it fades.

The Colonel picks up the advertisement and studies it.

COLONEL
(winks at Mabel)
I don't suppose you'd be up for a
rodeo show this weekend.

Mabel smiles as she steps into the car.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - FOYER - NIGHT

The Colonel holds up the rodeo flyer for Agnes and points.

COLONEL
The man's father was my Colonel
once upon a time.

Agnes leans closer to the paper and squints.

AGNES
(she reads)
Joe Miller.
(to the Colonel)
How about that.

Mabel appears at the top of the staircase in a silk evening gown and subtle makeup, gushing with sex appeal.

AGNES (CONT'D)
(looks at Mabel)
Well. Well. Well.

The Colonel glances up, and his jaw drops.

Mabel slinks down the stairs as the Colonel and Agnes watch.

MABEL
How do I look?

COLONEL
I'm afraid all words fall short. I--

AGNES
Look. At. You.

With a wink at the Colonel, Agnes exits.

The Colonel embraces Mabel.

MABEL
Did I make you wait too long?

COLONEL
I'd wait all night for this.

Mabel smiles up at the Colonel, and they kiss.

A knock on the door, they pull away as Agnes darts past them.

AGNES (O.S.)
The Scott's have arrived, Mr. and
Mrs. Welker.

MABEL
(disappointed)
Our dinner reservation.

COLONEL
I've lost my appetite.

MABEL
(smiles)
And I could really use a nap.

COLONEL
(shouts to Agnes)
Please offer them our deepest
apologies. We won't be able to make
it tonight after all.
(kisses Mabel)
Something's come up.

The Colonel carries Mabel up the stairs as they giggle.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Colonel and Mabel kiss passionately.

COLONEL
You're so beautiful.

Mabel leaps and wraps her thighs around the Colonel's waist.
He GASPS, barely able to breathe.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
Quite the grip you've got there.

MABEL
Oh! Sorry. I...

Mabel loosens her grip, and he lowers her to the bed.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mabel and the Colonel lie in one another's embrace.

MABEL
How long will you be gone this
time?

COLONEL
Those bandits shouldn't keep us too
busy—a few weeks at the longest.

MABEL
My final exams are on Wednesday.

The Colonel gently kisses Mabel's shoulder.

COLONEL
I'll have Agnes and Shirley prepare
a nursery for when I get back.

Mabel bolts upright and jerks away.

MABEL
Why?

COLONEL
Don't you want to start a family?

MABEL
I was going to ask for an audition
tonight.

COLONEL
I thought you changed your mind.

Mabel glares down at the Colonel.

MABEL

What gave you that idea?

COLONEL

Don't you want to make a life with me?

MABEL

So you can leave for a while, and I can't?

COLONEL

Traditionally--

MABEL

Colonel Welker, don't you dare give me that. You knew you didn't marry a traditional girl.

The Colonel turns his back to Mabel and pulls the blankets over his shoulder.

COLONEL

You'll do just fine.

MABEL

The last time I auditioned, the man said I had no showmanship.

COLONEL

The last time you auditioned?

MABEL

Please help me.

COLONEL

Mabel, honey, it's late.

Mabel bursts out of bed, placing her hands on her hips and staring at the Colonel's back.

MABEL

Imagine how you'd feel if no one let you join the Army!

Seconds pass—nothing from the Colonel. Mabel pulls the blankets down.

COLONEL

Don't do that, sweetie. I'm tired.

Mabel stomps to the foot of the bed, grabs the Colonel by the foot and tugs until he crashes to the ground.

MABEL

Put your boots on. We've got work to do.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - ARENA - NIGHT

Gas lanterns illuminate a dirt ring and benches.

The Colonel, Agnes, and Shirley yawn with blankets wrapped around their shoulders. They stumble to the benches and sit.

Mabel pulls Hotshot and Blitzen into the arena center.

SHIRLEY

Go on and wave to us now!

Mabel offers a quick wave and stands on Hotshot's back end.

COLONEL

(whispers to Agnes)

Do you think she'll notice if I close my eyes for a few minutes?

AGNES

(whispers to the Colonel)

She could use our help.

The Colonel nods, sits up and leans forward.

COLONEL

You'll need to pause and connect with us, too.

MABEL

I waved.

Agnes GRUNTS as she stands and hobbles over to the railing.

AGNES

(gestures)

Shoulders back, smile, wave--

SHIRLEY

Blow kisses--

The Colonel glares back at Shirley.

COLONEL

No. Not that. Definitely not that.

(beat)

Introduce yourself with a bow and a wave...and then do your routine.

AGNES & SHIRLEY
That's what we said.

COLONEL
Get to it, then.

BEGIN MONTAGE -- MABEL RIDES IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE

--Mabel enters and waves charismatically with a scowl.
--Agnes and the Colonel exchange a frustrated glance. Shirley points to her own smile and gestures for Mabel to copy her.
--Agnes slinks out onto the dirt, blowing kisses and waving.
--The Colonel charges out, waving and flexing his muscles.
--Shirley leaps out, waving, curtsying, and pointing.
--The sun rises over the distant hills.
--Mabel looks at the "crowd," smiling as she stands on Hotshot and does a backflip. She smiles and curtsies.
--The Colonel, Agnes, and Shirley stand, clap, and whistle.

END MONTAGE

INT. URBAN KANSAS - AUNT HELEN'S HOME - BREAKFAST NOOK - DAY

Aunt Helen sits at a table across from her friend, DORRIS (50s), a mousey blonde. Each woman clutches a cup of tea.

DORRIS
Where are my manners?! I've been
braggin' about my family this whole
time. How's Mabel?

Aunt Helen offers Dorris an insincere smirk.

AUNT HELEN
We're as close as ever. Of course.

An envelope labeled "Kansas Inheritance Laws" sits on the tabletop. Dorris glances down at it.

DORRIS
Is that your will? I was thinkin'
of havin' one drawn up myself.

AUNT HELEN

Mine? No...

(laughs)

Mabel seems to be confused about Isaac's will. I've hired a lawyer to help us sort it out.

DORRIS

She's lucky to have a loving aunt like you watching out for her.

Dorris pats Aunt Helen on the hand.

AUNT HELEN

Tell her that.

The clock CLANGS.

DORRIS

(gasps)

Oh no! It's ten-thirty! Please excuse me. I've got to run!

AUNT HELEN

I must be going, too. I need to deliver these papers.

The women scramble for their things.

Aunt Helen picks up the envelope and tucks it into her purse.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

The Colonel wakes up and rubs his eyes. A small corner of the blanket covers his body.

He tugs at the blankets; they don't budge.

He looks down. Mabel sleeps horizontally at his feet. He pulls her up and under the covers with him. She wakes.

COLONEL

Why don't we stay in today?

MABEL

Any other day...not this one. Today is my day. I can feel it.

COLONEL

Don't be too upset if it's not.

MABEL

Why would you say that?

COLONEL

It's a big show, that's all. You
said it yourself, the local rodeos--

MABEL

I've got to keep trying! And I
won't stop, ever.

The color drains from Mabel's face, and she quickly exits.

COLONEL

Where are you going?

MABEL (O.S.)

I'm going to be sick!

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - FOYER - DAY

Mabel and the Colonel charge down the stairs.

Agnes and Shirley wait by the door, dressed and ready to go.

MABEL

We're going to be late!

COLONEL

(to Agnes and Shirley)
You ladies look fetching.

MABEL

Where are you headed?

AGNES

(holds up two tickets)
We are coming with you. We got
tickets this morning.

SHIRLEY

We wanna see you audition!

MABEL

Don't get your hopes up too high.
They might not let me.

AGNES

I have a good feeling they will.

Agnes winks at the Colonel.

COLONEL

(to Mabel)
Do you have our tickets?

Mabel rifles through her purse.

MABEL
(to the Colonel)
They're not here.

The Colonel nudges the women toward the front door.

COLONEL
All right then. Let's go.

MABEL
So you found the tickets?

COLONEL
Wait in the car. I'll find them.

The Colonel bolts up the stairs as the women exit.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - DAY

Mabel, Agnes, and Shirley step out and close the door.

Seconds pass. The Colonel rips the door open with the tickets in hand, leaps out, and closes the door behind him.

He darts off.

He runs back and locks the door.

The rodeo flyer falls out of his pocket as he jogs away.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

Every seat is filled. Mabel, Agnes, and Shirley sit in the front row with their mouths agape. The Colonel's eyes widen.

"MEXICAN JOE" BARRERA (38), a stud in a flashy costume, spins an on-fire rope as he stands on his horse. He hops over the spinning rope again and again. The AUDIENCE goes WILD.

EXT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - DAY

Aunt Helen approaches the door. The envelope pokes out of her bag. She knocks. Nothing. She tries the door. It's locked.

AUNT HELEN
Hello?!

She steps back, looks down, and spots the rodeo flyer. She picks it up, studies it, and glances at her watch.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

BILL PICKETT (45), a wiry Black cowboy, ropes a giant steer, springs off his horse, and grabs the steer by its horns.

He bites its lip, falls back, and they crash to the ground. He quickly ties it up—the CROWD GOES WILD.

Agnes and Shirley GASP. Mabel WHISTLES as she claps.

Aunt Helen appears at the top of the stadium bleachers and searches for Mabel. She spots her in the front row.

MABEL

That's...he bit that steer's lip!

COLONEL

Sure could use him on the battlefield.

MABEL

Who should I talk to about the audition?

Agnes leans in and points to JOE MILLER (40s), a large and leathery man on a white horse. He waves to adoring fans.

AGNES

That man is on the flyer.

Mabel stands.

SHIRLEY

Good luck.

Mabel winks at Shirley and marches off toward Joe Miller.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

That's our finale, folks! Give the man who invented bulldogging, Bill Pickett, another round of applause!

The CROWD ROARS again as Bill humbly bows and waves.

Shirley and Agnes proudly watch Mabel approach Joe.

The Colonel looks away and spots Aunt Helen.

AUNT HELEN

Is this seat taken?

COLONEL

Helen, what are you doing here?

AUNT HELEN
 I spotted you from my seat.
 (sits down)
 Thought I'd say hello.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA SIDELINES - DAY

Mabel swallows hard as she approaches Joe's horse from behind. He unwittingly gallops off to the center arena just as she reaches him.

Mabel deflates and takes a deep breath.

She throws her shoulders back and charges after him.

MABEL
 Sir?!

Joe stops and turns his horse around.

JOE
 Me?

MABEL
 Yes, sir.

Joe reaches down and offers Mabel a sturdy handshake.

JOE
 Call me Joe.
 (beat)
 What can I do for you, little lady?

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - RODEO STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

The CROWD has thinned; USHERS clean the seats.

The Colonel, Agnes, Shirley, and Aunt Helen remain seated.

AGNES
 This won't do. I cannot see.

The Colonel watches the cleaning crew work.

SHIRLEY
 Does she look like she's gettin'
 some good news?

AUNT HELEN
 (to the Colonel)
 What's "good news," right?
 (MORE)

AUNT HELEN (CONT'D)

Imagine what being married to a
rodeo clown would do for your
reputation.

The Colonel glares at Aunt Helen, speechless.

He quickly glances at Mabel, conflicted.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

Joe stands in front of Mabel.

JOE

Auditions were held yesterday.

MABEL

Can't you make an exception?

JOE

I'm awfully sorry, young lady.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - RODEO STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

A sullen Mabel retreats to her seat.

AGNES

How did it go?

SHIRLEY

How'd it go?

Mabel shakes her head from side to side as her eyes well up.

Agnes and Shirley comfort her.

AUNT HELEN

It really is for the best.

The Colonel stares at his shoes.

AGNES

(to Aunt Helen)

How would you know?

COLONEL

Please excuse me.

The Colonel stands and jogs off toward Joe.

AGNES

There will be other rodeos.

SHIRLEY

She's right! And we'll go to every
last one of them!

MABEL
 I've tried so hard for so long.
 Maybe I'm stupid to think--

Shirley grabs Mabel by her face and wipes her tears away.

SHIRLEY
 Don't you dare start talkin' like
 that now...you hear me?

Shirley lifts Mabel's chin.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

The Colonel and Joe greet each other with a robust handshake.

JOE
 I got your message.
 (beat)
 How'd she take it?

COLONEL
 I'm afraid I've made a mistake.

JOE
 That good, huh?

COLONEL
 Let her audition, will you?

JOE
 She gets in...she'll be gone a lot.

Joe pats the Colonel on the shoulder and gives him a nod.

COLONEL
 The alternative is worse.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - RODEO STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

Mabel wipes her eyes and glances up at Aunt Helen.

MABEL
 Aunt Helen?

Joe and the Colonel stroll up to the women.

JOE
 Mabel.

Mabel staggers to her feet.

MABEL

Yes, sir?

JOE

We don't usually let people audition on travel days. The crew will be itchin' to get packed up and back on the road after the show next Saturday...so don't you dare be late.

MABEL

Really?!

JOE

Tellin' you right now, crowd'll be brutal if you're no good.

(beat)

But if they like you, you'll have yourself a job.

AUNT HELEN

A job? Mabel doesn't need to work.

Agnes shoves Aunt Helen down into her seat.

JOE

You don't want a job?

MABEL

Oh. Please don't listen to her. Of course I do! Thank you!

Shirley leans in and holds Mabel's hand, excited.

AUNT HELEN

She's a married woman and--

Aunt Helen stands, and Agnes pushes her back down.

AGNES

Not another word.

Aunt Helen cowers and huffs as she reaches into her bag and clutches the envelope.

JOE

We're performing for King George the Fifth and Queen Mary in England in two months. Performers who do well there will have a long future.

Aunt Helen leans forward again. Agnes shoves her back.

COLONEL

If you hire her, promise you'll
give her the same respect you'd
give me.

JOE

She rides for us, she's family.

Joe shakes the Colonel's hand.

JOE (CONT'D)

I better get back to work.
(to Mabel)
See you Saturday.

MABEL

Bye, Joe!
(beat)
I'm going to perform for royalty!

COLONEL

If they really like you, maybe
they'll let you perform for the
President one day.

Aunt Helen watches on as Agnes and Shirley buzz around Mabel.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Agnes and Shirley giddily CHAT as they stroll to the car. The
Colonel kisses Mabel's hand, and they smile at each other.

Aunt Helen rambles several yards behind and watches them.

MABEL (O.S.)

Would you look at my hands? I'm
shaking!

AGNES (O.S.)

Because you are too thin.

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

What tricks're you gonna do?

Aunt Helen stops and pulls the envelope from her purse. Agnes
quietly charges up to her.

AGNES

What brings you here?

AUNT HELEN

I need to talk to Mabel alone.

AGNES

Mabel's mentioned you. You are selfish and mean-hearted, and you don't deserve a niece like her.

AUNT HELEN

If you don't mind--

AGNES

But I do mind; you won't ruin this moment for her.

(beat)

Go home.

Agnes turns and catches up with the rest of the group.

Aunt Helen's chin quivers as she watches them stride to the car. The envelope rattles in her shaking hand.

MABEL (O.S.)

Are you coming back to the house with us?

Mabel runs up to Aunt Helen; she tucks the envelope away.

AUNT HELEN

No, dear. I just came for the show. I better be on my way.

MABEL

Funny, I didn't think you liked the rodeo.

Aunt Helen hesitates and offers...

AUNT HELEN

Drive safely.

MABEL

You too.

They embrace and walk off separately. Aunt Helen tosses the envelope into a large trash bin.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - COLONEL'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

A uniformed Colonel stands before a sleeping Mabel.

He gently kisses her on the lips; she opens her eyes and kisses him back. She pulls him down onto the bed.

MABEL

Can't you stay a little longer?

COLONEL
I'll be back before you know it.

MABEL
But not in time to see my audition.

COLONEL
Is that the only reason you want me
to stay?

The Colonel playfully tickles Mabel. She laughs.

MABEL
Stop it!
(beat)
I wish you didn't have to go ever
again.

COLONEL
We'll have more time together soon.

MABEL
Now don't go sayin' that unless you
mean to retire.

COLONEL
Would that make you happy?

MABEL
The happiest.
(gives him a bearhug)
And you can come with me to
Oklahoma when I get into the rodeo!

COLONEL
You haven't been hired yet.

Mabel sits up and looks down at the Colonel.

MABEL
I have a good feeling about this. I
know I'm gettin' in.

COLONEL
If you don't, a quiet, happy life
will await you here with me, Agnes,
Shirley, and whoever else might
come our way...
(he rubs her belly)
That's not such a bad thing, is it?

MABEL
Don't you dare do that to me.

COLONEL
A man can dream, can't he?

MABEL
Can a woman?

The Colonel kisses Mabel, stands, and exits.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY (1916)

Sold-out seats are filled with CLAPPING FANS as the last act clears the arena floor. Mabel rides out onto the dirt.

She glances at Agnes and Shirley, who eagerly sit in the front row. Agnes and Shirley mimic waving and blowing kisses.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Laaaaaadies and gentlemen. Please
welcome Mabel Welker on Hotshot to
the arena for a LIVE AUDITION!
(beat)
Put on your judges' hats because
we're going to ask you if she gets
the job!

Mabel throws her shoulders back, waves, and smiles at the CROWD. Some CHEER, and some BOO. Everyone HUMS with CHATTER.

Mabel's hands tremble as she trots Hotshot around the arena.

EXT. CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

SUPER: Pancho Villa Expedition - Chihuahua, Mexico

The Colonel leads rows of CALVARYMEN to enemy lines.

REBELS line up for battle on the other side of a large, barren field.

The sky opens up; it pours.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

Mabel gallops Hotshot and stands on his back as they jump over a stack of boxes.

She lands and triumphantly throws her hands in the air.

The CROWD remains devastatingly silent, except for Agnes and Shirley, who CHEER and CLAP.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Looks like she could use a little
 encouragement, folks.
 (beat)
 What do you say?

Some CHEER. Most BOO.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - RODEO STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

Agnes's and Shirley's knuckles turn white as they hold hands.

SHIRLEY
 Come on, Mabel. You got this.

AGNES
 (covers eyes)
 I think I will close my eyes.

SHIRLEY
 Don't do that.

Shirley pulls Agnes' hands down from her eyes.

EXT. CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

BANG! BANG! BANG! Cannons erupt in the distance. The Colonel
 and his ARMY furiously charge full speed ahead.

The barren field populates with MEN from both sides.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

Mabel does another lap around the stadium floor. SOMEONE
 throws trash onto the dirt. Mabel takes a deep breath.

She does a suicide drag, plucks the trash from the dirt and
 plasters a wide smile on her face.

Mabel rides to another horse, waiting on the sidelines. She
 stands on Hotshot, places her foot on the second horse, and
 takes off in a Roman Ride for a full lap around the arena.

EXT. CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The US Army Soldiers and Pancho Villa's Men mix and mangle
 one another in their violent plight for justice.

The Colonel takes down two Rebels with his bayonet and
 charges forward. A CRACK, his horse limps on the field.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

The crowd BUZZES as Mabel Roman Rides toward a line of three consecutive on-fire brush fences at the arena's center.

One after the other, she completes her jumps with a smile.

She moves to Hotshot, does a backflip onto the dirt, and throws her hands in the air.

The crowd stands and ROARS.

Joe runs out onto the dirt with a microphone.

JOE

Ladies and gentlemen, it looks like
The Miller Brothers Ranch 101 Wild
West show has a new performer!
Welcome Mabel Welker and Hotshot to
the show!

Mabel hugs Joe as everyone CHEERS.

EXT. CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Mayhem. Men from both sides SCREAM and SHOOT.

The Colonel's horse crashes to the ground.

He scrambles to his feet as a Rebel rides up behind him and fatally stabs him in the back.

He slumps down over his horse, and they lie in the mud, barely breathing.

The war rages on around him.

INT. FORT RILEY, KS - RODEO STADIUM - SEATS - DAY

Mabel embraces Agnes and Shirley.

SHIRLEY

You did it!

MABEL

I couldn't have without you ladies.

AGNES

(cries)

You have made us very proud.

MABEL
Are you crying?

AGNES
(wipes tears away)
You forgot to blow kisses to the
audience.

Joe strides up to Mabel and pats her on the back.

JOE
Congratulations, cowgirl. The train
leaves at seven tonight.

SHIRLEY
You're leavin' tonight?

MABEL
Thank you, sir. I'll be on it.

Joe jogs off, and the women embrace Mabel.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - DAY

Mabel steps into a large training center.

SIX PERFORMERS wait on the sidelines as soft-spoken CHIEF
LIGHTHEART (30s) leads a TEN-MAN Ponca Nation POWWOW in the
arena.

The performers RING brass bells, shake rattles, and beat
drums as they SING.

Mabel's jaw drops. Joe WHISTLES. The Powwow stops.

JOE
Listen up! I'd like to introduce
you to our newest rider, Mabel
Welker, and her horse, Hotshot.
(silence)
Make her feel welcome.

EVERYONE
(lackluster)
Welcome.

The Powwow starts. Everyone resumes their activities.

JOE
You're on the dirt next, kiddo.

Mabel GASPS with excitement and runs over to...

MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - BULLPEN

Mabel admires the monstrous black bull.

ELMER (20s), stringy, glares at her as he grooms the animal.

MABEL

When do I get to ride the bull?

Joe and Elmer laugh.

ELMER

Girls don't ride the bulls--

JOE

I said you can't ride the bulls.

(beat)

Tell you what, tough girl. Do well in the London show, and I'll let you ride ole Diablo here.

Elmer lowers his head and storms off.

The bull SNORTS and kicks the side of its pen.

MABEL

Deal.

JOE

Don't wander off too far.

Joe tips his hat and jogs off.

Mabel grabs her lower abdomen and folds over in pain.

BENA (30), a tall Native American woman with a muscular physique, runs up to Mabel's side.

BENA

Hey, are you okay?

MABEL

Yeah. I'm...

BENA

Do you need to see a doctor?

MABEL

I'll be okay. I didn't get much rest on the train, that's all.

BENA

Okay. You let me know if something changes.

(MORE)

BENA (CONT'D)

(beat)

My name is Bena.

They shake hands.

MABEL

Nice to meet you. I'm Mabel.

BENA

I saw your audition. We're excited to have another--

JOE (O.S.)

Girls, stop your chattin'! We're ready for Mabel!

Mabel gathers herself as she shuffles over.

MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - CENTER

Mabel steps onto the dirt with Hotshot.

MABEL

(whispers)

We did it, boy.

Her eyes widen as she beholds the grand arena.

Elmer slithers over, lowers his crop, and trips Mabel.

She falls. Elmer laughs.

Mabel stands and dusts herself off.

ELMER

Watch out. The dirt's slippery.

Elmer spits chew at Mabel's feet.

Bena charges up to the railing, ready to defend Mabel, but Joe holds her back.

ELMER (CONT'D)

You think you made it. Most don't last a month. I give you a week.

MABEL

What's your best trick?

JOE

He's workin' on a jump from a horse onto a moving stagecoach.

MABEL
That'll be cute for the kids.

ELMER
Yeah? Give us your best trick.

MABEL
I'll need another horse.

MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - STANDS

Joe hands a second horse off to Mabel and joins Elmer at the railing.

Mabel warms up the two horses as the other performers gather in the stands and watch. The Chinese acrobat, LOIS (22), petite with long black hair, joins them.

LOIS
Who's the new girl?

BENA
Trick rider from Kansas.

LOIS
You think this one will make it?

BENA
Hope so.

Elmer tilts his head back toward the women and offers...

ELMER
She won't.

Joe slaps the back of Elmer's head. The women laugh.

SILVER TIP (21) is the "hot guy" with silver hair Mabel met in Rural Kansas.

SILVER TIP
What's everyone doing?

BENA
Watchin' our new trick rider!

Mabel does a suicide drag on Hotshot and the women CLAP.

Silver Tip's eyes lock on her.

LOIS
This is gonna be good! I can feel it.

SILVER TIP

She tried to get a job at the
Marion rodeo a few years back.
Rides like a man.

LOIS

I don't know. I've never seen you
ride that good.

SILVER TIP

Can't we get Buffalo Bill back?

BENA

Buffalo Bill's sixty-eight years
old. He can't jump outta bed, let
alone off a stagecoach anymore.

LOIS

Don't worry. You're still the belle
of the ball in our eyes.

Chief Lightheart joins them.

BENA

Great job out there today.

CHIEF LIGHTHEART

Thanks. I think we finally nailed
the routine.

(to Silver Tip)

What are you so sour about?

SILVER TIP

Just another act takin' money out
of our pockets.

Elmer looks back at Silver Tip and points.

ELMER

That's exactly right, man.

Joe turns to Elmer, and he flinches. Everyone laughs.

CHIEF LIGHTHEART

I think you boys better find an
outlet for that tension...I'd bet
she don't want no part of it.

Joe calls out to Mabel...

JOE

All right, Mabel, they're warm!

ELMER

Yeah! Get to the trick already!

JOE

I don't own a parrot 'cause I don't need one.

Mabel brings both horses to a full-speed gallop.

MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - CENTER

Both horses gallop as Mabel stands and ties the second horse's reins to Hotshot's saddle.

The second horse lines up behind Hotshot.

Mabel storms toward a parallel oxer jump, braces herself, and does a backflip as Hotshot hurdles over the oxer.

Her mid-air jump fast-forwards to...

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - CENTER - DAY

It's three weeks later, everyone wears different clothes.

Mabel lands her backflip on the second horse's saddle as it leaps over the now on-fire oxer.

The other performers CHEER.

Silver Tip slowly lifts his hands and applauds.

Elmer sulks with his hands in his pockets.

The second horse spooks, and Mabel falls hard.

Joe and Silver Tip run up to Mabel.

SILVER TIP

Are you okay?

Mabel screams and groans.

JOE

(to Silver Tip)

We've got to get her to the hospital!

Bena charges over and holds Mabel's hand.

BENA

Just stay still, Mabel.

JOE
I'll get the car.
(to Silver Tip)
Carry her out to the road!

SILVER TIP
Got it.

BENA
Hurry Joe!

Mabel writhes in pain. Silver Tip looks at her, helpless.

INT. OKLAHOMA - CAR - DAY

Joe drives a large Ford Model T. Bena rides shotgun. Silver Tip sits in the back, with Mabel's head resting on his lap.

MABEL
(cries)
Could you hold my hand?

Silver Tip nervously clasps her hand in his.

SILVER TIP
We're almost there.

She squeezes his hand as she moans. Silver Tip flinches but doesn't pull away; he's smitten and in pain.

He glances at her wedding ring and scowls.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
Quite the grip you got there.

INT. OKLAHOMA - HOSPITAL - MABEL'S ROOM - DAY

Mabel opens her eyes. Agnes and Bena sit at her bedside.

Joe and Silver Tip play cards off to the side at a table.

MABEL
Agnes? Why are you here?

Mabel scans the room, confused. Agnes bends and hugs her.

AGNES
How do you feel?

The men excitedly stand and rush over to Mabel.

SILVER TIP
Told you she'd wake up today.

MABEL
(to Silver Tip)
Do I know you?

Silver Tip blushes and offers...

SILVER TIP
We've met. And I helped take you to
the hospital.

MABEL
Why am I in the hospital?

JOE
You had an accident at practice.

Mabel inspects all of the lines plugged into her body.

MABEL
Why do I have--

Agnes moves Mabel's hands away from the lines.

AGNES
Leave them be and rest.

MABEL
Did the jump go wrong?

JOE
No. You landed the jump perfectly.
Something spooked the horse after.

BENA
Good thing, too. They say you
wouldn't've made it otherwise.

MABEL
Will I be able to ride in the show?

JOE
We have four weeks.

MABEL
Good.
(to Agnes)
You came all this way for me?

AGNES
Of course. You are my family.

MABEL
Is it that bad?

BENA
You were bleeding pretty hard.

MABEL
Why was I bleeding?

Bena stands and glances at Joe and Silver Tip.

BENA
We'll be outside.

Bena, Joe, and Silver Tip shuffle out of the room.

MABEL
What's going on?

AGNES
Mabel. Sweet girl. When you fell,
you ruptured some blood vessels.

MABEL
I don't understand.

Agnes leans down and touches Mabel's abdomen.

MABEL (CONT'D)
I didn't even know.

AGNES
You weren't that far along.

Agnes cries, and Mabel pulls her in for a hug.

MABEL
Where's my husband?

AGNES
What did your aunt tell you?

MABEL
My aunt? I haven't talked to her.

Agnes stares at Mabel; she's speechless.

MABEL (CONT'D)
Where is Shirley?

AGNES
She's moving into the new house.

MABEL

The Colonel never said anything about moving.

AGNES

We both did, Mabel.

MABEL

Why?

AGNES

Oh. Dear God.

MABEL

What happened?

Agnes bawls.

MABEL (CONT'D)

Did we buy a new house?

Agnes musters a...

AGNES

Dear, the Army sent a telegram. He didn't...make it.

Mabel blinks for a few seconds as Agnes' words sink in.

MABEL

Oh, Agnes.

Mabel weeps in Agnes' embrace.

MABEL (CONT'D)

Why are you two moving?

AGNES

Your Aunt Helen told us that you wanted her to sell the house.

(enraged)

We should have known! Foolish.

Mabel pulls away and looks up at Agnes.

MABEL

It's not your fault. She's--

AGNES

The Colonel left Shirley and me some money. You can come home and live with us...Hotshot, too.

MABEL
Where is Aunt Helen?

AGNES
We thought she was here with you.

EXT. OKLAHOMA - HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE - DAY

Bena and Agnes wheel Mabel onto the walkway.

Rain beats down on the awning above as they wait for Joe to pick them up. The storm HOWLS.

Mabel slouches in her wheelchair, nearly catatonic.

Agnes crouches down in front of Mabel's chair.

AGNES
You will see Hotshot soon! We must
be very excited about that.

Mabel turns away, and Joe pulls up.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - MABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A simple all white bedroom decorated with family photos. Now, it serves as a reminder of all she's lost.

Rain POUNDS on the window as Mabel cries in Agnes' arms.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - MABEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mabel lies in bed, lifeless.

Agnes enters and switches out an old, untouched bowl of soup for a plate of eggs and toast.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Bena makes breakfast in a large ranch-style kitchen.

Agnes pours out Mabel's old soup and washes the dish as Joe enters.

BENA
Has she eaten yet?

AGNES
Not a solitary bite.

BENA
Give her time.

AGNES
I want to take her with me when I
go tomorrow.

JOE
Are you sure about that?

AGNES
She needs family right now.

BENA
I promise you she's surrounded by a
lot of love here, too.

JOE
Why don't you let her stay a little
longer? If nothing changes, then
we'll take her back to you
ourselves.

Agnes dries her hands and considers Joe and Bena's request.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - MABEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Agnes sits at the edge of Mabel's bed and strokes her hair.

AGNES
I need to go, and I would like you
to come with me.

Mabel doesn't move or speak.

AGNES (CONT'D)
(cries)
Mabel! I will carry you if you
would like, but I need to know what
you want!

Joe appears at the doorway. He KNOCKS on the open door.

JOE
We're ready when you are.

Agnes wipes her eyes and collects her stuff.

AGNES
I will be right there.

Joe nods and steps away.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Me and Shirley prefer to have you home with us. It's not a big home, but it's enough for us. You come back when you're ready.

(beat)

I meant it when I said we are your family. Don't you ever forget that.

Agnes kisses Mabel on the forehead and cries as she exits.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - MABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mabel lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. Another summer storm rages outside of her window.

She sits up, throws her blankets off, and jumps out of bed.

She lights a lantern, throws on a coat, and quietly exits.

EXT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - NIGHT

Mabel braves the storm, led only by a flickering lantern that might go out at any minute. She creeps to the stables.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - BARN - NIGHT

Her lantern dims, and Mabel steps up to Hotshot's stall.

She watches Hotshot sleep as tears stroll down her cheeks.

MILLER BROS RANCH - HOTSHOT'S STALL

Mabel places the lantern on the ground, kneels at Hotshot's side, and strokes his beautiful gray mane.

He lifts his head and nuzzles her.

She smiles and cries as she wraps her arms around his neck.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - HOTSHOT'S STALL - DAY

Silver Tip cleans the barn and stomps into Hotshot's stall.

He stares down at Mabel, who is sound asleep next to Hotshot.

He picks her up and carries her out.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS HOUSE - MABEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

The blinds drawn, Mabel lies motionless. A KNOCK.

Joe cracks open the door.

JOE

Mabel, it's Joe. Can I come in?

Silence from Mabel. Joe ambles up to her bedside.

JOE (CONT'D)

Mabel, honey. We miss you terribly.

Mabel doesn't respond.

He draws the curtains and opens the window. She pulls the covers over her head.

MILLER BROS HOUSE - HALLWAY

Joe closes Mabel's door, and Bena whispers...

BENA

Did you talk to her?

JOE

I tried.

BENA

What are we going to do?

JOE

Only thing we can do. Keep tryin'.

BENA

The show's three weeks away.

JOE

Don't give up on her just yet.

Joe wraps his arm around Bena. They shuffle down the hall.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - BARN - NIGHT

Dressed to ride, Mabel visits Hotshot after everyone's gone to bed. He excitedly stands and nuzzles her.

Mabel leads him out of his stall and saddles him.

She traces her fingers over the "Emma" engraving on his black leather saddle. She leads him out of the barn.

Silver Tip steps out of his office and watches her.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - CENTER - NIGHT

Mabel mounts Hotshot and slowly trots him around the arena.

Silver Tip rides up to the railing on his horse, Trix. He watches Mabel for a few seconds.

SILVER TIP
How you feelin'?

Mabel stops and shrugs.

MABEL
I didn't think anyone would be up.

SILVER TIP
No one is.

MABEL
Thanks for your help.

SILVER TIP
We've been mighty scared for you.

Mabel looks away. Silver Tip points to the arena floor.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
Do you mind?

Silence from Mabel. Silver Tip jumps Trix over the railing.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
We thought you were headed back home to Kansas for a minute there.

Mabel trots Hotshot toward the exit.

MABEL
I'm gettin' pretty tired. Have yourself a good night.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
I'd like to talk if that's okay.

Silver Tip removes his hat and runs his hands through his silver hair. Mabel hesitates and offers...

MABEL
I remember you now.

SILVER TIP
I was hopin' you wouldn't.

MABEL
You were downright mean. I watched your girl, she wasn't half as good as me, and you know it. And you didn't have to--

SILVER TIP
You weren't ready. You know that now. Look...I don't expect you to forgive me...but I do apologize. I could have been nicer about it.

MABEL
I reckon it'll be easy to stay out of each other's way so--

SILVER TIP
Actually, I heard you have some experience with stagecoaches.
(beat)
Is that right?

MABEL
It is.

SILVER TIP
It just so happens that Elmer was let go a week ago.

Mabel studies Silver Tip, impatient. She says nothing.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
So...now I need a second rider for my stagecoach routine.

MABEL
You're apologizing by askin' a favor?

SILVER TIP
I know you have your own routine. But I'd be grateful for your help.

MABEL
I'll think about it.

SILVER TIP
All right. Now, let's get you home.

EXT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - NIGHT

The rain has stopped.

Silver Tip strolls down the sidewalk with Mabel. The enchanting sounds of crickets and insects swell.

MABEL

I can walk myself home.

SILVER TIP

Okay. Have a good night.

Silver Tip tips his hat at Mabel and crosses the road.

Slightly surprised, Mabel waves goodbye.

MABEL

You too.

Mabel strolls alone. Silver Tip's HEAVY FOOTSTEPS continue.

MABEL (CONT'D)

What are you doing?!

They stride parallel on opposite sides of the street.

SILVER TIP

I live right next door to you.

They continue in silence.

MABEL

You could have just told me.

SILVER TIP

But then where's the fun in that?

Mabel stops and cracks a smile.

MABEL

Would you please join me on this side of the road? It's weird.

SILVER TIP

Well, if you insist.

MABEL

Your boots sound like my Daddy's did.

SILVER TIP

I've been told that I have a heavy step more than once.

MABEL

Why'd you stay at the hospital?

SILVER TIP

Don't know. Once I was there, I didn't think it'd be right to leave.

(beat)

Do you remember what you did to my hand on the way to the hospital?

MABEL

Your hand?

SILVER TIP

You nearly ripped it clean off. It's been a week, and it's just now movin' again.

MABEL

You're a liar.

SILVER TIP

Am not.

MABEL

Well, I'm sorry then.

SILVER TIP

I'll forgive you if you do the stagecoach routine with me.

Mabel gives Silver Tip a once-over.

MABEL

How old are you?

SILVER TIP

Twenty-one.

MABEL

Where'd you get that silver hair?

SILVER TIP

It's a long story.

MABEL

It's a long walk.

They stroll in silence for a few seconds until...

SILVER TIP

My Daddy was killed for these boots I'm wearin' when I was fourteen.

(MORE)

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)

(beat)

I was walkin' in town, saw a man
wearin' them, so I tackled him to
the ground, and he shot me right in
the head.

MABEL

He did not!

SILVER TIP

Did so.

Silver Tip grabs Mabel's hand and runs it along his scar.

MABEL

I'll be. What happened then?

SILVER TIP

I fired second an' last. I took my
Daddy's boots back.

(beat)

All my hair turned silver by the
time the rodeo hired me...so they
named me Silver Tip.

MABEL

What's your real name?

Silver Tip thrusts out his hand and introduces himself.

SILVER TIP

Floyd Magill Baker.

Mabel shakes his hand and cracks the slightest smile.

MABEL

Mabel Carolyn Welker, formerly
Kuhn.

They stroll in silence again until Mabel notices a few
FIREFLIES floating around the tall grass.

MABEL (CONT'D)

Those are beautiful. I hardly ever
get to see them back home.

SILVER TIP

I used to collect them as a kid.

MABEL

How?

SILVER TIP

What do you mean, how? You never kept a jar of 'em by your bed when you were little?

MABEL

Why would I do that?

He runs to a porch and finds a mason jar filled with water.

He empties it and holds his hand out near the grass.

A firefly lands on his finger, and he holds it up so Mabel can appreciate it, then gently places it into the jar.

SILVER TIP

Stay here. I'll get a few to fly your way so you can catch some.

Silver Tip steps onto the tall grass and gently brushes his hands over the blades.

Thousands of fireflies fly up into the sky. Each one gently flashes, and Mabel laughs as they land all over her.

Silver Tip watches on in delight.

He ambles over and gingerly helps her coax the fireflies into the jar.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)

There you are. Now you got something to watch over you while you sleep.

MABEL

Yeah?

SILVER TIP

Yeah.

Mabel and Silver Tip laugh. The fireflies float around them.

MABEL

I...I need to get inside. It's late.

SILVER TIP

Of course. Need me to walk you to the door?

Mabel runs to the house and enters without another word.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - ARENA - DAY

Chief Lightheart and TEN PERFORMERS practice their routine.

Mabel enters with Hotshot.

LOIS
There she is!

Bena and Lois run up to Mabel. They embrace.

BENA
How are you feeling, honey?

MABEL
Better.

LOIS
We missed you so much!

Joe looks across the arena floor and smiles. He jogs over.

JOE
Is that Mabel?!

LOIS
Hey guys! Mabel's here!

Joe embraces Mabel.

JOE
Are you back?

MABEL
If that's okay with you.

JOE
Are you comfortable with the routine you were working on?

MABEL
I am. I'd also like to try something new.

JOE
I don't know. We've only got about three weeks. Are you sure you can get it together in time?

Silver Tip joins them and nods.

SILVER TIP
We'll work day and night until we do.

Joe turns toward Chief Lightheart in the arena.

JOE
Clear the dirt for Mabel and Silver
Tip!

INT. LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The lights shine on Mabel as she sits before a mirror. A fully costumed Bena adds the final touches to her makeup.

BENA
You're all set!

Bena steps aside. Mabel's costume and makeup are stunning.

MABEL
That's me?

BENA
That's always been you.

Mabel's eyes water and she places her hand on her heart.

MABEL
I wish my parents could see me.

BENA
They can, honey.

Mabel reaches up and touches her hair.

BENA (CONT'D)
Careful! Don't go making a mess of
yourself now.
(beat)
Blot those tears and send in Silver
Tip. I'm going to trim that beard
of his whether he likes it or not.

MABEL
I bet he'll love that. Where is he?

BENA
Last I saw, over by the acrobats.
Be quick. You two are on in--

MABEL
Twenty minutes.

Bena smiles and relaxes in the chair.

EXT. LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - FAIRGROUNDS - NIGHT

Mabel wanders around the grounds.

Awe-struck, she strolls past the elephants and tigers.

Silver Tip brushes his horse in the distance. She spots him.

They make eye contact and smile.

Two ACROBATS twirl down on silks above her head.

SILVER TIP

Watch out!

He pulls her out of the acrobats' way, and they meet eyes.

Joe runs up, breathless, and urges...

JOE

It looks like Lois will be done a little early. We need you two ready and waiting.

LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - BACKSTAGE

Joe and Mabel rush over to the waiting area.

Silver Tip follows close behind.

JOE

You okay?

MABEL

I've...I'm not used to this.

Joe runs off.

JOE

I need to get Bena! You'll do great!

Mabel steps to the edge of the arena. Lights flash, and her hands tremble. She stares at the CROWD in wonder.

Lois and her elephant stride toward Mabel.

LOIS

It's a wild crowd tonight! Good luck!

INT. LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - ARENA - CENTER - NIGHT

Mabel mounts Hotshot and rides to the dirt.

A large spotlight shines down on her. The crowd ROARS.

SLOW MOTION: camera lights flash; Mabel looks at the crowd.

Mabel's LABORED BREATHING and POUNDING HEART replace the crowd's ROAR.

Mabel stands in her stirrups as she smiles and waves.

Her kneecaps tremble. She sits down, collects herself, and warms up with a few laps around the arena.

More APPLAUSE. Mabel spots Agnes and Shirley in the crowd.

She smiles, and they wave. She stands up on Hotshot.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And for our finale, ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Marion, Kansas, U.S.A., we have Mabel Welker! The world's bravest female trick rider to ever grace a rodeo!

The crowd CHEERS.

Mabel takes a standing lap around the arena.

Silver Tip bursts onto the arena floor via stagecoach led by two horses and rides parallel to Mabel.

MASKED COWBOYS make a roaring entrance, chasing Mabel and Silver Tip around the arena.

Mabel jumps onto one of Silver Tip's horses and stands.

The crowd GASPS then falls silent.

She places her foot on Silver Tip's other horse and takes the stagecoach reins from him.

She slips and nearly falls, but Silver Tip catches her.

She looks at Silver Tip, grateful, and regains her footing.

He pulls a gun and fires at the Masked Cowboys.

The crowd CHEERS.

Mabel hands the stagecoach reins back to Silver Tip.

She pulls Hotshot's reins and leaps to his back.

Mabel draws a gun and points it at the Masked Cowboys.

The Masked Cowboys raise their hands in the air, except for one who also pulls out a weapon.

Mabel quickly aims and shoots it out of his hand.

He falls, and she takes his horse's reins.

The other Masked Cowboys' knees dramatically knock together, and they run away.

The arena erupts in APPLAUSE.

Mabel waves to the crowd, and she stands on Hotshot's back.

The Masked Cowboys sneak behind Mabel and kidnap Silver Tip.

She turns just in time to see them drive the stagecoach away.

Another Masked Cowboy chases after Mabel on horseback.

Mabel stands on Hotshot and the new horse, brings them to a gallop toward a flaming hurdle and jumps over the fire.

The Masked Cowboy stops short of the fire and cries out to his fellow bandits.

They chase her from the other side.

Mabel steps off the second horse, sits down on Hotshot, and ties the second horse's reins to the saddle.

Hotshot gallops. Mabel stands on his back with the second horse in tow.

The Masked Cowboys chase her toward a second fire jump.

Mabel does a backflip off of Hotshot; he jumps the fire, and she lands on the second horse as its hooves hit the dirt on the other side of the fire.

She thrusts her hands into the air and everyone CHEERS.

Silver Tip breaks free, and the Masked Cowboys retreat.

Mabel stands bravely on the other side of the fire.

KING GEORGE V and QUEEN MARY give Mabel a standing ovation with the crowd.

An overwhelmed Mabel gently touches her heart, and tears roll down her face as she waves to the crowd.

INT. LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - ARENA - DIRT - NIGHT

The stadium is empty. The performers celebrate.

Joe sits next to Mabel and pats her on the shoulder.

JOE

Great job.

BENA

I've never heard a crowd clap so hard in my life.

Mabel blushes.

LOIS

Where's Agnes and Shirley?

MABEL

Back in the hotel. They're still on Kansas time.

BENA

Well, I'm glad they made it.

MABEL

Me too.

Joe lifts a glass of Scotch and offers...

JOE

To a successful show!

Everyone holds up their drinks and crashes them together.

EVERYONE

Cheers!

MABEL

Does that mean that I get to ride Diablo?

JOE

Well, I--

MABEL

You said I could ride him if I did well tonight.

INT. LONDON, ENGLAND - STADIUM - BULLPEN - NIGHT

It's dark. The silver bars on Diablo's pen reflect the arena lights. A cloud of steam accompanies several loud SNORTS.

JOE

Ask me; you shoulda been the one
with the name Hotshot.

MABEL

He got me here.

Joe winks at Mabel as he jumps onto the railing and prepares to open the gate. Diablo watches Mabel approach.

JOE

You ready?

With a nod, Mabel steps onto the first bar.

The pen shakes violently. Diablo's hooves slam into his cage.

Mabel climbs to the top of the pen and looks down at the
1,500-pound pure black bucking bull with black eyes.

Mabel grips Diablo's rope. She swings her leg over the bar
and onto the beast. He fights his small pen even harder.

In the distance, a lone spotlight shines onto the dirt of the
empty 80,000-seat stadium.

Mabel breathes steadily. Diablo moves violently beneath her.

Mabel lifts her head, and a beam of light shines in her
determined eyes. She grips the rope tight.

INT. OKLAHOMA - MILLER BROS RANCH - STADIUM - NIGHT

It's showtime back home, and their 80,000-seat stadium is
packed. The CROWD roars, stomps and claps.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

For our finale, we have...

(beat)

Are you sure?

(beat)

Pardon, ladies and gentlemen, I had
to make sure the announcement was
right. I can hardly believe it.

(beat)

Mabel on Diablo!

The crowd erupts into APPLAUSE like never before.

Silver Tip and Bena lean over the railing and search.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 We have our baddest lady riding our
 baddest bull tonight! How about
 that?! Another first from Mabel!
 My! Oh! My! This is a treat!

MILLER BROS RANCH - STADIUM - BULLPEN

Diablo thrashes his 1,500-pound muscled body in his stall.

Mabel readies herself on Diablo's back.

MILLER BROS RANCH - STADIUM - SIDELINES

Diablo bursts out onto the arena floor with Mabel on his back. The crowd ROARS and GASPS.

The bull violently leaps, plunges, and spins, tossing Mabel's small body around.

A clock tracks Mabel's ride in the background.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8!

Mabel flies through the air in slow motion and crashes into the red dirt. She lies on her back, motionless.

Silver Tip leaps over the railing and rushes to her side.

STAFF rush in and wrangle Diablo back into his pen.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 And she's off! That's a first,
 ladies and gentlemen! That was our
 very own Mabel Welker on Diablo,
 showin' the world what tough looks
 like, yet again!

MILLER BROS RANCH - STADIUM - ARENA

Silver Tip crouches over Mabel. She lies motionless.

SILVER TIP
 Mabel?!

Silver Tip brushes the hair out of Mabel's face.

SILVER TIP (CONT'D)
Can you hear me?!

Mabel opens her eyes, a little groggy.

MABEL
That was amazing.

Silver Tip reaches out his hand, and Mabel grabs onto it. He helps her to her feet, and the crowd goes WILD.

Mabel raises her hands in the air and waves as they CHEER.

Silver Tip steps back and gets the crowd going even louder.

They CHANT and CLAP for her.

CROWD & SILVER TIP
Mabel! Mabel! Mabel! Mabel!

THE END

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