

THE AMERICAN

Screenplay

by

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Story

by

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NOTE: Although some details of the American rodeo sequence are not entirely accurate, all details of the Italian and palio sequences are.

EXT. KIMBALL, NEBRASKA - MORNING

A beautiful day. In the distance, the Rocky Mountains.

In the foreground, a low rent house off a two-lane road, a big ass Ford pickup and a beat up Sentra parked out front.

INT. LOW RENT HOUSE - THE BEDROOM

A pretty young woman, KELLY, lies naked under a wild tangle of sheets, looking affectionately over at...

JOHN WYATT, 30's, sitting on the edge of the bed, eyeing a scrap of paper with numbers and initials scribbled on it. He's wry, rugged. Cowboy handsome. Kelly's kind of man.

KELLY

How much does it add up to?

JOHN

Mmmm, just what they owe me.

KELLY

Gotta be hard to get guys to bet against each other like that.

JOHN

Harder to stop 'em. Trick is to be the guy they make the bets with.

KELLY

And then just make sure they lose.

John says nothing. Kelly realizes she went too far. But then John just smiles at her. A big, rascal smile.

JOHN

That's right.

John grabs his jeans off the chair that Kelly's waitress uniform is folded over. She slides to him, suggestive.

KELLY

You don't hafta go.

JOHN

Gotta work.

KELLY

The show's not 'til tonight. You could just maybe stay for lunch...

He stops and gives her another smile, this one softer and gentler. But it says it all. He never stays for lunch.

EXT. LOW RENT HOUSE

John climbs in his truck. Kelly comes to the door in a robe. John rolls down his window, leans out, confirming.

JOHN
It's this way.

He points. Kelly shakes her head, points the other way. John nods. He's good at leaving, not at directions.

KELLY
My name's Kelly, by the way.

JOHN
That I know.

He says it so wonderfully even Kelly believes him. She can only sigh as he starts up his truck and drives off.

EXT. KIMBALL COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

John's pickup sits parked on the grass, behind the bleachers of a RODEO ARENA, near some semi trailers.

John stands at the open driver's door, his face covered in shaving cream, razor in one hand, fast food burrito in the other, using his door mirror to look at himself.

A skinny 18-year-old kid, KYLE, walks up and watches John shave a bit, eat some burrito, shave some more. Finally:

JOHN
Something to tell me, Kyle?

KYLE
Pembry said I had to come tell you again to knock off the betting and the bookie shit and all that.

JOHN
Okay, nice job. Anything else?

KYLE
Can I put 50 on Foster for tonight?

John cuts Kyle a look.

JOHN
To stay on or dump?

KYLE
On. He's going the full eight.

JOHN
Know something, do you, Kyle?
Foster tends to fall off broncs.

KYLE
(looking closer)
You ever almost eat the razor?

JOHN
No. Shaved with the burrito once.
What do you know, Kyle?

KYLE
Nothing, other than Foster just
found out he's going up to Triple-A.
Tonight's his last night. Pembry
said he's letting him go out easy.

Kyle points. John looks...

AT THE ARENA ENTRANCE TURNSTILE, where a virile, "star"
cowboy, FOSTER, is surrounded by a dozen OTHER COWBOYS,
all laughing, all high-fiving. It's a real celebration.

John wipes his face off with a towel, watching.

JOHN
So Foster's going up to the show...

KYLE
Yep. And you were better'n he is.

JOHN
Aw, you don't have to say that.

KYLE
Well, I kinda do. I want five-to-one.

John turns back to Kyle, amused at his moxie.

JOHN
I'll give you three.

KYLE
C'mon. Four-to-one?

JOHN
Keep talking, it's two.

John's not amused anymore. Kyle rolls his eyes, pulls a out a 50 dollar bill, then remembers something.

KYLE

Oh. Pembry told me to give you this. Came to the main office.

Kyle reaches into his back pocket, pulls out a LETTER.

John snags the fifty, pockets it, then takes the letter, eyeing it warily. It's addressed to "*Mister John Wyatt, in care of the Pembry Rodeo, Incorporated*" in flowing script. Strange, foreign stamps line the top, and an oversized postmark that boldly says "*Siena, Italia.*"

KYLE

Where is Sy-eena anyhow?

John just stares at the letter, distracted by it.

JOHN

Siena. And it's far away.

Now John turns to his open door and just stuffs the letter in a box behind the front seat. Kyle gets a funny look.

KYLE

You're not gonna open it?

John shuts the door and turns back, giving away nothing.

JOHN

Nope.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - LATER

John's dressed for work, chaps and a plaid shirt. He's walking the safety fence, checking it, past the bull holding pen, where a HUSKY COWBOY hails him, discreet.

HUSKY COWBOY

Can I get a hundred on Foster?

John looks around for Pembry, then pulls out his scrap of paper and writes it down.

JOHN

Shady, you want in?

SHADY, the short cowboy at the gate, holds up "three."

JOHN
My my, Shady steps up big.

EXT. ARENA ENTRANCE - DUSK

The crowd files in. At the turnstile, John is now fully dressed for work, which is exactly the same but with two white circles on his cheeks. He's high-fiving kids as they enter, stopping as two LITTLE BOYS stare up at him.

FIVE-YEAR-OLD BOY
You a real rodeo clown, mister?

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD BOY
They like to be called bullfighters.
(to John)
Right, mister?

JOHN
Damn straight, son.

He tousles the older boy's hair, then sees a SKINNY COWBOY waving at him. Skinny gestures "two?" John nods, "sure."

EXT. ARENA - NIGHT

The rodeo's on. Attendance is fair, five hundred maybe. This is no big time rodeo, not hardly. But Kyle's out there, roping a calf in a blisteringly fast display.

ARENA ANNOUNCER (O.S., AMPED)
Kyle Akers, folks. Look at 'im go!

At the fence, John applauds, turns to TWO RANGY COWBOYS.

JOHN
Nobody thinks Foster's gonna choke?

They all look over to the BRONC CHUTE, where Foster joshes with a tall man in a suede blazer and white hat, PEMBRY.

RANGY COWBOY #1
Pembry's got him on that nag Daisy.

RANGY COWBOY #2
No offense, man, but it's free money.

EXT. ARENA - LATER

BAMMMM! The chute flies open and a massive bull comes roaring out, a very BUFF COWBOY hanging on tight until three mighty kicks send him flying. He lands hard.

The bull whirls, coming back to stomp all over him but--

John runs right out into harm's way, hands up, directly in the path of the angry bull. Fearless, John yells--

JOHN
YAH. YAH!

-- And the bull turns away. As another bullfighter lures the bull off, John pulls the buff cowboy to his feet.

BUFF COWBOY
Can I still get in on Foster?

EXT. ARENA - LATER

ARENA ANNOUNCER (O.S., AMPED)
Now, in his final ride, the Pembry
Rodeo's biggest star, Duke Foster!

The mood electrifies. The crowd buzzes. All the cowboys rush to the fence. Every eye in the arena turns to--

THE BRONC CHUTE

-- Where Foster climbs on Daisy. He looks to Pembry in the stands, who touches his hat, saluting. Then Foster grips the cinch rope tight and looks down where--

John does a good job wrangling Daisy. He's actually got a way with horses-- they trust him. He looks up at Foster.

JOHN
Congratulations, Duke.

FOSTER
Thanks, John. Sorry it's not you.

JOHN
Aw, you're being nice. I'm just...

John shoots a look to Pembry, who's chatting, not looking.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Just glad you're not pissed about
what Pembry said. Pretty shitty.

Quickly, Foster looks down at John, rattled.

FOSTER
What? What'd Pembry say?

JOHN
(to himself, "disgusted")
I said I was staying out of it.

FOSTER
Out of what? What'd he say?

John leans up, whispers. Foster's jaw drops and--

-- The chute opens. John steps back as Daisy whips Foster
out into the arena o.s.. John just watches as, instantly,
there's a THUD and an "Oooh" from the crowd. John winces.

ARENA ANNOUNCER (O.S., AMPED)
Ouch. Always next time, right Duke?

John turns away, and now allows the faintest of smiles.

EXT. KIMBALL COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS - NIGHT - LATER

John lays on the hood of his truck, downing a longneck Bud,
looking up at the stars. Then he sees something, sits up.

JOHN
Hey, Shady. You owe me some coin.

But Shady, across the grass, ducks behind a semi trailer.

EXT. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEMI TRAILER - SECONDS LATER

John comes around the corner, annoyed.

JOHN
Shady, you sonuvabitch, you owe--

John stops short. There, at the far end of the semi...

ALL THE COWBOYS ARE LINED UP, arms folded, staring at
John. Foster's there, burning. Pembry steps out, pissed.

PEMBRY
Anything you want to say, John?

John takes a beat, then merely folds his arms, defiant.

JOHN

Just you guys owe me 3400 dollars.

The cowboys buzz at John's hubris. Pembry shakes his head.

PEMBRY

Told you a dozen times to knock off the bookie shit. Then you go and pull a rank stunt on Foster here--

FOSTER

-- Goddamn asshole!

Foster starts for John. Pembry pulls him back.

PEMBRY

So, you ain't getting any money.

(then)

And what a piece a work you are. Already blackballed in what, six states, plus the Chapman circuit and Triple-A. Now here. Son, rodeo's over for you. All of it. You won't be able to get a job shovelin' shit.

John stands there, defiant, but nobody's challenging him. In fact, they all walk away. Even Pembry. John's alone.

EXT. KIMBALL COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS - NIGHT

John walks up to his truck, throws opens the door, not having a clue what he's gonna do now. Then Kyle appears.

JOHN

Hey Kyle. Nice ride tonight.

Kyle just nods tightly, juts his chin past John.

KYLE

You know my brother, Chris.

Slowly, John turns around to find CHRIS, Kyle's older, much bigger, much much flabbier brother.

JOHN

'Lo Chris. You're looking fit.

Chris starts for John. John puts his hands up.

JOHN (CONT'D)
And I don't have Kyle's fifty.

CHRIS
Bullshit.

KYLE
It was my birthday money, John.
From my grandma. You didn't win it
fair, and I really kinda need it.

JOHN
Well, Kyle, I really kinda had to
give it to Pembry.

CHRIS
Bullshit.

Chris steps in, takes a big swing. John easily ducks it.

JOHN
Don't do this. I don't have it.

CHRIS
Bullshit.

JOHN
Chris, you keep saying that--

Suddenly, a hand spins John around and... THERE'S FOSTER.

He slams a fist into John's jaw, flying him back against
his truck. Now Foster steps in and pummels him. Then...

FOSTER
Goddamn asshole.
(to Chris)
He's all yours.

Foster stomps off, and Chris actually moves in, driving a
hard punch into John's gut. John doubles over, drops.

KYLE
Chris, he's down!

From the dirt, John looks up at Chris, lip bleeding.

JOHN
Chris, I am completely down.

CHRIS
Then give us the money.

John holds his hands up in surrender, then crawls to his open door, reaches in the back and finds... a bootbox.

He pulls the box out, but it flips open and dozens of letters, all different but all with strange stamps and postmarked "*Commune di Siena*," spill to the ground.

He finds the one Kyle gave him earlier, holds it up.

JOHN

These sometimes have money in 'em.

Chris grabs the envelope, rips it open. There's no cash, just a letter. He angrily unfolds it and reads, mouthing the words, going from anger... to shock... to curiosity.

During this (and it takes a bit), Kyle coughs and looks at John, who shrugs. Finally, Chris looks at John, soft now.

CHRIS

Your... father died. In a car crash. He left you some kinda castle or something. Near Sy-eena.

KYLE

Siena.

CHRIS

Whatever. I'm gonna... get a Coke.

Chris shoves the letter at Kyle, then quickly walks off, leaving Kyle to turn to John, who just sits in the dirt.

KYLE

I'm... sorry.

John looks up, his face stone. He doesn't seem to care.

JOHN

It's okay, Kyle.

KYLE

Didn't know your dad was I-talian.

JOHN

He's not. He moved there 20 years ago. I haven't talked to him since.

Kyle hands over the letter. As John reads it, Kyle kneels and starts putting John's letters back in the bootbox.

KYLE

Looks like he tried to talk to you.

That gets a rise out of John. He quickly grabs up the other letters, and tosses the box inside his truck.

KYLE

But a castle... what're you gonna do?

JOHN

Letter says all I gotta do is find some lawyer, sign some papers, and it's mine to sell. It's free money.

KYLE

Sign papers where? There?

JOHN

It's what it says. Some kinda law. Buncha crazy Italians. Who cares. Besides, nothing left for me here.
(extending a hand)
So, see ya round.

It's going kind of fast for Kyle. But he shakes John's hand and steps back as John starts to climb in his truck.

Then John stops, reaches in his pocket, pulls out something.

JOHN

Oh. Here. This was burning a hole.

He hands it to Kyle, who realizes it's his 50 dollar bill (written on it is "*Happy Birthday, Kyle. Love, Grandma*"). Kyle stares it, then at John, making a painful realization.

KYLE

You just play everybody.

JOHN

Kyle, you either play or get played.

John caps it with a shrug, then climbs in his truck, shuts the door, starts it up. A little wave, and he drives off.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A roar as the truck zooms past a sign "*Denver - 220 mi.*"

INT. JOHN'S TRUCK - MOVING

A weepy country song plays as John glances at the letter sitting on the passenger seat. His rascal smile is gone.

EXT. USED CAR LOT, NEAR DENVER STAPLETON AIRPORT - DAY

Colored flags flap. John, a huge duffel over his shoulder, walks away from his truck and the very pleased SALESMAN.

INT. UNITED 747 - DAY

John finds seat 67H and awkwardly sits, knees touching the seat in front of him. He had more room in his truck.

Other passengers take their seats. Families, couples, groups of students. No lone cowboys. John pulls out the "In Case We Crash" brochure, flips through it, gets the willies, quickly puts it back, sighs. He's no traveler.

INT. UNITED 747 - NIGHT - LATER

Dark now. Everyone's asleep except John, who sits in a solitary pool of light, staring at a FORBES magazine, and a page of "INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE" with PICTURES of...

IDEAL TUSCANY. Perfect villas and castles, with vast, manicured grounds. Cypressess lining the pristine gravel roads. Vineyards cut into the golden rolling hills.

"Listed at \$1.5 mil... \$3 mil... \$5 mil..." John laughs.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ITALY - HIGHWAY NO.326 - DAY

Those golden rolling hills, for real. Cypressess in the distance. Then there's a high pitched "weeeeeeeeeee," and a very tiny FIAT 500 whizzes past a sign... "**Siena - 2km.**"

INT. FIAT 500 - MOVING

John's squeezed in, knees touching the dash, duffel filling the other seat. He had more room on the plane.

He drives and re-reads the letter, doing neither well...

JOHN

"F. Barzanti, avvocata. Via Tito Sarrocchi, 20." Via Tito where-o?--

VRROOM. The Fiat lurches sideways as a Mercedes blows by at 120 mph. John drops the letter, fights to keep his car on the road. It's like a tiny rowboat on the high seas.

Finally, John gets control. He drives on, rattled. Then something out the windshield catches his eye. He sees...

THE CITY OF SIENA

... And it's breath-taking. Earth hues buildings, red tile roofs. Striped cathedral. White-topped bell tower. A skyline basically unchanged since the Middle Ages.

John just stares. He won't admit it, but he's intrigued.

EXT. RENTAL CAR RETURN LOT - DAY

A small lot outside the city walls, in the merely "old" part of town. John hands his keys to a 20-YEAR-OLD KID in an "AUTOEUROPE" windbreaker, eyes the letter in his hand.

JOHN
So, where would I find Via...
(bails on his Italian)
... this Via.

John holds up the letter, points. The kid looks at it.

20-YEAR-OLD KID
"Via Tito Sarrocchi"? *Si, si.*
(pointing big, English fair)
Into the city, go up to the church,
go right, go a little way, go left.

So simple. They trade manly nods. But then the kid's face clouds over, and he leans to John.

20-YEAR-OLD KID (CONT'D)
But there is today the Palio...

He gestures vaguely. John has no idea what he means.

JOHN
Okay then... righty-oh.

EXT. SIENA - PORTO CAMOLLIA (CITY ENTRANCE) - DAY

John faces a lovely medieval ARCHED ENTRYWAY, duffel slung. It's quiet. No one is around. Then, from within the city, a bell tolls. John takes a breath and... he enters Siena.

EXT. VIA DEI MONTANINI (STREET) - DAY

Letter in hand, John tries not to feel out of place. But the old stone buildings and older cobblestone street seem very odd. Plus, there are no cars allowed. Only people.

... There's nothing like this in America.

Through the rope curtains of a *SALUMERIA*, he sees *salami*, *prosciutti* and *salcicce* hanging, olives in ceramic jars. The BUTCHER, busy sweeping up, looks out at John and nods.

In a BAR, CROTCHETY MEN IN HATS sip *grappa* and argue.

From a *GELATERIA*, some KIDS bound out, licking cones. An OLD DOG sleeps in the sun. A PRIEST hurries by, smoking.

Everyone seems to be heading somewhere. But John doesn't care. He's starting to enjoy himself. This might be okay.

He emerges into a SMALL PIAZZA and stops. There's a church. There's a street to the right. He goes down it.

DOWN ANOTHER STREET - A MINUTE LATER

John takes a left and stops-- it dead ends in 30 feet. He stares, puzzled, then backs up, looks right, keeps going.

YET ANOTHER STREET - A MINUTE AFTER THAT

John breaks into sunlight. He's in a LARGE PIAZZA now. There's another church and many streets. John re-thinks.

QUICK SHOTS - THE SIENESE TRY TO HELP JOHN

A BAKER, THROUGH A ROPE CURTAIN, CLOSING UP HIS SHOP

BUTCHER

... Down this street, then a right.

(then)

But the Palio...

A SHOPKEEPER WITH HALF-GLASSES, LEAVING HER STORE

SHOPKEEPER

... Up and then a left. Two lefts.

Of course there is the Palio...

A BARKEEP BEHIND A BAR, LOCKING UP HIS CASH REGISTER

BARKEEP

... Across the piazza, then down and around, and then up. And then back. But you will have trouble today.

JOHN

Sure, 'cause of the Palio.

EXT. PIAZZA POSTIERLA - LATER

John walks briskly, confident, but then he stops short... Four streets converge here, and now John's even more lost.

Suddenly, from elsewhere comes a CRRRACK-- a mortar blast. John recoils, concerned but curious. Then he hears a medieval trumpet fanfare, and then the roar of a crowd.

John looks around. He doesn't know *what* is going on.

EXT. VICOLO DEL SALTARELLO (STREET) - LATER

John's given up. He sees THREE MEN (old, older, oldest) walking towards him, like the "Ages of Man" in motion. They look at him. He looks back, decides what the hell.

JOHN

No way you speak English, right?

OLD WALKING MAN

Non parlo Inglese.

John nods, "of course." Then, there's a sound. A motor. All the men turn and stare as, from down the street...

... There comes a Vespa. A woman astride.

FRANCESCA. Mid-20's. Dressed the hip, modern businesswoman, but oozing that whole Sophia Loren/Gina Lollobrigida va-va-voom vibe. All Italian. All amazing.

The street is narrow, with some pedestrians, so she has to drive by slowly and ignore the stares of the Italian men.

... Until she notices John. She looks right at him, almost puzzled to find an attractive guy standing in front of the trio of old men that presumably ogle her daily.

It's a moment. But then she drives on.

After she's gone, the older man crosses himself, while the oldest one swoons and mutters her name reverently...

OLDEST WALKING MAN
Mi Dio, Francesca...

Even John was thrown. But then he sees, up the street, she has slowed to a crawl behind a clot of pedestrians.

JOHN
 Francesca... speak *Inglese*?

They nod. That's all John needs. He turns and catches up to Francesca, duffel bouncing, walking beside her Vespa, which is still stuck behind the clot of pedestrians.

Francesca looks over, sees him, smiles sly.

FRANCESCA
 Something you want?

JOHN
 I'm kinda lost.

FRANCESCA
 Bad day to be that.

JOHN
 So I'm finding out. But I still need to get to some guy named Barzanti. A lawyer, I think. He's got an office on Via Tito... Puente.

She looks at him again, still smiling, still sly.

FRANCESCA
 Does this work in America?

JOHN
 This?

FRANCESCA
 This asking directions thing. Do American women ever fall for this?

She's not mad, she's fucking with him. John likes that.

JOHN
 The key's to make sure they know I really am lost, then get to the "maybe we could grab a beer" part.

FRANCESCA
 A beer? Too much.

It's intimate, like she's giving him a tip. He gets it, but the clot has cleared, and now Francesca goes faster, forcing John to walk much faster if he wants to keep up.

JOHN

Then I'd say how about coffee, soda,
candy. I'd say hey, let's get candy.

FRANCESCA

That's good. I'd still say no.

She turns onto a different street. John hustles around the corner, jogging now to stay even. He's not done.

JOHN

Then I'd say fine, forget later.
How about now. Let's take a walk.
Or I can ride. Ladies' choice.

Again, she considers it, letting John just huff beside her. Then she looks at him and shakes her head.... "no."

John has gone from playing along to just trying to keep up.

JOHN

Look, I really am lost. And I
really gotta find this Barzanti guy.

She points up at a street sign, "*VIA TITO SARROCCHI*," and turns onto it. John has to hustle again, but is smiling.

JOHN

Though maybe I'm startin' to taste
that candy.

She guns it. John instantly raises his hands.

JOHN

Okay, okay.

She slows and stops, waiting for John to catch up. He arrives sweaty, out of breath, way more harried than cool.

FRANCESCA

I like you better this way. And you
really want this "Barzanti guy"?

John nods, winded. She points to a nearby door to a bar.

JOHN

Thanks.

FRANCESCA

Nice boots, by the way. Ciao.

She guns the Vespa and takes off. John calls after her.

JOHN

How do I see you again?

Francesca calls back over her shoulder, a vision.

FRANCESCA

Find me.

She zooms away up the street, slaloming pedestrians. John watches her go, stunned. Then he smiles, a pained smile, knowing full well he can't find his ass with a mirror.

INT. BAR - DAY

More of a cushy clubroom. As John enters, he sees one man arguing against a dozen others. It's a cacophony of angry Italian, but then it stops. And John realizes...

... Now everyone is staring at him. He fum-fums...

JOHN

Mr. Barzanti?

The one man raises a hand, speaks with a goodly accent.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Of course, I am Eraldo Barzanti.

ERALDO BARZANTI comes over. He's a twinkly little man in his 60's with no hair, Lew Wasserman frames, baggy suit.

And, despite Eraldo's nice smile, John is suddenly a little nervous. He quickly pulls out his letter...

JOHN

I'm... this guy.

... And hands it to Eraldo, who takes it and reads it, then looks up at John anew. He gestures to the door.

ERALDO BARZANTI

You can walk with me, yes?

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET) - DAY

John tries to keep up with Eraldo, who still carries John's letter and moves like a fast motion penguin, smiling and nodding grandly to everyone they pass.

ERALDO BARZANTI

You must realize that this letter was sent to you over a month ago. Right after your father died which, by the way, I am very sorry about.

JOHN

Yeah, well... I came when I got it.

ERALDO BARZANTI

But you understand we had to...
(smiling special at a WOMAN)
Signora Mariani, buongiorno.

JOHN

I understand. You had to bury him.
(off Eraldo's wince)
No, you had to...

John makes a vague "flames" gesture. Eraldo quickly nods.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Her brother thought they should be together, so his ashes are with hers.
(off John's odd look)
His wife? Did the letter not say that his wife had died also?

JOHN

No. I knew he married again but...

Eraldo quickly re-scans the letter, then whaps it, annoyed.

ERALDO BARZANTI

It does not even mention her. But please, know they were very beloved.

JOHN

That's... great.

They have arrived at a very nice door. Eraldo gestures.

INT. BARZANTI LAW OFFICE - DAY

Inside this 400-year-old building is a modern office, decorated in perfect Italian streamline. Hip. Classic.

Eraldo leads John through the outer office.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You realize you do not want me.

JOHN
I don't?

Eraldo holds up the letter.

ERALDO BARZANTI
I am "E. Barzanti." The lawyer who
sent you this letter is "F. Barzanti."

Eraldo opens a door with a frosted window, stenciled
"*F. Barzanti, Avvocata*" and gestures across the room to...

INNER OFFICE

... Francesca, sitting at a huge desk in an Aeron chair.

ERALDO BARZANTI
My daughter. Francesca.

She looks up, sees John. She's pleased. So is John.

FRANCESCA
You found me.

JOHN
I'm that good.

FRANCESCA
What did you want my father for?

JOHN
Nothing. Turns out I want you.

They just look at each other. Eraldo, next to John, looks
back and forth between them, confused by all this.

ERALDO BARZANTI
If you have met, I am thrilled. If
you have not, I am deeply disturbed.
(now, to Francesca)
You sent him this.

Eraldo hands Francesca the letter. She eyes it, then
looks at John, like Eraldo, anew. Softer, warmer.

FRANCESCA
And I see the resemblance now.

Now, Eraldo points to the letter and speaks to Francesca, but plays it to John by speaking in English.

ERALDO BARZANTI

But you forgot to mention the wife.
The poor man did not even know--

FRANCESCA

Non era adatto, Papa.

(subtitled:)

It wasn't appropriate, father.

Shut down, Eraldo drops it. John steps in between them.

JOHN

If whoever wouldn't mind, I'd really like to see my place. Your letter said I could sign for it, sell it, and celebrate. I'd like to do that now.

Francesca stands, trades looks with Eraldo.

FRANCESCA

You picked a very difficult day. I sent that letter over a month ago.

JOHN

Yeah, well, rodeo mail's kinda slow.

FRANCESCA

Right... You're a sort of cowboy.

JOHN

Yeah, a sorta one. Now please, guys, what is this thing going on today?

Eraldo shoots a stunned look to Francesca, then to John.

ERALDO BARZANTI

The Palio.

JOHN

Right. Everyone keeps talking about it. No one says what the hell it is.

John also makes it clear he doesn't care. Eraldo does.

ERALDO BARZANTI

It is a race. Ten horses, ten riders, three times around our town square. Bareback. Nothing is illegal except guns and knives. That is the Palio and it is happening today. Now.

Music should fade up, Eraldo's so moved. John is not.

JOHN
So it's just a horse race?

ERALDO BARZANTI
And Everest is just a mountain?

FRANCESCA
Papa...

JOHN
Look. I'm broke, okay? I need a
place to sleep as much as I need a
place to sell. I need this house.
Can't we just get it over with?

But John makes his honest play to Eraldo, not Francesca.

FRANCESCA
Hey, cowboy. I'm handling this.
(indicating Eraldo)
He's not. And you'll get your house
after the race. Do you understand?

She doesn't wait for his answer, merely walks past him.
John looks to Eraldo, who merely shrugs, "she's right."

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET) - DAY

Francesca exits the law office, John and Eraldo following.

JOHN
Okay, so what do I do until then?

ERALDO BARZANTI
You may watch with us, if you like.

FRANCESCA
Or, feel very free to sit and wait.

She points to a tiny stone bench against a wall, and walks
off. Eraldo walks off after her. John eyes the bench...

WALKING WITH FRANCESCA AND ERALDO - SECONDS LATER

John catches up to them.

JOHN
So where's this town square?

ERALDO BARZANTI
In the center of town?

John nods, refusing to feel foolish. Francesca sighs.

FRANCESCA
There is something I didn't say
before, and that is I'm very sorry.
You father was very special to me.

John nods again, stiffer. Doesn't want to talk about it.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You must understand, for the two of
them to go in such a senseless way--
a mere traffic accident-- it was a
tragedy for all Siena. Especially,
of course, for the *Tartuchini*.

John wants to just drop this. But he can't let that go.

JOHN
You figure they'd be the most upset.

Eraldo nods, not getting the goof. Francesca narrows her
eyes, not liking his tone. John rolls his eyes, goes on.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Okay look. We just met, so I suppose
it's fine if occasionally I have no
idea what the hell you guys are
talking about. But the tarta-who?

ERALDO BARZANTI
Tartuchini. The people of the
Tartuca. The turtle, the tortoise.
These people. Everyone around us.

Eraldo gestures to the SHOPKEEPERS, the KIDS running by.

ERALDO BARZANTI
And since she was a *Tartuca*, your
father became a *Tartuca*. That means
you are a *Tartuca* as well.

Eraldo nods strong. John looks at them both, puzzled.

JOHN
I'm a turtle? Is that like an Elk
or something? It's a club? There's
a lodge? A free gym I can use?

ERALDO BARZANTI

No, not a club. More of a state of mind. A spirit. Something that possesses you. It is one's life.

JOHN

Great. So dad joined a cult.

ERALDO BARZANTI

No. No cult. This neighborhood. We call it a *contrada*. These streets, these people. This is the *Tartuca*.

Eraldo gestures again around him. Finally, John looks, sees blue and yellow *Tartuca* scarves in every window, *Tartuca* flags hanging from standards. All with pictures of turtles. Even the street lamps are turtle-shaped.

ERALDO BARZANTI (CONT'D)

There are 16 other neighborhoods in Siena. Some are our friends, some are neutral, some are our enemies.

He gestures to another street, where everything is red and yellow, and everything features a snail. Eraldo sneers.

ERALDO BARZANTI (CONT'D)

That is the *contrada* of *Chiocciola*, the Snail. They are neighbors, but they are scum, slimy drowners of saints. Piss on them and they melt.

JOHN

Enemy. Got it.

(then, not really buying)

And all this somehow in some way has something to do with... the Palio?

Eraldo suddenly smiles huge. Delighted.

ERALDO BARZANTI

See, now you understand.

EXT. VIA DI CITTÀ - DAY

A CROWD OF PEOPLE stream through a passageway between two buildings, all heading to some place on the other side.

Eraldo, Francesca and John cut across the flow.

ERALDO BARZANTI

It is the neighborhoods-- the *contrade*-- that race against each other. Ten of the 17 race in a given Palio. Not all at once.

JOHN

The winning neighborhood-- the *contrada*-- how much does it get?

ERALDO BARZANTI

Money? Nothing. The winner pays.

John has gone along with everything so far, but that strikes him as so odd he actually does a double take.

Francesca just smiles. Eraldo actually laughs at John's reaction, then gestures to the entrance to a fancy palazzo.

ERALDO BARZANTI

We will watch it from in here.

INT. PALAZZO SANSEDONI - BARZANTI APARTMENT - DAY

John enters the palatial apartment, following Eraldo and Francesca down the marble hall, awed by the lavish decor.

JOHN

Nice... museum.

John's almost serious. Francesca rolls her eyes, wry.

FRANCESCA

It's been in the family for centuries.

They arrive at the end of the hallway, at a pair of doors. Eraldo opens them and they all step out into the twilight...

EXT. BARZANTI APARTMENT BALCONY - FADING DAY

... And John's jaw drops. The balcony is three stories up and can seat only two, but it perfectly looks out over...

THE PIAZZA DEL CAMPO

... "The Field." The town square of Siena. But it's not square, shaped rather like a scallop shell, sloping down to a Gothic brick building, the *Palazzo Pubblico*. The huge bell tower, *Torre di Mangia*, stands tall over everything.

Five story apartment buildings like this one ring the square, and every balcony is decorated and occupied.

It's one of the most engaging public spaces in the world.

And now it's packed, completely. Thousands of people, shoulder to shoulder. Around the perimeter, where the sidewalk cafes would be, there is a track made of tamped earth. Bleachers surround that, also completely packed.

FRANCESCA

We call it our *Campo*. Our field.
This is where we run the Palio.

Francesca just watches John, as he takes it all in.

JOHN

It's... wild.

FRANCESCA

It's the piazza to end all piazzas,
and it's been like this since 1349.

John just stares. The Campo is big, but not that big.
It's tough to imagine horses running around it... safely.

JOHN

Kind of tight for a horse race.

FRANCESCA

There's nothing like it in the world.

She gestures to the empty chair. John turns to Eraldo,
gestures grandly for him to sit instead.

JOHN

Please.

Eraldo appreciates the gesture, takes a seat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

How often do you do this?

FRANCESCA

Twice a year. Now. Again in August.

JOHN

That's it? Some of the towns we'd
go through'd have these Frog Jumping
Festivals or Pioneer Days every
other week during tourist season.

FRANCESCA

You think this is a little tourist
show? Something to make money?

JOHN

Sell some t-shirts and beer. I get it.

Francesca waits, knows Eraldo will jump on that one.

ERALDO BARZANTI

This is not a show, not a pageant,
not a "tourist gimmick" in any way.
It is about honor. So it is good
you are here. Because to truly know
our city, you must see our race.

FRANCESCA

But if you want to see your house...

She cuts him a look, playful now. But he's staring down
at the piazza. The crowd roars again, and she looks as--

ACROSS THE PIAZZA, at the *Palazzo Pubblico*, the HORSES and
JOCKEYS emerge from the pillared entrance down front. The
horses-- beautiful and lively. The jockeys-- not small
and light, but big and tough-looking. Italian cowboys.

JOHN

You run quarterhorses. Strong and
fast. Your jockeys look tough, too.

FRANCESCA

Forget the jockeys. They don't
matter. If a horse wins without
one, the neighborhood still wins.
They're just mercenaries, in it only
for the money. And I know, because
I used to help my father train them.

ERALDO BARZANTI

She was tough, a little Mussolini.

FRANCESCA

(ignoring that, pointing)
Look, right there...

ON THE PALIO TRACK, each of the jockeys, a FANTINO, walks
his horse to the start, clearly whispering to each other.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

... They're making secret deals.

JOHN

Deals? To do what?

FRANCESCA

Help someone win, make someone lose.
Whatever pays the most. They don't
care. They finish knowing someone's
going to be mad at them. That's why
they always come from somewhere
else. Never from here. When it's
over, they get out of town quickly.

JOHN

You don't trust 'em. I'd leave too.
(pointing)
Especially if I had to wear that...

AT THE STARTING ROPES, the *FANTINI* are in wild uniforms--
pajama-looking outfits in loud contrada colors, topped by
metal helmets. As they load in, they now barter openly.

FRANCESCA

You never know who's just made a
pact, or just agreed to break one.

John zeroes in on one strapping jockey, **MASSIMO COGHE**, who
is grandly making deals with the jockeys on either side.

JOHN

That guy's working the room.

FRANCESCA

Massimo. A serious veteran. What
you would call a "bad ass." He's
riding for our ally, *Nicchio*, the
Shell. So we want him to win.

JOHN

We don't want our guy to win?

ERALDO BARZANTI

We are not in this Palio. We are in
the next one and will be victorious!

Eraldo's unbridled enthusiasm makes John grin.

JOHN

I'll take your word for it.

FRANCESCA

He's the Tartuca *capitano*, our captain
for the Palio. His word's pretty good.

ON THE PALIO TRACK, the starter has nine of the *fantini*
ride their mounts in between the two ropes, and wait. The
last horse waits, 20 feet back, waiting to run in.

JOHN

Wait, some guy gets a running start?

FRANCESCA

When he hits the rope, they all go.

The last horse dashes in, the front rope drops and...

JOHN'S FIRST PALIO - LAP ONE

... They're off. Whatever the rules are, or aren't, whatever the race seemed like it was, or wasn't... now that the horses are charging, their jockeys hanging on...

ON THE BALCONY, John's never seen anything like this.

ON THE PALIO TRACK, the horses fly into the first turn, a brutally sharp one called *San Martino*. One horse slips, her *fantino* flying off, landing hard. Instantly he's trampled by two horses, but manages to crawl away, safe.

Now, two *fantini* ride side-by-side, and start whipping each other with the 3-foot switches they carry. Brutal.

ON THE BALCONY, John gapes, stunned.

JOHN

You can whip each other?

ERALDO BARZANTI

In the Palio, anything is permitted.

FRANCESCA

Almost anything.

John thinks they're insane, but then Francesca scoffs as--

ON THE PALIO TRACK-- a whipped *fantino* flinches, falls--

ON THE BALCONY-- and Francesca tsks-tsks dismissively.

FRANCESCA

All he had to do was cut inside.

John whirls, jabs a finger at her, emotion rising.

JOHN

Maybe you trained guys, but what they're doing down there is hard.

John's instant, absolute devotion catches her off guard. Hands up, she backs down, lets him go back to watching.

But now Francesca watches John watch... and likes what she sees. Eraldo watches her watch... and finds it amusing.

THE PALIO - LAP TWO

Giraffe leads, then Tower, Unicorn, Shell (with Massimo).

Rounding *San Martino*, one spirited DARK BAY MARE makes a charge from fifth, into the other tight turn, called *Casato*. But the Giraffe horse suddenly cuts her off and--

The spirited dark bay mare goes down. Her *fantino* goes down harder. He quickly leaps the wall, safe. The mare gets back up, unhurt, but runs back the wrong way.

Eraldo and the entire crowd groans. This is a mistake.

THE PALIO - LAP THREE

Shell and Tower draw abreast of Giraffe, on either side. It's a squeeze play, and the Giraffe *fantino* flies off.

Now it's just Massimo versus the Tower *fantino*. From *Casato* on, Massimo whips the other man mercilessly.

ON THE BALCONY, John stares, horrified but transfixed.

JOHN
Christ, he's fierce.

ON THE PALIO TRACK, the Tower *fantino* falters. Massimo drives to the finish and raises his whip... in victory.

AROUND THE CAMPO

The crowd explodes. Cheers. Jeers. Joy. Outrage.

IN THE BLEACHERS, THE NICCHIO (SHELL) SECTION

The *Nicchiali* (easy to tell because their scarves have shells on them) go nuts. It doesn't get better than this.

ON THE BALCONY, Eraldo goes nuts, too. Jumps up and down, whooping, then bends down, head-locks John and Francesca.

ERALDO BARZANTI
We must go down there.

Eraldo lets go, ducks inside. Francesca shrugs, inviting.

FRANCESCA
We must.

EXT. PALAZZO SANSEDONI - NIGHT

John and Francesca fly out onto the street. The crowd is pouring out of the Campo. They fight against the flow.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - NIGHT

John and Francesca push their way into the Campo as the *Nicchiaoli* mob their horse, just to touch her. They also mob Massimo, lifting him onto their shoulders like a god.

John eyes the pandemonium, exhilarated. It's way beyond a normal sports celebration. He leans to Francesca.

JOHN

You people like to win.

FRANCESCA

Mostly, we hate to lose.

Francesca points to men crying, crushing their hats. Then she pulls John back as, suddenly right in front of them...

The second place Tower *fantino* pushes past, frantic, being chased by a crowd of angry *TORRAIOLI*, who are sure he threw the race. Quickly, he rips away his "tear away" uniform to reveal street clothes. He leaps a bleacher rail and escapes.

FRANCESCA

The most important thing about the Palio is not to lose. And that is coming in second. Not last, second.

JOHN

That one you're gonna hafta lay out.

FRANCESCA

To try hard, and win-- great. To sort of try, yet finish far back-- you'll try again later. But to try hard, and miss-- it's disgraceful.

(off his stare, she shrugs)

That's the Palio.

A new sound, a chant, rocks the piazza. The *Nicchiaoli* have gathered around the judges' stand, shouting up...

NICCHIAOLI

D'acelo! D'acelo!

Give it to us! Give it to us!

A huge BANNER on a pole (with a stylized PAINTING of the Virgin Mary) is lowered down to them. Francesca points.

FRANCESCA
That's what the winner gets.

JOHN
Sure, the Virgin Mary. Why not?

The *Nicchiaoli* grab the banner pole and shout, hug, cry. Shell drums beat. Shell flags wave. Shell, Shell, Shell.

Then a song breaks out, the SHELL ANTHEM. The *Nicchiaoli* sway together, with allies and friends, a thousand strong. The words and melody fill the piazza. It's stirring.

Francesca nods, loving this. John eyes her, then smiles.

JOHN
This is really amazing.

She smiles back, nods. The crowd starts to surge, following the palio banner as it's being carried out of the piazza. Francesca and John start to move, too.

John blinks, stumbles a bit, straightens. Francesca sees.

FRANCESCA
How long have you been up?

JOHN
Since... Nebraska.

She gauges him, makes a decision.

FRANCESCA
Come on.

INT. ALFA ROMEO SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

Quiet now. Francesca drives. John rides shotgun, bleary.

They pass through the tiny hamlet of "*Vignano*," which in its entirety is a fruit stand and soccer field (with a strung BANNER, "*Vignano Sagra di Piccione*," featuring a cute li'l cartoon pigeon). John squints at the banner.

FRANCESCA
They're having a pigeon feast. You should go sometime. You'd have fun.

JOHN
Can you really "feast" on pigeon?

Francesca shrugs, then turns off the narrow country road onto an unpaved road. They bounce along, then stop.

FRANCESCA
You can sleep here tonight.

John peers out. It's pitch black. He can't see a thing.

JOHN
Where?

EXT. IL CASALE (A HOUSE) - A SECOND LATER

John follows Francesca, carrying his duffel, squinting. Suddenly, he yelps, drops down into a ditch. Beat.

FRANCESCA
There used to be a bridge there.

John climbs up, gamely keeps following Francesca.

JOHN
You need to get a moon or something.

INT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

Francesca leads John down a dark hallway. They arrive in a room, she strikes a match, lights a candle. Gestures.

FRANCESCA
Okay?

The room is Old World, but clean. There's a folding cot in the corner with a blanket folded on top. John nods.

JOHN
As long as I can be horizontal.
(crossing to the cot)
So tomorrow we can take care of the
paperwork and all that?

John turns, sees her standing there, candle lighting her face like an exquisite painting. It stuns him. She helps.

FRANCESCA
Of course. All that. Tomorrow.

John manages a weary salute, sighs, sits down on the cot. Francesca nods, turns to put the candle on the mantle...

... But something catches her eye. It's a small framed PHOTO of a little boy, maybe ten, sitting on a horse, wearing a too tiny cowboy hat and a too huge happy grin.

Francesca looks at it closely, a smile growing...

Then she turns back, sees John's out cold. She watches him sleep a beat, then blows out the candle, and leaves.

EXT. IL CASALE - DAY

Tuscany in the morning. Rather pretty.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM

A rooster crows... John's eyes open, and he sees the rooster is right next to his head. He sits up very fast. Eraldo is across the room, smiling at him, waving nice.

ERALDO BARZANTI

The cock, he is a bastard. But still, you like your place, no?

JOHN

Can't wait to see it.

That puzzles Eraldo, which puzzles John. He looks around. *This* place is, well, dilapidated. Sunlight comes through the windows, some which are broken, but mostly it streams through a gaping hole in the roof. And John realizes...

JOHN

No... NO...

INT. IL CASALE - HALLWAY - DAY

John hops down the hallway, buttoning his jeans, his jaw dropping as he goes. Eraldo follows, placating.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Do not be so quick to judge.

EXT. IL CASALE - A SECOND LATER

John bursts into the sunlight, stumbling 30 feet away from the house before he turns around for the grand view...

Il Casale is a split level farmhouse. More accurately... a ruin. The stucco, patchy. Windows, missing. The clay tile roof has gaping holes. Chickens wander in and out.

John just stares. Eraldo comes out, staring with him...

ERALDO BARZANTI

He always said it was his dream.

JOHN

Dream to do what? Live in a dump?

ERALDO BARZANTI

In the few years he owned it, he actually did quite a bit with it.

John growls, then sags, stares at his inheritance, bummed.

Now, Francesca emerges from the shade of the one lone oak, stylish sunglasses on. She looks to Eraldo, who shrugs, then she steps over beside John, and stares up with him.

After a beat, he pulls out his letter, points to a line...
*"... what he has left you is **Il Casale**, near Siena..."*

JOHN

I thought it was gonna be a "castle."

Francesca looks at the letter, sympathetic.

FRANCESCA

Il Casale. ["cuh-zahl-ay"] It's just what it's called. It's not a word. It doesn't mean anything.

John manages a chuckle. Damn straight. Then...

JOHN

Guess I can get *something* for it.

Francesca shrugs, unsure, then hears a motor and turns. John and Eraldo turn, too, and they all watch as...

A HORSE TRANSPORT turns off the main road and heads down a second road toward the fenced pasture, where a lone young MAN watches TWO HORSES canter across the grass.

JOHN

Are those my horses?

ERALDO BARZANTI

No.

JOHN
Then why are they here?

ERALDO BARZANTI
They have always been here.

JOHN
Why is that guy here?

ERALDO BARZANTI
Someone has to watch the horses.

John is about to take that further, but smartly doesn't.

ERALDO BARZANTI
But you own more than you think.
The house, the stables, the acres
of pasture, that bastard rooster,
this tree, even the truck there.

JOHN
Truck? Where?

Eraldo points to the oak tree. Hidden behind the tree is, indeed, a vehicle... a tiny, three-wheeled thing with a little flatbed on the back, called an "Ape." John gapes.

JOHN
It's a tricycle.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Whatever it is, now it is yours.

Eraldo is distracted, because now a sizable man in his 50's is walking up from the pasture. He is **PRIMO CERPI**. He nods politely to Francesca and Eraldo. They nod back.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Come seppe che eravamo qui?
How did you know we were here?

Primo points to the lone man in the field, mimes a phone.

PRIMO
Io diedi a mio figlio di idioto un telefono.
I gave my idiot son a cell phone.

Then Primo looks at John, smiling grandly, hand out.

PRIMO
You are the cowboy, no? I am Primo Cerpi, horse breeder for the Palio, among the various other pastimes...
(more...)

PRIMO (CONT'D)
 (realizing, sagging)
 And they have not told you yet.

JOHN
 Told me what?

Primo tsk-tsks Eraldo, then continues to John.

PRIMO
 First, I am sorry about your father.
 I am also sorry that his passing
 occurred at a time he owed me money.
 (pulls out a piece of paper)
 This much money, to be exact.

He shows John the paper... "102,000,000." John chokes.

JOHN
 A 102 million dollars?

PRIMO
 Lire. In dollars, about 50 thousand.
 In any currency, not a small sum.
 And the debt is against the house,
 I'm afraid. So now you owe me.

John turns slowly to Eraldo, hoping for relief. But...

ERALDO BARZANTI
 It is true.

John sighs. Looks at Primo, who isn't budging an inch.
 Then John gestures to the house, the grounds, all of it.

JOHN
 How about you buy it from me? Take
 what I owe and I'll keep the rest.

PRIMO
 It is worth no more than 40 thousand.

John looks to Eraldo, who shrugs, pained.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 He is being generous.

Then from the pasture comes a yell... "Papa." Primo
 looks, sees the lone man, his son, beckoning him down.

Primo nods his leave, then starts down, calling back.

PRIMO
 Let me know when you will pay.

JOHN
I'll give you a call.

John waves, friendly-like, then turns to Francesca and Eraldo, dropping his smile fast. They can't say anything.

JOHN (CONT'D)
So, the most I could sell this place
for is... less than I owe. Great.

John shakes his head. It's just so unbelievably fucked. Then he hears a horse WHINNY, scared. He turns, sees...

Down at the pasture, Primo is trying to pull a third horse from the back of the transport. Primo curses, kicks it.

... And John's eyes narrow.

EXT. PASTURE GATE - A MINUTE LATER

Primo roughly yanks on the horse's bridle. She's the dark bay mare that ran the wrong way in the Palio... **GEMMA**.

PRIMO
Gemma, Gemma. *Idioto animale*.

The lone man-- Primo's son, **GIULIO**-- tries to help, but Primo waves him off, pulls harder on the bridle. Then--

JOHN (O.S.)
All right, that's enough.

Primo whirls, sees John running down. But he doesn't care.

PRIMO
She throws her *fantino* and runs the wrong way. She needs to learn.

JOHN
That's not how you teach a horse.

PRIMO
My horse, my teaching.

Primo yanks hard. Gemma rears back, jerking free, then trots around the truck and away, outside the pasture.

Primo swears a blue streak, and Giulio starts after Gemma. But John sprints ahead of Giulio who, as he passes Primo, is stopped by his father with a hand on his shoulder...

... Primo wants to see what John will do.

IN THE FIELD, Gemma runs along the outside of the fence. John sprints up behind, then runs up alongside her...

With a deft move, he bounds onto the fence rail and leaps onto Gemma's bare back. Gemma goes into a full gallop, but John reaches down and grabs up her bridle, in control.

BACK AT THE GATE, Eraldo and Francesca have come down to join Primo and Giulio, all watching as John rides Gemma, bareback. Eraldo and Francesca trade looks, impressed.

IN THE FIELD, John wheels Gemma around, taking a turn at speed, then races her back to the gate where, at the last moment, he jumps off and lets Gemma run into the pasture.

Giulio shuts the gate, as John walks right up to Primo.

JOHN
Stay away from her.
(as Primo protests)
My place, my rules.

PRIMO
It is only your place if you pay me.

Not looking back, John waves Primo off, then walks past Eraldo and Francesca, heading for the house. They follow.

ERALDO BARZANTI
That was impressive. Especially on
a horse with such problems.

JOHN
Horses don't have problems. Owners
do. You give a horse just a li'l
something, she'll give back... more.

John slows, stops, stares at *Il Casale*. He gets an idea.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What'ya think? Are houses the same?

He keeps going. Francesca and Eraldo trade looks, follow.

BACK AT IL CASALE, THE HOUSE

John circles the farmhouse, sizing it up. Eraldo and Francesca hustle behind him, trying to keep up.

ERALDO BARZANTI
We are not quite following you. I
mean, we are actually *following* you,
but we do not quite understand you.

JOHN

What if I get some workers and, say patch the roof, slap on some paint, whack the weeds? If I got this place looking a little better, what could I get for it then? Tease me.

ERALDO BARZANTI

I do not know. 80. Perhaps more.

JOHN

Great, say 80. I pay off Snidely Whiplash there, that gets me outta here with 30 grand. Now I'm happy.

FRANCESCA

But we haven't even talked about the taxes, the fees, the stamps... Plus, you have to pay workers, you know.

JOHN

As long I leave with a profit. Can you get me some workers? And fast?

ERALDO BARZANTI

For a *Tartuca*, we can do anything.

John finally stops, turns to Francesca and Eraldo, grins.

JOHN

I like you guys.

FRANCESCA

Unfortunately, there is still the paperwork. But-- I will do you a favor. A big favor. You think you can handle a big favor, John Wyatt?

She steps closer to John, which is fine by him. He nods.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

Be at my office. Three o'clock.

And she walks off. Eraldo shrugs, follows. John watches them go, then looks around. He's standing beside a ruined farmhouse he's about to inherit. In Italy. It's odd...

... But it just might work out. And John smiles.

EXT. SIENA - PORTO ROMANO (CITY GATE) - DAY

There's a "weeeeeee" as John's Ape wheels around and parks. The door opens, revealing John inside, knees at his chin. He had more room in his rental car. He groans, climbs out.

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET) - DAY

John approaches the Barzanti law offices, and slows...

There's Francesca. Leaning against her Vespa, smirking. The moment is ripe. Then she pats the seat, "get on."

EXT. VIA DI CITTÀ (STREET) - DAY

Francesca whizzes along on her Vespa, winding through pedestrians. John's on the back, not sure what to do with his hands. He's puts them around her waist, lightly.

She swerves the Vespa a bit, on purpose. He grabs tight. She smiles, pleased. Then he leans up to her.

JOHN

So, what's my big favor? And just how happy should I be about it?

FRANCESCA

I cut through kilometers of red tape, called in dozens of favors, saved you days, maybe weeks, of crazy Italian bureaucracy. You should be thrilled.

JOHN

Oh boy, am I.

She rolls her eyes. Now, they both hear--

FUSTO (O.S.)

Francesca! Ciao, baby.

-- As they pass a tight-shirted "FUSTO" (one of those Italian macho types) who makes kissy sounds at Francesca. She lets go of the Vespa, lets it swerve as she gives him an Italian "up yours." Then she re-grips the handlebars.

FRANCESCA

I move back after three years and every guy think he has a shot at me.

JOHN
That's fine. You just steer. I'll
do the fuck you's.

INT. COMMUNE DI SIENA OFFICES (COUNTY OFFICES) - DAY

Bureaucracy Central. A dozen glass windows with holes.

A WOMAN slides some documents through a slot to Francesca, who hears a tap on glass. She looks to the next window, where a BESPECTACLED GUY waves at her, leers lamely.

BESPECTACLED GUY
Ciao, Francesca!

Francesca smiles wanly, waves back, then crosses the room to where John waits by a counter, amused at what he saw.

JOHN
Everybody thinks they have a shot.

FRANCESCA
To them I'm a legend. The scarlet
woman. The prodigal daughter.

JOHN
This, I like. What'd you do?

FRANCESCA
I'm not going to tell you.
(opening the documents)
Here, here, and here.

Not looking at him, she lays the documents on the counter, holds up a pen. John takes it, starts to sign, their arms playing a subtle game of "Twister," bringing them close.

JOHN
Here?

She nods, not moving away, then flips pages as he signs...

JOHN
Well, you're all big Catholics over
here. What would strict, Eraldo-
like parents really disapprove of?
(signs again, then eyes her)
You married against his wishes. Or,
you married but then got divorced.
Or, you just slept with everybody.

Francesca just smiles, an enigma, then disentangles herself and walks off. John, left holding the pen, calls after her.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I approve of all that, by the way.

INT. METICULOUS BUREAUCRAT'S OFFICE - DAY

The METICULOUS BUREAUCRAT eyes the documents... meticulously.

Francesca and John sit across, her watching the bureaucrat, John watching her. Finally she relents, and whispers...

FRANCESCA
I married a Snail, okay? The enemy.
Shame on me. Then I divorced him.
Shame on shame. Is it that obvious?

JOHN
No. I look for clues. I guess. I
said married, you touched your
finger. You don't have a ring, so I
said divorced. The you being easy
part... just me hoping.

John realizes the Meticulous Bureaucrat is staring at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You too?

The Bureaucrat stares more, then returns to the documents.
Now, through the open window, come the sounds of love...

DEEP MALE VOICE (O.S.)
... *Tesoro biscottino. Baciami.*

In an apartment across the alley, it's "afternoon delight."
The Bureaucrat is mortified, doesn't look up. John eyes
Francesca, who smiles and whispers the translation:

FRANCESCA
"Precious little cookie. Kiss me."

John nods, impressed. The Bureaucrat wipes away sweat.

DEEP MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Baciami. Bacia tutto il mio corpo.

FRANCESCA
"Kiss me. Kiss my whole body."

The Deep Male Voice moans, as presumably his whole body is being kissed. It's overblown enough to be as ridiculous as it is sexy. Francesca just keeps smiling, listening...

... While John basks in her. She's something else. The Bureaucrat is about to pass out, especially as the Deep Male Voice seems to head "over the falls"...

DEEP MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Mia coniglietto. Mia regina. Vivo per te.

FRANCESCA
"My bunny. My queen. I live for you."

Then there's a short, quick grunt. The voice goes high...

DEEP MALE VOICE (O.S.)
IL NICCHIO VITTORIOSO! SONO VINCITORE!!

FRANCESCA
"... The Shell has won. I am a winner."

Suddenly, in the room... BAM. John and Francesca whirl to the Bureaucrat, now drenched in sweat, as he furiously stamps the rest of their documents... BAM-BAM-BAM.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - EVENING

The bell tolls "six" as Francesca approaches the base of the *Torre di Mangia* and slows... there's John. Leaning against a stone pillar at the entrance, licking a *gelato*.

He smiles at her. She hands him a certificate of title, with calligraphy and a huge gold leaf stamp in the corner.

FRANCESCA
You're a homeowner.

JOHN
Looks like I won a spelling bee.
(then, eyes the certificate)
Never owned anything before that
didn't have wheels. Feels good.

Now, they walk. Around the piazza, everyone's out for *passeggiata*, the evening stroll, plus the bleachers are being taken down, the track earth scooped up.

FRANCESCA
So I've done all this for you.
What're you going to do for me?

John holds out his cone.

JOHN

Lick?

FRANCESCA

More.

JOHN

A whole meal? Bet you know some place we could get some good Italian.

FRANCESCA

Dinner's already taken care of.

JOHN

All right, lady, what do you want?

FRANCESCA

(sees something, stiffens)

Let me hold your arm.

Francesca hooks her arm in John's. He rolls his eyes.

JOHN

Maybe you're easy. I, however--

CARLO (O.S.)

Francesca!

John smirks. That's the reason, a guy. He turns, sees--

Yes, a guy approaching. But others (mostly women) also see, because this guy looks like a god on earth. In his 30's, attractive to distraction, this is **CARLO DE SANTI**. He walks up to them, smiling wonderfully at Francesca.

CARLO

Ciao, Francesca. Lei guarda bellissima, come sempre.
You look beautiful, as always.

FRANCESCA

English, Carlo. Please.

CARLO

Of course. For your friend.

His eyes dart to Francesca's arm in John's.

FRANCESCA

John Wyatt. Carlo De Santi.

With his free hand, John shakes. Carlo becomes earnest.

CARLO

Of course, John, I knew your father,
and I must say your loss is mine,
although not professionally. He was
a shrewd, cunning competitor.

The last part, though said graciously, confuses John.

FRANCESCA

Carlo is the *Chiocciola capitano*.

CARLO

(to John, feigning "terror")
Beware. I am your mortal enemy.

JOHN

That's right. The slimy drowners of
saints. We piss on you and you melt.

Francesca rolls her eyes. Carlo laughs easy.

CARLO

Obviously, "someone" has explained
the ins and outs of our little race.
The rivalries, sure, and the secret
deals. But there's much more to it
than the medieval and Machiavellian.
(before Francesca can speak)

Though I struggle with those aspects
myself. Like the hatred between our
neighborhoods. It just gets so old.

JOHN

How'd it get started?

CARLO

How does anything get started?
Somebody does something to somebody.
It was so long ago nobody remembers.

FRANCESCA

It was 1686. Their assassins jumped
our jockey and beat him senseless. We
remember it like it was yesterday.

CARLO

Never piss off an Italian woman, John.

FRANCESCA

That's enough, Carlo.

It's playful between Francesca and Carlo, but just barely.

CARLO

Of course, John, you saw the whips.
You know they're made of stretched
calf phalluses? Lends a Freudian air
to the whole thing, don't you think?

(to Francesca)

How'd you used to describe it?

"Macho brutes on naked sweaty beasts,
whipping each other with penises,
trying to win a picture of a virgin."

(then, with an edge)

Of course that was then. You feel so
differently about everything now...

Francesca just laughs, so done with Carlo, who also
laughs. John shrugs what the hell, laughs even louder...

EXT. VIA DI CITTÀ (STREET) - A MINUTE LATER

Now Francesca pulls John along, fast. He shoots a look
far behind them, where just-ditched Carlo waves bye-bye.
John returns it, friendly, then eyes Francesca, amused.

JOHN

"Macho brutes on naked beasts"...?

FRANCESCA

I was 19. I hated everything.

JOHN

Except, I guess, one thing.

(off her raised eyebrow)

Hey, I understand. Guy cuts a path.

FRANCESCA

Probably why I married him.

John just nods, "ohhh," then makes a face, "hubba hubba."

FRANCESCA

Stop. Yes, he's very good looking.

JOHN

And quick. And articulate. Hell,
he speaks English better than I do.

FRANCESCA

Next time ask him where he learned.

(doing a fair "frat boy")

"Brown University. Theta Xi Rush

(more...)

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)
 Chairman. Damn glad to meet ya."
 (then, with a shrug)
 He was what I wanted at the time.

JOHN
 Or that's what he kept telling you.

FRANCESCA
 And when I asked you to take my arm...

JOHN
 ... You weren't trying to make him
 jealous. You want to make sure he
 knows it's over. You're trying to
 back him down, not stir him up.
 (nods, supportive)
 I get it.

She looks at him, liking that he gets it. Not looking at
 her, he allows a grin, then looks around, mildly puzzled.

JOHN
 Now can I ask where the hell we are?

It's different here. Strings of festive lights cross-
 cross above the street. There's a murmur of a crowd.
 Francesca just smiles, pulls him around a corner into...

EXT. VIA DEI PISPINI (STREET)

... A STREET FEAST.

FRANCESCA
 We're at dinner.

Two long, long tables, 100 feet each, fill the street, set
 with service for 400 people. Shell flags fly everywhere.

JOHN
 Shell's celebrating again?

FRANCESCA
 They never stopped.

John takes it in. Everyone's eating, laughing, loving it.
 The winning horse stands in a decorated temporary stall, a
 guest of honor. And sitting at the main table is...

... The winning jockey, Massimo, being fêted like royalty.
 He hoists a glass of Chianti, smirking, just smug as hell.

And then a surprising sight... Eraldo sidles right up next
 to Massimo, whispering into his ear. And Massimo listens.

John points at the sight, intrigued. Francesca nods.

FRANCESCA

As *capitano*, my father must always be thinking how to get what he wants.

She sits. John joins her. Suddenly, steaming plates of pasta appear. Someone fills their wine glasses with Chianti. John looks at Francesca, loving this, beaming.

JOHN

Last night, then this? You know how to show a guy a good time.

He toasts her with his Chianti, is about to sip--

FRANCESCA

Just the ones who have a shot.

-- And he almost does a spit-take. She smiles, still that enigma, sips lady-like. Eraldo bounds up to them, giddy.

ERALDO BARZANTI

It is fortunate you are both here,
for I have just gotten news that
will make your *Tartuca* hearts sing.
(starts slow, builds big)
Our ally, *Nicchio*, splendid *contrada*
of the Shell, has agreed to loan us
their champion *fantino*, the great
Massimo. He will ride for his usual
fee, and we will rejoice in victory!

A waiter carrying filled wine glasses passes by. Eraldo spins, snags one, spins back around, raises it to toast.

ERALDO BARZANTI

To our blessings. And to my cunning.

He caps it with a wink, then clinks glasses with Francesca and John. All drink, all laugh. It's a merry moment...

LATER

... And now everyone's merry. Everyone sings, and dances. It's like Mardi Gras, but without the drunken frat guys.

John and Francesca watch from a side, clapping along. It's a serpentine, partner-trading dance, like a *Tarantelle*.

But as John watches the dance, Francesca watches him. It makes her smile, until he catches her and she shrugs,

unapologetic. Now John smiles, but then-- someone pulls him into the dance. He goes around, laughing, until...

... He reaches a hand to Francesca, pulls her in. Around and around they go, until he leads her out of the fray...

AROUND A CORNER

.. And it's quiet here. Darker. They're all alone.

They look into each other's eyes. They're going to kiss and they both know it. They both fight little smiles.

Then it gets serious, and they move in and... they kiss. Softly. Gently. And then harder. More fervently and...

INT. PALAZZO SANSEDONI - BARZANTI APARTMENT - NIGHT

... BAM. The front door flies open. John and Francesca stumble in, lips locked. They pull apart, breathing hard, and then she leads him down the hall, into an open door..

INT. FRANCESCA'S ROOM

... Which she shuts, then turns and kisses John again. Leisurely now, not frantic. Their breathing deepens. Eventually John's eyes open, and he pulls away from her.

JOHN

This is your room.
(looks around, amused)
Your *teenage* room.

It is. There are suitcases and boxes on the floor, but there are also dreamy pictures of horses on the walls, posters of Nirvana and a cute soccer player. Girly stuff.

FRANCESCA

I haven't gotten my own place yet.

JOHN

It's okay. It's like high school.

She starts to unbutton his shirt, looking at him. But she stops. She can't get the buttons undone. He smiles.

JOHN

They're snaps.

It's a western shirt. She nods, takes hold and rrrrrrip. Then she moves in, lightly kissing his bare chest...

FRANCESCA

Never knew any cowboys before.

JOHN

We're not that different. I think there's a bumper sticker about how we "stay in the saddle longer" or "do it with our boots on" but...

(actually swoons a bit)

What am I even talking about?

She looks up at him, pleased she's having such an effect...

FRANCESCA

You're not much like him, really.

... Then returns to her kissing. John's lost in it.

JOHN

Who? What're you talking about?

FRANCESCA

Your father. But like watching the dancing, or last night watching the Palio... you got the same look he would get sometimes. I liked it.

John pulls back from her, breathing heavy. He eyes her.

JOHN

You gotta stop that.

FRANCESCA

You really want me to?

JOHN

No.

He doesn't step back in, though. She notices.

FRANCESCA

You don't like talking about him.

JOHN

No, I'm fine with it. He did what he did and... now he's gone.

He tries a shrug, upbeat. But she eyes him, not pleased.

FRANCESCA

He was your father.

JOHN

Yeah. And what was he to you?

FRANCESCA

He was good to me. He taught me things. Things I'll never forget.

That breaks it. John gets a sour look, his thoughts ugly.

JOHN

You're kidding me.

FRANCESCA

About what?

JOHN

Did you bring him here? Or where?

Francesca gets it now and gapes at John, mortified.

FRANCESCA

That is sick.

JOHN

You're saying you didn't? Good. It's just the way you were going on about him, I got a little confused.

FRANCESCA

I wasn't "going on." And you were insulting a decent man.

JOHN

Who, my dad? He was an asshole.

Fast, Francesca slaps him. John tries to shrug it off.

JOHN

Hey, I've been slapped before.

Faster, she slaps him again. John just winces, stinging.

JOHN

Never twice really fast...
(then, malignant)
And never by some twisted girl
defending my wonderful father.

He's right in her face. She in his. It's the same intimate pose from mere moments ago, now very different.

FRANCESCA

I will always defend him.

JOHN
 'Cause he "taught" you things?
 Well, hey, turns out he taught me,
 too. But just one thing, to leave.

And he does. Francesca just stands there, listening as the front door opens, and then slams. She sags, not happy.

INT. IL CASALE - THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

John's under the blanket, asleep. Then the rooster walks over, pecks his forehead, tap-tap. John's eyes open, but then quickly he sits up, scaring the rooster into the air.

There's a guy, 30-ish, across the room, grinning at him. This is **GIANFRANCO**. He catches the rooster, walks over.

GIANFRANCO
 Francesca.

John doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. GianFranco gestures to the house around him, says again:

GIANFRANCO
 Francesca.

JOHN
 She sent you...?
 (it dawns on him)
 ... to fix up the place. Great. And
 you can do it fast, right? 'Cause I
 wanna get the hell outta here. Okay?

GianFranco just stares, blankly. John smiles, thin.

INT. IL CASALE - HALLWAY - DAY

As John pulls on a shirt, GianFranco hands him "his" rooster, which he tucks under an arm, then bats away a cobweb, pointing to the front door leaning against a wall.

JOHN
 Obviously, that has to go back on.

But GianFranco just stares at it, puzzled, like he doesn't have the slightest clue about doors. John sags, annoyed.

INT. THE KITCHEN

John gestures to the broken counter tiles, then opens the faucet. No water, just noise. He looks to GianFranco...

... Who just looks puzzled again. John rolls his eyes.

INT. THE BACK HALLWAY

John pushes open the door to a BEDROOM. It's full of hay bales, stacks of red roof tiles, and a huge Tartuca flag.

JOHN

You can at least move stuff, right?

(off that damn puzzled look)

Hay bales to the horse barn? Roof tiles to the roof? Up on the roof?

He points "up," mimes "carrying," tries not to explode. Then suddenly, GianFranco nods, calls outside--

GIANFRANCO

Mario! Mario! Mario!

Quickly, THREE MEN (all Marios) hustle in from outside. Each smokes, each salutes John as they enter the bedroom, grab a bale, hustle back out. GianFranco nods to John.

John nods back. Strokes the rooster. Sighs, relieved.

EXT. SIENA - VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET) - DAY

Eraldo walks, again the speeding penguin, smiling and nodding very grandly to everyone he passes. And amid the "Buongiorinos," can be heard the real news... "Massimo."

The *Tartuchini* are clearly thrilled with Eraldo's coup.

INT. BARZANTI LAW OFFICE - DAY

Eraldo enters, still basking in his triumph. He goes to the Francesca's office, pokes his head in, smiling huge...

... But she is just sitting at her desk, looking forlorn.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Lo sono okay?

Are you okay?

She looks up, musters a smile for her father. Nods.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Lei non aiutano Gianni Wyatt oggi?
Are you not helping John Wyatt today?

She shakes her head. Lets the smile fade.

EXT. IL CASALE - AT THE EDGE OF THE PROPERTY

John stands at the fence, looks out into the midday sun.
 In one direction, the tended rows of someone's vineyard.
 In the other, a field of sunflowers stretches to infinity.

It may be one of the more spectacular views on the planet,
 but John merely squints at it, almost distastefully...

Then... he steps over to a WELL, where a chain hangs. He
 starts hauling. Hauls and hauls until... he brings up a
 bucket, brimming. John sniffs the water, wary, then...

He gingerly tastes it. Nods. Drinks deep. Then, he just
 dumps the whole bucket over his head. He has showered.

EXT. IL CASALE - A MINUTE LATER

John rounds the front, dripping, but stops as he sees...

Out by the oak, GianFranco and the Marios are all staring
 at an industrial-sized weed-whacker, which lies on the
 ground like a dead animal. One of the Marios kicks it a
 bit. Nothing. Then GianFranco sees John, calls to him...

GIANFRANCO
La Macchina non funziona.

GianFranco caps it with a shrug. John shakes his head.

JOHN
 I don't do Italian.

GIANFRANCO
La Macchi-na... non funzi-one...

He says it louder and slower, clearly the reverse of what
 ugly Americas do to non-English speakers around the world.

JOHN
 The machine? Non functioning...?
 (understanding, pleased)
La Macchina non funziona. Got it.

GianFranco gestures to the *panini* (sandwich) he's eating.

JOHN
So you're eating lunch.

Now, John sees something else, out at the ravine.

AT THE RAVINE - A MINUTE LATER

John steps closer, peering down in the weeds, where a weathered, sweating old man, **SABATINO**, picks up a 40-pound stone and heaves it onto a pile. He sees John, and stops.

JOHN
Francesca sent you, too?

Sabatino doesn't answer that. Instead, he points to himself, then to the collapsed bridge, nodding confidently.

SABATINO
Soon.

He's actually rebuilding the stone bridge, stone by stone. It looks like it should take him, oh, about seven years.

JOHN
You'll be done "soon"?

John shrugs whatever, turns back, watches GianFranco and the Marios stand around, smoking and eating. John scowls.

JOHN (CONT'D)
At least someone's workin'...

EXT. SIENA - PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - DAY

Champion MASSIMO is sure working it here. Dressed sharp, looking fine, he's out on the Campo, taking a victory lap. WOMEN swoon, MEN envy him, and Massimo strolls on until...

WOMAN (O.S.)
Massimo!

He turns to whoever hailed him, Pope-waves, blows a kiss.

MASSIMO
Ciao, baby!

Then he turns a corner, heading down a dark alley...

... And then there's a strange sound, a high pitched shriek. It's the war cry of an OLD WOMAN IN BLACK as she dashes out, carrying a massive cane, black heels clacking on the cobblestone. Massimo whirls, holds up his hands, but she's not aiming for his face. She whacks his knee...

... And, like Nancy Kerrigan, Massimo goes down crying.

INT. TARTUCA COUNCIL HALL - NIGHT

More noise here. Yelling and arguing, all in Italian. The room is housed within the *Tartuca* museum, and it's nicely furnished. Wood and leather. Italian style.

The *TARTUCA COUNCIL* is having an emergency meeting. The *PRIORE*, the "chief," is a stern man. He's flanked by various *Tartuchini*, and they're all yelling at...

... Eraldo Barzanti, facing them. For the first time, he looks haggard. He's flanked by his younger lieutenants, **NATALEO** and **ENRICO**. They're taking the yelling blithely.

After more yelling (and maybe the words "*fantino*" and "*Massimo*" and "*Palio*" can be made out), it stops, and Eraldo starts to say something. Immediately, the yelling starts up again, and Eraldo backs down to wait it out.

Out the window, a clap of THUNDER can be heard. LIGHTNING FLASHES. Eraldo looks out at it, not sure what to do, until Francesca sidles up next to him. She whispers...

... And Eraldo gets a very strange look on his face.

EXT. SIENA - NIGHT

Lightning flashes, illuminating the city. It's stunning.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A candle burns. John drops on the cot, beat tired. He just wants to go to sleep, but something catches his eye.

... On the mantle, that PHOTO. Him at age ten.

John goes over to it, leaning close in, remembering... Hard to tell what he's thinking, but it's not pretty. Then he reaches up, and flips the frame face down. He crosses to the cot, drops onto it, pulls up the blanket.

Now there's thunder... and rain. Pitter-pat, on the roof. Drip-drop, on his face. John just lies there, getting wet. Suffering it, fuming. But then...

... He hears a strange creaking.

INT. HALLWAY

John walks, looking up at the ceiling. The creaking seems to be coming from there. And it's getting louder.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

John comes out in the downpour, squints up into the rain trying to see the roof. There are odd shapes up there.

He grabs a ladder and leans it up against the house.

ON THE ROOF

John reaches the top of the ladder, looks out at the roof. It's hard to see in the darkness and downpour. But then a BOLT OF LIGHTNING flashes, and John sees the shapes are...

... Stacks of red clay roof tiles. Not yet installed.

The creaking can be heard over the rain now, and John just gapes as, weakened by rain and carrying added weight...

THE ROOF OF HIS HOUSE (or most of it) COLLAPSES. It's a horrible sound, and an even more horrible sight as it just drops away before his eyes, crashing to the floors below.

Still perched on the ladder, John just stares...

EXT. IL CASALE - THE NEXT MORNING

Eraldo walks up to John, just sitting under his oak tree, staring off, soaking wet. John finally looks at him.

ERALDO BARZANTI
What has happened to you?

JOHN
To me? Nothing. To that...

He nods towards the house. Actually, from the front, it looks okay. Eraldo shrugs, goes to the front door and in.

Quickly he comes back out, mortified.

JOHN
Actually, the whole roof didn't cave.
It's still up over the living room.
Just enough to support the big hole.

John would laugh, but he's not finished being disgusted.

JOHN (CONT'D)
God, what a fool. Thinking I could
fix this place up. Not as big a
fool as my father for borrowing all
that money to buy it, but...

He shakes his head, growls. Eraldo treads carefully.

ERALDO BARZANTI
He did not borrow the money to buy it.

JOHN
He owed 50 grand to Primo. Now I do.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Not for the house. For bets. Primo
is, how do you say, a bookie. Your
father made many, many bets with him.
Calcio mostly, soccer. But Primo is
unscrupulous. He has contacts, ways
to manipulate the outcome. He...

John's on familiar territory. He brightens.

JOHN
He cheats? He's a bookie who cheats?
I am offended by that. But it means
I don't owe him, right? Hot shit.

John starts to rev up. But Eraldo slows him down.

ERALDO BARZANTI
The paper your father signed was
legitimate, therefore the lien
against this property is real, as is
the debt. There's nothing we can do.

JOHN
What idiot signs for gambling debts?

ERALDO BARZANTI
An honest one. Your father would
never back out from a deal he made.

JOHN
That's beautiful. What a great man.

Eraldo tries not to get mad. Asks simply:

ERALDO BARZANTI
So what are your plans now?

JOHN
Well, see, I was gonna get some cash
outta dear old Dad, even if I had to
dig him up and go through his pockets.
But even that's out, 'cause you...

John does the vague "flames" gesture. Eraldo just stares.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You are like a poet. A bitter,
angry poet with no perceptible
talent, but a poet all the same.

JOHN
Thank you. Anyway, I think I'm just
gonna give up. Go into town, get one
of your tiny cups of coffee, drive to
Rome in my tiny truck, then I guess
do puppet shows on the street 'til I
get enough cash to get the hell outta
here. Why, you got something better?

ERALDO BARZANTI
I might...

John looks at him, curious, as Eraldo continues and...

QUICK POP-- IL CASALE - VIEWED FROM FAR AWAY

... All that can be seen is the house and the oak tree.
Then, even at this distance, John's answer can be heard...

JOHN
WHAT?! NO WAY.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MINUTES LATER

Eraldo drives alongside John in his Ape. John yells.

JOHN
NO GODDAMN WAY.

INT. ESPRESSO BAR - SIENA - A HALF HOUR LATER

John sugars his espresso, turns away from Eraldo, mutters.

JOHN
No.

INT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - MINUTES AFTER THAT

John crosses the square, now in its "normal" state as a bustling city center. Eraldo follows, still in earnest...

ERALDO BARZANTI

Understand, the loss of Massimo has left us in a terrible bind. There are very few expert *fantini*, and they are already riding for others. That leaves only novices, and everyone knows they are novices. We need a secret weapon... a surprise.

JOHN

You surprised the hell outta me.

ERALDO BARZANTI

I have seen you ride, even if for a few moments. You have a gift.

John looks back at Eraldo, laughs. When he turns back...

... There's Francesca. John stops short, trapped.

FRANCESCA

I saw it, too. Are you in, or out?

She's a tough one. John tries to be tougher.

JOHN

What's it to you?

FRANCESCA

This is his last Palio as *capitano*. I want him to win. If he uses you, he's going to need help training you.

ERALDO BARZANTI

From when she was a little girl, she could turn rough stones into gems.

John looks from father to daughter, feeling set up...

FRANCESCA

Bottom line, we can pay you ten thousand dollars just to go along with this. 30 thousand more if you win. That gets you close to even. It also gets you close to leaving.

JOHN
But only if I win.

John walks off, shaking his head. Eraldo calls after him.

ERALDO BARZANTI
We hoped you would at least try.
When you wanted from us, we gave to
you, because you are *Tartuca*.

John slows, turns back. He knows a chit's being called in.

JOHN
So, for a *Tartuca*, anything?

Eraldo shrugs, that's right. Francesca shrugs, too.

FRANCESCA
And you want the money.

Like father, like daughter. John sighs.

INT. PALAZZO PUBBLICO - BASE OF THE TORRE DI MANGIA - DAY

Eraldo leads John and Francesca to the stairs going up.

INT. TORRE DI MANGIA (SIENA'S TALL TOWER) - STAIRCASE - DAY

Up and up. John looks up at Eraldo, who sweats badly. He looks down to Francesca, who looks up at Eraldo, worried.

EXT. TORRE DI MANGIA (SIENA'S TALL TOWER) - TOP - DAY

Eraldo, huffing, emerges into the wind. John follows, and then Francesca, both bushed, but then John recovers fast...

... Because the view is amazing.

The Sienese countryside spreads out around them. The rolling hills and vineyards and all that. But Eraldo taps John, and points over the side, down. John looks...

JOHN'S POV - THE CAMPO BELOW THEM

There it is. Seen this way, it is perfectly shell shaped. The corners at *San Martino* and *Casato* are 90 degrees.

ERALDO BARZANTI
That is what you will learn.

EXT. IL CASALE - THE ROOF - POV: THE PASTURE

It's just John's pasture. But there's a TRACK that runs around it, perfectly shell shaped. Just like the Campo.

FRANCESCA (O.S.)

This is where you will learn it.

John and Francesca are perched on the ladder, looking out. Eraldo is below, holding Francesca's shoes. He calls up.

ERALDO BARZANTI

It was Primo's secret. Now, it is ours.

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR - DAY

The bar where John first found Eraldo. Eraldo and Francesca enter, followed by John. Eraldo motions for him to follow him to a table, where his lieutenants (from the council meeting) quickly stand, showing Eraldo respect.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Gianni, meet Nataleo and Enrico.

John nods, not sure why he's meeting them. They nod.

NATALEO/ENRICO

Buongiorno.

John nods again. They nod more. Eraldo explains.

ERALDO BARZANTI

They are your bodyguards. After Massimo, we cannot be too careful.

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET) - DAY

Eraldo walks with Francesca. John follows, flanked by Nataleo and Enrico. Only John acts like this is weird.

ERALDO BARZANTI

You are entering a world very few outsiders get to see. It is mostly a world of great beauty, but it is sometimes a world of ugliness. The Palio is a time of passion, and now you are our *fantino*. So unless you are protected, better to stay in *Tartuca* territory. On our streets.

JOHN
How do I know which ones are ours?

ERALDO BARZANTI
Keep your eyes on the turtles.

Eraldo points up as they pass under a wooden street light bracket carved into the shape of a tortoise. Then they turn onto **VIA SAN AGATA (STREET)**-- the light bracket here is a dolphin riding a wave, symbol of the *Onda contrada*.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You are being paid by us, of course, but we know you need more money, and you know there is more to be made.

JOHN
The secret deals.

ERALDO BARZANTI
The *partiti*, yes. They are secret only from others. We must know.

FRANCESCA
We'll let you have two. Any more and you'll be distracted from winning.

EXT. ONDA CLUBROOM BAR - DAY

Similar to *Tartuca's*. While the bodyguards wait, Eraldo and Francesca lead John to the back, where a MUSTACHIOED MAN emerges, wiping his hands, clearly the proprietor.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Buongiorno, mi amico.

They shake hands. Francesca, too. Eraldo explains.

ERALDO BARZANTI
He is the *capitano* for our excellent ally, the *Onda contrada*. The Wave.

JOHN
I thought Shell was our ally.

FRANCESCA
Just listen to what he says.

Francesca's brusqueness is becoming unnerving to John.

The man does not shake John's hand, just starts talking Italian fast. After a bit, Eraldo nods, then translates.

ERALDO BARZANTI

He wants you to block the *fantino* of their enemy contrada, *Torre*, the Tower. He wants you to block him near the finish. Not at the start.

JOHN

Not at the start?

ERALDO BARZANTI

No, near the end. Too early and there is no humiliation. They must be embarrassed. He will pay this:

He gestures to the *capitano*, who holds up a napkin, on which is written a long number. John eyes it, rattled.

JOHN

How much is that? And to do what? Block him how? What does this mean?

FRANCESCA

It's five thousand dollars.

JOHN

Oh. I'm in.

ERALDO BARZANTI

This will help you make a profit. We want you to be happy, John Wyatt.
(then, to Francesca)
Now take him to eat.

INT. TRATTORIA LA TARTUCA - DAY

Not a restaurant, a mom'n'pop joint. LORENZO, the owner, carries over plates of *crostini*, *fettunta* and *finocchiona* and sets them before John and Francesca, then he steps back, clasps his hands, and addresses John, sincere.

LORENZO

I just wanted to say how very sorry I am about your father. He was like a saint to me. A good and kind man.

It's clear Francesca is waiting to see what John will say. So are Enrico and Nataleo, at a nearby table, plus Lorenzo's WIFE and the CHEF, both peeking out from the kitchen. John decides to take the high road, and be the gentleman.

JOHN

... Thank you.

LORENZO

And I am so pleased you will be our
fantino. It will be very exciting.
But not too exciting, for your sake.

Nervous laughs all around. John changes the subject by
biting into the *crostini*, then smiling graciously.

JOHN

This is very good, thank y--
(it hits him)
My God, this is really good.

Lorenzo smiles, he knows it's good. He pours the Chianti,
then leaves, as John realizes Francesca is still staring.

JOHN

I suppose you're gonna tell me how
you turn the rough stones into gems?

FRANCESCA

I grind and I grind.

JOHN

O-kay...

John leans back, done. Francesca leans forward, not done.

FRANCESCA

I liked you. And you ran out.

JOHN

You slapped me. Twice.

FRANCESCA

You insulted your father.

JOHN

He was my father. I get to insult
him. Why do you have to defend him?

FRANCESCA

Because that's what he would've done
for me. From when I was little, no
matter what happened, he always told
me things would be okay. Then, when
I was 18, I thought I was in love.
Not with him, but with Carlo.

JOHN

Sure. He's a catch.

Francesca shoots him a look. John shrugs and, unable to help himself, leans to the food and starts eating again.

FRANCESCA

The entire contrada turned on me, even my father. Especially him. He cut me off. No money. Nothing. But it just made us feel more like Romeo and Juliet, so we decided we'd show my father, show everybody, and we snuck away to City Hall, thinking nobody would know what we were doing.

JOHN

You actually thought that?

Francesca shoots him another look. He shrugs, eats more.

FRANCESCA

Yet your father came. He said he'd be our witness-- we didn't even know you had to have one-- but first he took me to buy a wedding dress. He knew it was all a mistake, of course, but he never tried to talk me out of it, never said anything but that things would be okay.

JOHN

But they weren't. You got divorced and, I guess, ran away to law school.

FRANCESCA

Yes. And when I came back with my degree, I was still a disgrace. But we have this idea in Siena that every *contrada* has its own street or gate, its own special entrance. No one has a special exit. There's a feeling that to leave is bad. But to come back in, no matter what has happened, is good. And your father-- gently, patiently-- reminded people of that. Because of him, now things are okay.

(then)

So I will always defend him, John.

JOHN

Because he was pretty much...

He feigns not knowing the rest. She falls for it.

FRANCESCA
... Like a father to me.

JOHN
See, there I was back in America,
kinda hoping he'd be a father to me.

Bitterly triumphant, John makes a show of standing.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Well. Thanks for a grrreat lunch.

He whirls to leave, but nearly knocks over Lorenzo, who has brought over plates of *pasta e fagioli* and *pici*. It's a lame, awkward dance, until Francesca calmly pipes up.

FRANCESCA
That was *antipasti*, John. Appetizers.

His grand exit ruined, John can only sit back down, chagrined, as Lorenzo sets down the new plates, clears the old, and leaves. John harrumphs, then digs in and damn, this is even better. Mid-chew, he notices TWO TEENAGERS at the front window, peering in. Francesca notices, too.

FRANCESCA
Everyone wants to pay their respects.
If you want to keep your job, be nice.

She beckons them in. Quickly, they come in through the open front door. John sips more wine, leans to her.

JOHN
How many people knew my father?

FRANCESCA
It's a small town, John. Please.

First, the cute TEENAGE GIRL steps up.

TEENAGE GIRL
I just wanted to say sorry. Your
father was cool. He could kick ass.

John looks confused. Francesca nods to the bodyguards.

FRANCESCA
He did what they do. Only better.

Enrico leans over, not offended by the comment at all.

ENRICO
He could kick my ass.

Now the TEENAGE GUY steps up.

TEENAGE GUY
You're from America. You know ABBA?
(singing, "explaining")
"Dig it, the Dancin' Queen." Eh?

JOHN
They're... I think from Sweden.

Teenage Guy grins, pumps a fist anyway. John just nods.

LATER

A DOZEN TARTUCHINI have gathered. TWO OLD MEN IN HATS.
THREE OLDER LADIES (two in black-- widows). Little KIDS.
More TEENAGE BOYS and GIRLS. All watch him eat.

FRANCESCA
They want to know where you are from.

JOHN
You know, here and there.

Francesca turns to the group, waves her hand vaguely.

FRANCESCA
Qui a là.

That gets odd looks. Someone whispers to Francesca.

FRANCESCA
They want to know what you did,
before you came here to be a jockey.
Should I say cowboy? Ranch hand?

JOHN
Tell 'em I was a bullfighter.

Francesca eyes John, then turns to the group, translates.

FRANCESCA
Lui lotta tori.

Smiles and nods. Teenage Guy grabs a cloth napkin, waves
it like a cape, mimes a veronica to enthusiastic applause.

TEENAGE GUY
Toro! Toro!

FRANCESCA
They think you meant matador.

John corrects them, confident his actual job is impressive.

JOHN

No. I wore face paint and wild
shirts. I wrestled bulls and horses
in the rodeo. I saved men's lives.

He caps it with a proud nod, gestures for the translation.

FRANCESCA

*Lui porta truccatura e fa la lotta
animali in un "ro-de-o."*

Only a boy smiles. Everyone else looks down, embarrassed.

OLD WIDOW LADY

Senza una sede... e un pagliaccio?

Francesca shrugs to her, then turns to a confused John.

FRANCESCA

She thinks you were a homeless clown.

LATER

Francesca, flanked on either side by Enrico and Nataleo, grills John as he chews the last of his steak and drains his wine. He's full up with food, wine, and her company.

ENRICO

You chase the bull?

JOHN

No. The bull chases me.

NATALEO

The bull catches you?

JOHN

No. I catch the bull.

FRANCESCA

You are a very weird cowboy.

JOHN

(hoisting his glass)
I'm a *Tartuca*. I am the *fantino* for
the *contrada* of the *Tartuca*.

A CHEER goes up. The group instantly breaks out into a song for the *Tartuca*, a rousing jingoistic ditty.

EVERYONE BUT JOHN
*Si sa che 'un lo volete/ il nostro Tartucone/
 Per forza e per amore/ Per forza e per amore.*
 (at the top of their lungs)
 TAR-TAR-TUCA. TAR-TAR-TUCA.

John joins in, swinging his glass around. He nods to Francesca, who makes him wait... but gives him a nod back.

JOHN AND EVERYONE
 TAR-TAR-TUCA. TAR-TAR-TUCA. TAR--

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - CRACK OF DAWN

John's dead asleep. A finger taps his forehead. John opens his eyes. It's Eraldo, crooking a finger. John sits up, sees Francesca across the room, arms folded, sunglasses on.

The rooster is in the corner of the room... still asleep.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

Eraldo, Francesca, and John approach the fence, which Giulio straddles. Giulio nods to Eraldo, who explains.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 We have permission to ride Gemma.

Now, Francesca steps up to Gemma, strokes her gently, then turns to John, gesturing for him to get on up.

FRANCESCA
 The grind begins.

John walks up to Francesca, grabs Gemma's bridle, then swings himself up and on. He strokes Gemma's neck, then straightens up and walks her, then trots her, then breaks her into a gallop, heading onto the shell-shaped track.

The instant he hits the "faux" *San Martino* turn, he flies off, lands hard, bounces painfully through the grass.

Eraldo winces. Francesca doesn't. Giulio just gapes.

QUICK SHOTS-- John lands hard, smacks a fence post.

John lands hard, rolls through the grass.

John flies off, sails over the fence... and lands hard.

AT THE PASTURE GATE - LATER

Francesca comes over as John brushes off dirt, grimacing.

FRANCESCA
Staying on her back is one thing.
Doing it around a track is another.

JOHN
Maybe I'm not that gifted.

FRANCESCA
What were you before you were a clown?

JOHN
Actually, I rode broncs, bareback.

FRANCESCA
Were you any good?

JOHN
Four times circuit champion.

Eraldo has hustled over, unable to contain himself.

ERALDO BARZANTI
See, you already know how to stay on
a horse, bareback, in a competition.

John climbs to his feet, frustrated.

JOHN
Not for more than eight seconds.

ERALDO BARZANTI
This is how all jockeys begin with
her. You are doing well, trust me.

It's hard to resist Eraldo's boundless enthusiasm, and John smiles. But Francesca's face is stone. John sobers.

INT. ORNATE SIENESE APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Fancy rug, fancy lamps, and this is just the hallway. Eraldo leads John to a door, still cheerleading.

ERALDO BARZANTI
She is a widow. She is proud. She
expects you to be the proud *fantino*.

INT. ORNATE SIENESE APARTMENT - DAY

John sits on a couch, next to Eraldo. Opposite them sits an ANCIENT WOMAN, all in black, her face stone. This is a woman who's raised many children and buried many men. Suddenly, she starts rattling Italian. Eraldo translates.

ERALDO BARZANTI

She has a grudge against *L'Aquila*, the eagle. 167 years ago, their *priore*-- the *contrada* boss-- disrespected her great-great-great grandfather over a wine cork.

(aside to John, in earnest)

The entire story is very angering.

(back to translating)

Every Palio we ride in she pays our jockey to deliver vengeance upon the *Aquila*, in the form of whip blows.

JOHN

Whip blows? I whip their guy?

ERALDO BARZANTI

300 dollars per blow that is effective. Up to 10 blows. It could add up. She's very rich.

Suddenly, the woman rattles more Italian, "*malocchio*" being repeated as she points to one of her eyes and makes a very scary face. Now John looks to Eraldo, worried.

ERALDO BARZANTI

If you fail to deliver any blows, she will put the *malocchio*, the evil eye, upon you. It is a standard curse.

John nods to the woman, affecting sincerity. She smiles.

ON A TV SCREEN - SLOW MOTION VIDEO

It's the start of the last Palio, as captured by RAI UNO. In slow motion, the Shell *fantino* (Massimo) leaps forward, as the riders on either side go outward, giving him room.

ERALDO BARZANTI (O.S.)

Look, see, he has made a good deal.

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR - EVENING

Enrico and Nataleo half-watch, sip *grappa*. John watches closely as Eraldo points to the outward-going *fantini*.

ERALDO BARZANTI

He did it by promising money to these two, at the start, to clear his way.

JOHN

I make last minute deals on my own?

ERALDO BARZANTI

We give you extra money for that. You still get your other money, plus the two *partiti* we have arranged.

During this, John pulls over a white paper placemat, motions "pen" to Enrico, who hands him one. He quickly writes "*10 + 30 to win, plus 5 to block Tower guy.*"

JOHN

How are all these deals legal?

ERALDO BARZANTI

They're not. Article 89 strictly prohibits them. Everyone knows that.

JOHN

If everyone knows there's a rule against them, and everyone does them anyway, why not get rid of the rule?

Eraldo looks at John oddly.

ERALDO BARZANTI

That makes no sense.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

John lies in bed, unable to sleep, because he hears...

Music. Distant, but loud. Bad Italian pop, too. He tries to ignore it, but it's just too loud and too bad.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

He sticks his head out the front, tries to divine the source. Nope. He steps barefoot onto the rock driveway, wincing with every step. He stops, listens again. Nope.

He just stands there and grimaces, hating this completely.

EXT. IL CASALE - MORNING

John emerges, now dressed, blinking against the sunlight. Then he spies, down in the pasture with Gemma... Primo.

EXT. THE PASTURE - A MINUTE LATER

Primo runs his hand over Gemma's haunches, then sees John coming down towards him. Not looking up, Primo smiles.

PRIMO

She should do well for the contrada
that gets her in the lottery, eh?

John nods, face hard, not giving Primo anything.

PRIMO (CONT'D)

I hope you didn't come down here to
tell me again how to treat my horse.

John doesn't know why the hell he came down. But...

JOHN

I came to see if I could even things
out a different way. With a bet.

Finally, Primo looks at John. His language spoken.

PRIMO

On what?

JOHN

The race.

Primo just laughs, loud and derisively.

PRIMO

I would never wager on the Palio.
No one does that.

JOHN

Because it's pretty much fixed? I
heard you liked your bets that way.

PRIMO

Oh, I do. But because everyone is
trying to influence the Palio, no
one can guarantee its outcome. It
is so dirty it is ultimately pure.
And I despise things that are pure.

John stands there, awkward. Primo goes on.

PRIMO

But you would bet on yourself,
fantino? You think you have ass?
 (off John's look)
 It means you think you are lucky?

JOHN

I make my own luck.

PRIMO

If you think that, you are a fool.

Primo laughs again, then walks away, tossing back...

PRIMO

Just like your father.

Them's fightin' words. But John just stands there.

EXT. SIENA - PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - DAY

Francesca and John walk the tight turn at the real *San Martino*, like Formula 1 drivers finding a through line.

FRANCESCA

You can't go in too steep.

JOHN

Right.

FRANCESCA

But you can't go in too shallow.

JOHN

So go in... just perfect?

Francesca nods, sarcastic. John rolls his eyes.

EXT. IL CASALE - DAY

John watches as the Marios, all smoking, all stand around a portable cement mixer. One Mario taps it with a hammer, attempting to accomplish something not very clear. GianFranco, nearby, sees John, shrugs. John calls over.

JOHN

La Macchina non funziona?

GianFranco nods, points to a *panini* he eats. John mutters.

JOHN
So, again with the eating. Great.

EXT. IL CASALE - PASTURE - DAY

John rides full throttle on Gemma, leaning hard into the faux *San Martino*, and taking it... perfectly.

AT THE GATE, Eraldo pumps a fist, heartened. Giulio, too.

ALONG THE FENCE, as John passes Francesca, suddenly she brings up a switch and whaps him. Nothing vicious, but John's shocked, glares at her and so, going into the faux *Casato* turn, he goes sailing, landing hard in the grass.

IN THE GRASS - SECONDS LATER

John just lays there. Francesca appears over him, shrugs.

FRANCESCA
It will happen in the race.

JOHN
Lady, we are gonna hafta talk.

FRANCESCA
Not here.

He sits up, amused by her insistence on total control.

JOHN
Okay, where?

EXT. SAN GALGANO - DAY

A small, 500-year-old CHURCH. The Ape sits outside. Siena sits on a hill nearby. There's nothing else around.

INSIDE THE CHURCH

It's clear the church is just a shell. No windows, no roof. Empty. Grass grows where the floor would be. Someone has placed a single stone bench in the middle.

John sits on the bench, alone, watching as Francesca's Vespa drives inside the sanctuary. She parks next to the bench, climbs off, then sits on the bench next to John.

FRANCESCA
I always liked this place.

JOHN

This one get bombed or something?

FRANCESCA

Roof fell in 500 years ago. They never had enough money to fix it. I thought you'd find it appropriate.

John smiles thinly. Francesca raises an eyebrow, waiting.

FRANCESCA

You had something to say?

John looks around, exhales, realizes he really didn't.

JOHN

Just that I'm... trying.

FRANCESCA

You are trying hard. I like that. But your father tried, too. Not to be a *fantino*, but to do the right thing. Can you really hate him for that?

John answers, softly, carefully, as best he can...

JOHN

No, I hate him for teaching me to ride. I'd just turned ten. We'd gotten this sweet palomino. And he spent every day with me. Gave me everything he had. Put it in my blood. But the whole time he knew he was leaving. Didn't even tell me 'til he was packed and driving away. A year later he calls, all perky, says he's met someone and moving to Italy. Hopes I can come "visit."

(then)

He didn't need me to come here. He knew every time I got on a horse, I'd have to think of him. Have to.

He looks off, bitter. She tries to understand, can't.

FRANCESCA

But then you joined the... rodeo.

Now John looks at her. Grins, flip.

JOHN

Yeah, I did, didn't I?

FRANCESCA

He said the worst mistake he ever made was leaving you. But he fell in love, John, and made a new home. That's why he sent you the money and plane tickets. He found a second chance, and he wanted you to see it.

John looks off, nodding. Then he makes a decision, gets up, and starts walking away. Francesca calls after him.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

And you can't just keep running.

JOHN

Watch me.

FRANCESCA

That's why he left you the house, John. So even after he was gone, you'd have to come here... and see.

That hits John. But he just keeps going.

INT. ESPRESSO BAR - SIENA - DAY

John stands at the counter, fuming, gesturing lamely.

JOHN

Coffee. A lot of it. A double.

The ESPRESSO GUY finally hears something he understands...

ESPRESSO GUY

Si. Un doppio espresso.

... And he starts making it, as John exhales. Then:

CARLO (O.S.)

Wow. I heard.

John whirls, sees Carlo entering the bar, looking dashing as always. He shakes John's hand, sidles up next to him.

CARLO (CONT'D)

I can't believe it. You're riding. All I could think was, that guy's going to have one hell of a summer.

JOHN

Hell is probably the right word.

CARLO

Francesca working you out? She's a feisty one up close, isn't she?

John's eyes narrow. Carlo leans in, sharing a secret.

CARLO (CONT'D)

She and Eraldo will run you ragged. Keep you from making any real money, if you let 'em. But never forget it's only you up on that horse. It's your show. You're the man, John.

(nods big)

So go get 'em. Show 'em who's boss.

With that, he claps John on the back, and walks out, leaving John to ponder that until his tiny white cup and saucer arrive. John eyes it, then drains it like a man.

EXT. THE PASTURE - DAY

John marches, jaw set, down to where Francesca, Eraldo and Giulio wait. He spies Gemma across the pasture...

And John whistles. Gemma turns and comes running. As she nears the fence, John runs towards it as well. She turns, he turns, they run together along the fence until--

John scrambles up on the fence, then leaps onto her back. He takes hold of her mane, and they're off.

Francesca, Eraldo and Giulio trade looks, amazed, as...

John gallops hard around the faux Palio track, taking the turns at speed. Man and beast, rider and mount, in sync.

It's a beautiful display. He rides back around to them, jumps off, then walks right up to Francesca, and stops. She looks to the others, then gives John what he wants.

FRANCESCA

Okay.

JOHN

Damn straight.

INT. RISTORANTE LA FINESTRA - PIAZZA DEL MERCATO - EVENING

A gorgeous eatery sitting on one of the few large squares besides the Campo. Eraldo, Enrico, Nataleo and John sit at a table overlooking the lights of this open air market.

Enrico and Nataleo are making eyes at the ladies at the next table. Eraldo sips his Chianti, watching John...

... Who just sits there, glowering. He's working on his placemat. Down the side, two columns: "Win 10 + 30 + 5 + 3 = \$48,000" and "Not win 10 + 5 + 3 = \$18,000."

TEENAGE GUY (O.S.)
Hey, Americano!

John looks up. It's the Teenage Guy from lunch, with his Girl and TEENAGE FRIENDS, out on the town, goofing around.

TEENAGE GUY (CONT'D)
YOU KNOW THE BEE GEES?
(singing, "explaining")
"Ah, ah, ah, ah. Staying Alive"...

JOHN
No, they're from Australia. And
buddy, you gotta get some new CD's.

TEENAGE GUY
I did. It's retro, no?

Teenage Guy laughs, moves on. John shakes his head, seemingly annoyed, then sees Eraldo now smiling at him.

JOHN
What?

ERALDO BARZANTI
Nothing. It is just good to see you
sitting here, with me. Or in front
of *Il Casale*, tending to the horses.
These are things your father did.

JOHN
A chip off the old block. Great.
(then)
Did you know him? Really?

Eraldo retreats from it, gives his enigmatic Eraldo shrug.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Who knows anyone, really?

JOHN
C'mon. Was he a saint? A fool? A
good man, bad? Who was he here?

John's truly asking. So Eraldo tries to truly answer.

ERALDO BARZANTI

He was just a man, like the rest of us, trying to make his way through life. He did what he had to do. As any man does. Yet sometimes at night he would lie outdoors and look up at the stars. Does this help you?

It doesn't. It makes John stew, darkly. Then he folds up his placemat and stands, making a vague gesture...

JOHN

I gotta...

ERALDO BARZANTI

Of course.

Eraldo points inside, to the "W.C." sign.

INT. WATER CLOSET - ONE PEE LATER

John finishes his business at the toilet, zips, starts washing his hands. He splashes his face, then stares at himself in the mirror. Angry. Confused. Overwhelmed.

Then he looks for a paper towel, but finds only a real towel with a PAPER NOTE draped over it. It says simply...

"Americano. Window."

Still dripping, he looks around, curious. The only window is a small one above the toilet. He stands on the seat...

ALLEYWAY BEHIND RISTORANTE LA FINESTRA

... And pokes his head out the window. A few feet away, a SKINNY GUY waits, looking off, smoking. John eyes him, goes "Psssst." Skinny whirls and rushes over, whispering.

SKINNY GUY

I am from *Oca*.

JOHN

Onda? The Wave?

SKINNY GUY

Oca, the Goose. The other *Tartuca* ally. We want you to block *Civetta*, foul contrada of the Owl, at the end of the race. You must shame them.

JOHN

I'm already blocking Tower for Wave.
Getting decent money to shame them.

SKINNY GUY

You will not get the chance. The
Torre fantino has sold his honor and
will fall off at the beginning.

JOHN

You're kidding me.

SKINNY GUY

I am not doing that.

JOHN

So what're you paying? Dollars.

SKINNY GUY

(does the math on his fingers)
Four thousand, two hundred.

JOHN

That's really swell, but *Oc-- Ond--*
the other guys, they offered more.

SKINNY GUY

More? How much more?

JOHN

... Eight.

SKINNY GUY

Eight?! But you must understand,
ours is money you will actually see--

JOHN

Keep talking, it's ten.

SKINNY GUY

Okay, eight.

JOHN

And... nobody can know about this.

He says it with such menace, Skinny Guy gulps, nods weak.

SKINNY GUY

Of course.

INT. JOHN'S APE - MOVING - DAY

John "weeees" through "*Vignano*," eyeing a new BANNER over the soccer field, "*Vignano Sagra di Salcicce*" (now with a cute li'l cartoon sausage). At the fruit stand, that same woman with the apron. Nothing changes here...

EXT. IL CASALE - DAY

John crosses the ravine, sees the bridge has part of the first arch, maybe three feet of the 40 feet needed. Sabatino sees John, wipes away sweat, nods to the bridge.

SABATINO

Soon.

John nods and walks on, not caring.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The bad pop music plays, but John isn't trying to sleep.

By candlelight, he's looking at a book, "*The Palio of Siena*" by Cecchini & Neri. He flips through magnificent paintings and drawings of the origins of the Palio...

But then he finds what he was looking for... an elaborate list entitled "*TRADITIONAL CONTRADA ALLIES AND ENEMIES*"...

EXT. SIENA - VIA DI CITTÀ (STREET) - DAY

John emerges from a SOUVENIR SHOP, trying to read a MAP.

EXT. VIA DELLE VERGINI (STREET) - DAY

At a doorway, John hesitates, pausing to re-check his map, his notes, his gut. A deep breath and he heads inside...

INT. GIRAFFA CLUBROOM

... And lets his eyes adjust before he goes to the bar and addresses the BARKEEP, playing it the only way he knows.

JOHN

Get me your *capitano*.

The Barkeep looks at him oddly. John tries again.

JOHN
Capitano? Your captain?

The Barkeep's eyes narrow. Then John hears a cough, and turns to see a heavy-set man with slicked-back hair waddling over, wary. He is the *capitano*, VOLPI.

VOLPI
 I am Volpi, *Giraffa capitano*.

JOHN
 I'm John, turtle jockey guy. You have enemies. I can help with 'em.

Volpi's eyes go wide. He quickly pulls John aside.

VOLPI
 There is a place for these things. The courtyard of the Church of San Agostino. You must meet me there.

JOHN
 But where is that--

VOLPI
 You cannot be seen here. Go.

He urgently leads John to the door, looks out to make sure the street outside is empty, then shoves John out.

EXT. VIA SAN PIETRO (STREET) - DAY

John walks, his map of Siena pointlessly open, reduced to being a lost, dumbass tourist. Then he hears--

CARLO (O.S.)
 John.

-- And John whips his map down, sees Carlo approaching.

JOHN
 Carlo.

CARLO
 I saw you out with Eraldo and his boys. They treating you okay?

JOHN
 Oh yeah. Like a king. Fantastic.

Just then, John's eyes flick past Carlo, to Volpi, now quickly walking by them to the secret meeting. He sees

John talking to Carlo, panics, brings his hand up to cover his face, then breaks into a lame trot to get past.

Carlo looks where John's gaze went, misses seeing Volpi, then turns back, as John smoothly covers with a dry smile.

JOHN

How're you doing? Your jockey okay?

CARLO

He's fine. So green. I'd love to replace him, but I'm too damn loyal.

(then, taps John's map)

So, you're lost. Where you going?

JOHN

A church. The San Agostino church.

CARLO

Really? I was just there. That's my church. Let me walk you there.

JOHN

No, no. Thanks anyway.

CARLO

Sure? It'll just take a second.

(off John's head shake)

Okay, shun me if you want. It's right up there, around that wall.

JOHN

Thank you, Carlo.

John starts off. Carlo doesn't quite let him go.

CARLO

John, you're not getting caught up in all the medieval stuff, are you? The secret deals are a distraction. What's real is the glory of winning.

JOHN

C'mon, I know that. Please.

CARLO

Good. Otherwise what a shame. Come all this way to disgrace yourself. Plus, your people'll beat you silly.

Carlo grins. John can't even respond to that. Just nods.

CARLO

Well, give my regards to Francesca.

JOHN
I don't-- okay, I will.

John smartly decides to stop talking. Just grins back.

EXT. PRATO DI SAN AGOSTINO (CHURCH COURTYARD) - DAY

John pokes his head around a wall, sees...

A large square area where secret deals have been made for centuries and so, despite the NUNS and PRIESTS, it vaguely seems like a gay pick up spot because of the JOCKEYS and CONTRADA OFFICIALS who wander the grounds, "hooking up."

There's Volpi, doing a horrible job of acting casual. He spies John, beckons him quickly over, then blusters.

VOLPI
You made a deal with *Chiocciola*.

JOHN
With Carlo? No way. He's an enemy.
I just know him. You know, a buddy.
A buddy enemy. You must have those.

Volpi gauges John, decides to get on with it.

VOLPI
So what can you do for me?

JOHN
I can box out, I can block, I can do
whip blows. Whatever pays the most.

EXT. VIA SAN PIETRO (STREET) - MINUTES LATER

John emerges, pulls out his "deal placemat," scribbles...

... "*Block out Caterpillar guy for Giraffe - \$3000.*"

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR - EVENING

John, Enrico and Nataleo are at the bar, sipping *grappa*.
John empties his glass. Enrico notices.

ENRICO
Another?

JOHN

Sure, why not.

(then)

You don't normally hang out with the guy who's riding for you, do you?

ENRICO

Never. He's not our friend, so we are not friendly.

NATALEO

The *fantini* pretend to be friendly, but they can never be trusted.

JOHN

That make you mad?

ENRICO

Of course. Especially the women. There is all the cursing, the slapping, the pummeling.

NATALEO

The lighting on fire.

JOHN

What?

ENRICO

Once, a woman of the Panther thought their *fantino* had betrayed them, so she hid, then jumped out and doused him in kerosene, then chased him while lighting matches. But she ran too fast, so the wind blew them out.

Enrico and Nataleo think that's funny. John's not done.

JOHN

So it makes you furious. Or you don't even care? I don't get it.

John's so damn brittle. The bodyguards get brittle, too.

ENRICO

It just is. Nothing is black or white. The real world is gray. We know that in Siena, and accept it.

NATALEO

And the Palio is not all betrayals. There is honor and bravery. Genesisio...

Nataleo looks to Enrico, who picks up the ball, enthused.

ENRICO

Genesio, *mio Dio*. He falls the day before the Palio, is badly injured and unconscious all night. He wakes only an hour before the race, drinks a bottle of Chianti to kill the pain, and goes on to win. He is a hero.

(then)

The Palio brings out the best and worst in all of us. That-- that-- is why it means so much to us.

NATALEO

When in your life do you get permission to live so fully?

As they've been talking, some TEENAGERS have come in and taken over the rest of the room. They do that in Siena.

TEENAGE GUY (O.S.)

Hey, *Americano*.

John looks over, sees Teenage Guy waving to him, smiling.

TEENAGE GUY

K.C. and the Sunshine Band?

JOHN

Finally, somebody from America.

Teenage Guy laughs, then jumps behind the bar. Suddenly vintage disco fills the bar. "K.C. and the Sunshine Band."

The kids move out on the floor and form a line dance. Teenage Girl beckons to John. Teenage Guy calls over.

TEENAGE GUY

Come, join us. You know this.

Step, step, turn, clap. John shrugs, calls over the music.

JOHN

It's called line dancing. Or the achy breaky, if you're a Skoal man.

TEENAGE GUY

Nah, *Americano*. It's the hustle.

... That reaches John. He allows a smile, steps over, and joins in. Step, step, turn, clap. John starts to laugh.

JOHN

It is. It's all just the hustle...

And now he really laughs. It's crazy...

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET)

... But through the window, it's a cool sight. A dozen Italian teenagers and an American cowboy, all dancing in unison, stepping and clapping. All doing the hustle...

Then Francesca steps up, about to go in. But she stops, peers in. It looks like John has joined the neighborhood.

... And that makes Francesca smile.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

Her Alfa parked across the ravine, Francesca approaches the farmhouse. It's dark inside. Then, she hears hoofbeats from the pasture. Sees a man on a horse...

EXT. THE PASTURE - A MINUTE LATER

John is on Gemma, taking a lap around the faux Campo, riding hard and fast. In the bright light of the full moon, it's a stirring sight. And as he comes around...

... There's Francesca, sitting on the fence rail. He wheels Gemma around and slowly walks past her. They just look at each other, saying absolutely nothing until...

FRANCESCA

Closer.

He turns Gemma, slowly passes by again. She grins.

FRANCESCA

Clo-ser.

John turns Gemma back, passes by her once more...

... But this time Francesca grabs Gemma's bridle and neatly steps off the fence rail right into John's arms... He's surprised, but he catches her easily, setting her sidesaddle in front of him, facing him. She looks at him.

FRANCESCA

I want a ride.

JOHN

You're the boss.

He nudges Gemma. She starts walking, the two of them bouncing gently in the moonlight. She looks up at him.

FRANCESCA
If you win, what will you do?

JOHN
First? I like that bit where everybody carries the guy away on their shoulders. Can I request that?

FRANCESCA
Done. And?

JOHN
One of those nine course lunches.

FRANCESCA
Done. And...?

JOHN
And... I dunno.

FRANCESCA
What about getting your money?

John pauses-- does she know? He shrugs it off, so casual.

JOHN
Thought that went without saying.

Francesca nods, eyes *Il Casale*, pretty in the moonlight.

FRANCESCA
Still going to sell it and leave?

JOHN
Sure. Got a lot to get back to.

He just being flip. She knows it. Yet she's not sure...

FRANCESCA
You can't mean the rodeo.

JOHN
You kidding? Driving from town to town in my shitty truck, sleeping in shitty motels, eating shitty frozen burritos from the Circle K...

FRANCESCA
So there's nothing to go back to.

JOHN

Oh, but see I'll have my money, and
so I'll go from town to town in a
nice truck, sleep in nice motels,
eat nice warm burritos from Taco
Bell. Can't miss out on that...

FRANCESCA

Is there nothing to keep you here?

It's playful. And they're so close.

JOHN

Thought you said the jockeys always
left town right after the race.

FRANCESCA

Just the ones who have been unloyal.

JOHN

I see. But some stay.

FRANCESCA

If they have a reason.

JOHN

Hafta be a good reason.

FRANCESCA

Of course. Is that hard to imagine?
Or do you only have reasons to leave?

It's plaintive. She's trying. John thinks he knows why.

JOHN

Is that why you came out here? To
make sure I've been a good boy?

He's so wrong. Francesca blinks, stunned. Then she gives
up and pulls Gemma's bridle, stopping them. Sliding to
the ground, she steps away, turns back to face John, hurt.

FRANCESCA

I don't know why I came.

Then she just heads for her car, not looking back. John
watches her go, knowing full well he made a mistake. But
he just sets his jaw, wheels Gemma around and gives her
his heels, riding furiously off into the moonlight...

INT. IL CASALE - THE LIVING ROOM - MORNING

On his cot, John sits up, looks around. The rooster's gone. He is alone. He nods. It's better that way.

EXT. CHURCH OF SAN GIORGIO, VIA DI PANTANETO - DAY

The bell tolls, as Sienese bustle past.

INT. CHURCH OF SAN GIORGIO RECTORY

A serious PRIEST in a suit stares across his desk, on which a STATUE OF A UNICORN (*Leocorno*) sits prominently.

PRIEST

... And you would do this, my son?

John sits there, even more serious than the priest.

JOHN

Depends on what you're paying, father.

EXT. CHURCH OF SAN GIORGIO - A MINUTE LATER

John emerges, pulls out his placemat. Next to "*Block Owl for Goose*" he scribbles "*Do same for Unicorn - \$2000.*" He grins... it's nice to get paid twice for doing the job once.

INT. GELATERIA (ICE CREAM SHOP) - EVENING

A GANGLY YOUNG GUY, acting like a bad secret agent, backs "discreetly" into John, slips him a folded NOTE, then pretends to choose a gelato flavor while John opens it.

John reads, "*Help Shell, block Ram, \$1,000,*" then nods. Gangly Guy actually does the nose touch from "*The Sting.*" John tries not to laugh as he returns it. But deal done.

EXT. VIA DI SAN QUIRICO (STREET) - EVENING

People are out strolling, it's *passeggiata*. John walks, enjoying a gelato, feeling in control. He takes a turn down an alley, but gets a funny feeling. No one's here. He keeps going, now wary, then rounds another corner...

And there are FOUR BRAWNY MEN, ten feet away, glaring. John looks up, sees the street light bracket is... a snail.

He looks back at the men, and runs. On the cobblestones, his dropped *gelato* splats. Feet sprint past it...

ERALDO BARZANTI (O.S., PRE-LAP)
It's because you've done a bad thing...

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR - LATER

A crowd of *Tartuchini* sit, waiting, listening to Eraldo, who examines John's bruises (visible but not horrible).

ERALDO BARZANTI
... You escaped your bodyguards. But the bastard Snails do not beat up just anyone. It means you are legitimate. They think you are to be reckoned with.
(with a fist pump)
It is great news.

He turns, shows John's face to everyone. A cheer goes up. John sits there, impassive, giving away nothing. Yet he's getting away with *everything*. And that makes him smile...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. IL CASALE - DAY

Three weeks have passed. John's place looks different.

More like a quaint farmhouse. The roof has been repaired, tiles in place. The windows have been fixed. And the front door has been re-hung, made obvious as it opens...

... And John steps out. He looks a little different, too. He should look calmer-- hell, he just spent a month in Tuscany. But he just looks harder. More determined.

He sees GianFranco and the Marios standing around a cement mixer, smoking, doing nothing. John gives a wave, calls:

JOHN
Macchina non funziona?

GianFranco nods, points to his *panini*. John rolls his eyes, then sees Sabatino in the ravine, hauling his 5,237th stone.

He watches the devoted old man a moment, then turns away.

EXT. ESPRESSO BAR - SIENA - DAY

John enters, and the ESPRESSO GUY knows his order.

ESPRESSO GUY
Doppio espresso, Gianni?

John nods, goes to a table, opens his "deal placemat"...
 The scribbles... "*Help Shell... Block Ram, Caterpillar,
 Owl... Whip Eagle guy....*" The columns of numbers...

"WIN 30 + 10 + 8 + 3 + 2 + 1 = \$54,000" and
 "NOT WIN 10 + 8 + 3 + 2 + 1 = \$24,000." Below that
 "OWE Primo \$50,000 + fees, taxes, workers \$3800 = \$53,800."

John writes "WIN = \$200 profit." He stares at it, hardly
 thrilled. Then he hears a familiar voice behind him...

ERALDO BARZANTI (O.S.)
Uno espresso, per favore.

... and John quickly folds up his placemat as Eraldo comes
 over, sits down. He smiles at John, who smiles back. But
 it's stiff, even uncomfortable between them.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 I have not seen much of you.

JOHN
 I've been around.

The Espresso Guy brings their white cups and saucers.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 (re: John's espresso)
 Enjoy it. Then please, come with me.

Eraldo is polite. John drains his espresso and nods, wary.

EXT. VIA DI CITTÀ (STREET) - DAY

It's John and Eraldo, like their first walk, except they
 say nothing. Eraldo, however, still nods to everyone else.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Buongiorno, Signora Mariani.

Signora Mariani, a nice middle aged lady, smiles and nods.

SIGNORA MARIANI
Buongiorno, Eraldo. Signore Wyatt.

John rates his own greeting now. He returns it, stilted.

JOHN
Signora Mariani.

Turns out John knows other people, too. There's the *Onda capitano*, raising his eyebrows at John-- John stiffens.

Now Volpi passes, sees John, covers his face, quickly breaks into that lame trot of his. The *Leocorno* Priest nods, ever serious. Even Gangly Guy passes by, doing his not-so-subtle nose touch from "The Sting." John rolls his eyes, keeps on.

Finally, Eraldo gestures John to a door. Thank God.

INT. TARTUCA CONTRADA MUSEUM - DAY

An impressive place. John follows Eraldo in, looks around. Everywhere there are pictures of the Palio, citations, flags, silver plates, even mannequins wearing *Tartuca* costumes from different time periods.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You have worked very hard. You have
learned very much. But you do not
yet understand what is at stake here.

He points to the PALIO BANNERS that hang everywhere.

ERALDO BARZANTI (CONT'D)
We have won only 42 times in 700
years. Only 42 occasions of honor.

JOHN
42's better than nothin'.

Eraldo sighs. He's not quite getting through. Then he beckons John over, and leads him through a door into--

THE TARTUCA COUNCIL HALL

-- With the huge table, seen the night of the thunderstorm.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Please, sit.

He gestures to a chair. Opposite that chair, and looking now as surprised and off-balance as John is... Francesca. They trade awkward glances as John takes a seat. Then...

Eraldo takes the head chair. Looks at them both.

ERALDO BARZANTI
I want to know how we are doing.

Francesca shoots a look to John, who says nothing.

FRANCESCA

Actually our chances aren't bad.
Chiocciola's fantino is a novice.
Pantera's is a seasoned veteran but--

ERALDO BARZANTI

No. How are we doing, my daughter?
 You worry about me. Now I am
 worried about you. You have been
 different these days. Tell me why.

Francesca says nothing, then shoots another look to John.

FRANCESCA

Did you put him up to this?

JOHN

Why would I do that?

ERALDO BARZANTI

(to John)

I am worried about you, too.

JOHN

... What?

ERALDO BARZANTI

You have also been different. There
 is no joy in you. How can you ride
 for us and win, if you have no joy?

JOHN

(to Francesca)

Did you put him up to this?

FRANCESCA

Why would I do that?

JOHN

(back to Eraldo)

I've done everything you've asked.

ERALDO BARZANTI

And now I am asking you to tell me
 what is truly happening. Inside.

JOHN

So, now the job description includes
 spilling my guts? You want too
 much. Sorry, not gonna play today.

John stands, leaves. Francesca follows. Eraldo stops her.

ERALDO BARZANTI
È giusto okay.

But Francesca goes after John anyway.

EXT. VIA DI CITTÀ (STREET) - MOMENTS LATER

Francesca comes out onto the street, looking for John.
 She sees him down the street, and hurries after him.

EXT. VIA DI DONZELLE (ALLEY) - DAY

A dark alleyway. Francesca catches up to John, spins him.

FRANCESCA
 You can't just walk out. At least
 not on him. Not while I'm around.

JOHN
 Look, I'll ride for you people. But
 I'm not gonna cry or tap dance or
 whatever the hell it was he wanted.

FRANCESCA
 He has trouble being direct. He
 wants to know about the other deals
 you've made. The little extra ones.
 (as John barely flinches)
 I told you it was a small town.

Caught, John just stands there. Then covers with bluster.

JOHN
 So, you gonna take 'em away from me?
 Is that it now? Make me play it
 straight? Lemme tell you something.
 Nobody plays it straight here. All
 your talk about tradition and rules.
 Hell, tradition only counts as long
 as it doesn't get in your way, and
 if you people don't like a rule, you
 ignore it. This place is the Old
 West. And I'm a cowboy. I get it.

He's in her face. And she just looks at him, so calm.

FRANCESCA
 John, we always tell the jockeys not
 to make extra deals. But we know
 they always do. It's been that way
 for 700 years. We accept it. As
 long as you try to win. Okay?

John blinks, deflated. She eyes him, almost amused.

FRANCESCA

You know, you hold on so tight to this tiny little view of the world. Bad, good. Black, white. Someday, really, you're going to have to let it go.

With that, she turns and walks off, looking back just to flash John her winning smile, that vision. Now, John just stands there, a doof, not sure what he's doing anymore...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - DAY

It's packed for the horse lottery. The crowd faces the *Palazzo Pubblico*, where suited officials are on a platform, along with some folks in 14th century costumes. Everyone directs their attention to ten temporary stalls, where...

... TEN HORSES wait, numbers painted on their hindquarters, including Gemma, held by Giulio (looking goofy in costume).

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR - SAME

John sits at the bar, by himself, with a glass of Chianti. He turns to Enrico, playing cards with Nataleo at a table.

JOHN

Think we'll get a good one?

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO

Tension is everywhere as, on the platform, a man-- the MAYOR-- is handed a slip of paper, which he reads.

MAYOR

Velenosa. *Giraffa*.

A CHEER goes up from what must be *GIRAFFINI*, as Volpi is there. They circle the horse, Velenosa, happily singing a contrada song as Velenosa's GROOM leads her away.

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR

John strains to hear what's happening, but can't. Then a man enters the bar. Enrico and Nataleo look up, go back to their cards. The man is in his 50's, a quiet, gentle looking fellow. He comes over, sits in John's "space."

John looks at him, nods. The Quiet Man nods back.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO

The Mayor reads another slip of paper.

MAYOR
Zullina. *Pantera*.

No cheers from *Pantera*. Just murmurs of disappointment. The *Panterini*, visibly bummed, follow Zullina away.

INT. TARTUCA CLUBROOM BAR

It's getting uncomfortable. Finally, the Quiet Man speaks.

QUIET MAN
I just wanted to say thank you.

His English is good enough. John is certainly listening.

JOHN
For what?

QUIET MAN
For my sister's happiness. When she was 34 she was made a young widow, and she felt her life was over. So she went to America to try and forget. It is funny, when Americans want romance, they often think of Italy. When Italians want to forget romance, they always think of America. But it was there she met your father, and found a new life.

Wary, John eyes the Quiet Man as he gathers himself.

QUIET MAN (CONT'D)
And I just wanted you to know that he came here, knowing no one else, not speaking the language, wanting only to make my sister happy. Which he did for 20 years. Cared for her. Tried to do the right thing by her. So, for that-- for him-- thank you.

Beat. Then John nods, polite. An acceptance. Now, from outside comes the sound of horse hooves, and John runs out--

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI (STREET)

-- And sees, coming down the street, Gemma, led by Giulio, followed by a group of scarf-sporting *Tartuchini*. Eraldo is out front of the group. John runs to him, upbeat.

JOHN
We got Gemma? It's destiny.

John pumps a fist until he realizes the *Tartuchini* do not look thrilled. He stops. A HARD-LOOKING MAN steps up.

HARD-LOOKING MAN
She runs the wrong way.

John looks to Eraldo for some support here...

JOHN
But... it's destiny.

... But Eraldo just tosses John his jockey uniform. They do look like wild pajamas, in *Tartuca* blue and yellow.

ERALDO BARZANTI
The days of the Palio begin. Now is the first trial race. Get ready.

INT. PALAZZO PUBBLICO - CORTILE DEL PODESTA - DAY

John and Eraldo are with the OTHER JOCKEYS, all together for the first time. Some look experienced, some look like novices. All stare at John. All whisper among themselves.

Then they all take to their horses...

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - PALIO TRACK - TRIAL RACE

... And start the walk that precedes every race, practice or real, halfway around the track to the start (and it's clear which are trials because there are few spectators).

One veteran *FANTINO* (the seasoned rider for Panther) sidles up to John, trying to psych out the *Americano*.

PANTHER FANTINO
You should know, I am to block you.
And I always do what I am paid to.

JOHN
Good for you. How much you getting?

PANTHER FANTINO
None of your-- a lot-- four million.

JOHN
Shit, I need a calculator here.

PANTHER FANTINO
Dollars, two thousand. But don't
talk anymore. There are lip readers.

JOHN
There are not.

PANTHER FANTINO
There are. Stop talking about it.

JOHN
Well, they don't lip read English.

PANTHER FANTINO
Oh. You are right.
(then, casually)
So how are you enjoying Siena?

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - THE STARTING GATE - A MINUTE LATER

The STARTER loads John in. He looks for the Snail
fantino. Discreetly, he leans to the *fantino* on his left.

JOHN
Snail? *Chiocciola*?

The *fantino*, annoyed, jerks a thumb. John looks, sees the
scared novice SNAIL FANTINO is the *rincorsa*. Or was...

... Because he has rushed the rope, the Starter has
dropped it, and the first trial race has begun. John
gallops after the others, valiantly trying to catch up.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Eraldo stands with Giulio, Enrico, Nataleo, and Francesca.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Là va.
There he goes.

ON THE PALIO TRACK

John hits the first turn at San Martino, and promptly
falls off, rolling to a hard stop against the mattresses.

IN THE BLEACHERS

FRANCESCA
Là è andato.
There he went.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

John pulls up in his Ape, Nataleo and Enrico in the back. Sabatino is there, sweating in the moonlight. He beckons.

John drives the Ape closer. Sabatino points to the bridge, indicating John should drive across. It's finished. John does, motoring across the 40-foot stone span in smooth style. On the house side, he stops, climbs out and walks back to Sabatino, who waits, proud.

Amazed, John looks at the bridge, then at Sabatino.

JOHN

It was soon.

Sabatino nods, humble. Then he points to John, excited.

SABATINO

Tartuca. Fantino.

(grins, pumps a fist)

Bene. Molto bene.

His enthusiasm is more unnerving to John than helpful.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - PALIO TRACK - TRIAL RACE

John flies around the track, now riding well in traffic.

AT THE FINISH-- he's gunning for it hard, but then-- the novice Snail Fantino surges from John's blind side to win.

John realizes what has happened, and sags. He looks to...

... Francesca and Eraldo, who just swallows. Mortified.

EXT. VIA TITO SARROCCHI - DAY

The *Tartuca* entourage walks back to turtle territory.

JOHN

It was an accident.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Even in practice, second can never happen. But now you have learned.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

John lies there. That music again. Finally, he jumps up.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

He comes out, half dressed, jumps into the Ape (now parked close to the house) and starts it up. Nataleo and Enrico run up from the stable, in pajamas, trying to stop him.

JOHN

Get in.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NEAR VIGNANO

John drives, his head out the window, trying to track down the source of the music. It's louder here, and then...

He sees the BANNER, "*Vignano Palio Sagra di Cinghiale*" (now with a cute li'l cartoon wild boar). There are lights. Booths. A dance floor on the grass. And PEOPLE. Dozens.

NEAR THE SOCCER FIELD, John parks the Ape, climbs out. Enrico and Nataleo jump out and follow as John walks under the banner and out into the "*sagra*"...

And John is curious. There's the Woman who runs the fruit stand. And the three Marios, standing around, smoking, with THREE MRS. MARIOS. There's even Sabatino, eating a sandwich. He sees John, waves. John tepidly waves back.

Then he sees GianFranco, smiling, beckoning John over. John motions for Enrico and Nataleo to follow, and they all walk over to where GianFranco tends to a rotisserie where some tasty-looking meat turns. He points to it.

GIANFRANCO

La Macchine funzione.

He laughs, then rattles off Italian. John looks to Enrico.

ENRICO

He says every day he offers you some of his sandwich. You always say no.

That catches John off guard. He has to think back.

JOHN

I thought he was just telling me he was eating.

ENRICO

And, he says, ever since you moved into *Il Casale*, he has wondered when you would visit one of these feasts. He knows you can hear the music.

JOHN

I... didn't know I was invited.

ENRICO

Invitations are for guests. You have become a local. A somewhat strange local, but one all the same.
(as GianFranco speaks again)
He says, lastly, to have a sandwich.

GianFranco hands John a sandwich. He bites into it.

ENRICO (CONT'D)

It's *Cinghiale*. Wild boar. You like?
(off John's expected nod)
Next week is *bistecca alla griglia*.
Steak of the grill. You will come?

John just stares. Doesn't know what to say...

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - PALIO TRACK - TRIAL RACE

John's not in the hunt in this practice at all. At the finish, he crosses fifth. Slowing Gemma, he sags.

EXT. VIA SAN PIETRO (STREET) - EVENING

John, still in his uniform, walks beside Eraldo in silence. Just when Eraldo is about to speak--

JOHN

Don't say it.

ERALDO BARZANTI

But it will be fine.

John nods, feeling horrible. Then he realizes they are walking under strings of festive lights. A murmur builds ahead, and they round a corner into the middle of--

EXT. VIA TOMMASO PENDOLA (STREET) - NIGHT

-- THE FINAL DINNER. A cheer goes up. The flag corps toss their flags into the air. The bugle corps break into

a march. *Tartuchini* crowd around John, tousle his hair, slap his back. Old Women kiss his cheek. It's too much.

This time at the long, long tables the 400 people are all staring at John, all beaming, clapping, happy.

Eraldo leads him to the head table, seats him in the place of honor. Around him, KIDS jump up and down, giddy.

TARTUCA KIDS
Gianni! Gianni!

The Teenage Guy catches John's eye, gives him thumbs up. John tries to return it, but someone puts a glass of Chianti in his hand. That steaming pasta plate appears.

John looks around at the beaming faces, then digs in and--

-- That causes another cheer. John spies the Widow, in her finest black. She frowns, mouths... "*Malocchio*." John gets it, nods, mimes whipping someone furiously. The Widow glares at him a beat, then breaks into a big smile.

LATER

The meal has ended. The kids are running around the tables, playing "Palio," little kids as *fantini* riding piggyback on the bigger kids. Laughing and loving it.

Finally, John stands from his empty plate, and moves through the crowd, nodding to everyone who says some Italian version of "Go get 'em, tiger." John looks around, searching the faces until he finds... Francesca.

She is at the other long table, dressed in a beautiful, elegant dress. Hair swept up. Still a vision. Then...

LITTLE BOY (O.S.)
Gianni...?

John looks down, sees a LITTLE BOY holding a blue and yellow *Tartuca* scarf, motioning for John to take it. John does, ties it around his neck, then smiles nice at the kid.

JOHN
Grazie.

The boy breaks into a huge grin, then runs away. John watches him go, then makes his way to Francesca who, as he nears, realizes he is coming over, and stands, smiling...

... John takes her in. She is truly lovely.

JOHN
Feels like I'm gonna be sacrificed.

FRANCESCA
That's why it's called The Last Supper.

John just looks at her stunning dress, realizes:

JOHN
Is that the dress?

FRANCESCA
I don't get too many opportunities
to wear it. Plus, as it turns out,
my father actually likes it now.

John smirks. Francesca eyes him, and then:

FRANCESCA
I think you should know the real
reason we try so hard to win.
Forget everything that's been said.
Forget honor, or duty. Forget my
father. Forget getting beat up.
Even forget the money, if you can.
(gesturing around)
This is the reason. *Per forza e per*
amore. For strength and for love.

John looks around, at the kids, the old men, the widows,
the teenagers, at all the people he has come to know.
Finally, he comes back to Francesca. And busts up.

JOHN
It is not.

Francesca shrugs it off, laughing herself.

FRANCESCA
It sounded good.

Now they just look at each other. God, they like each
other. And just when they might lean in and kiss...

ERALDO BARZANTI (O.S.)
It is time.

They turn. Eraldo's there, all business. He nods to John.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You are up.

JOHN
What? Up where? To do what?

ERALDO BARZANTI
You must make a speech.

Eraldo leads him back to the head table, as John panics.

JOHN
No, I don't have to do that.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Yes, you do. You are our *fantino*.
It is standard. And you must make
sure you do not say too much, but do
not say too little. Do not promise
anything you can't actually deliver,
but you must be enthusiastic. Go.

He stops leading John, turns him around and...

... Everyone is staring at him. All 400 *Tartuchini*.
John stands there a beat. Dumbstruck. Eraldo nudges him.

JOHN
Good evening.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Buona sera.

Polite nods from everyone. John draws a total blank.

JOHN
I'd like to say I'll... I'll...

Suddenly Eraldo starts "translating," but he goes on in
rapid fire Italian for a good 20 seconds. People nod,
laugh, then break into thunderous applause. John knows an
exit when he sees one, smiles, and bows from the waist.

Then he turns and walk away, Eraldo beside him.

ERALDO BARZANTI
Well said.

JOHN
Thank you.

ERALDO BARZANTI
May I ask you something?
(off John's wary nod)
You have never said why you quit
(more...)

ERALDO BARZANTI (CONT'D)
riding horses bareback, even though
you were four times a champion.

John stops, takes a long beat. Then says simply...

JOHN
I didn't quit. They kicked me out.
I was in a slump. Got afraid I'd
lost my touch, so one show I rigged
an extra loop in the cinch. Made it
so I couldn't fall off. It worked,
and so I kept doing it. Got so I
couldn't go on without it. But then
they caught me. Blackballed me.
Banned me for life in six states, on
two rodeo circuits. I haven't been
on a horse since. Until now.

ERALDO BARZANTI
So. You cheated.

John nods, ashamed. Eraldo bursts out laughing.

ERALDO BARZANTI
You will do fine. Goodnight, John.

EXT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

John parks his Ape. Enrico and Nataleo jump out, head for
the stable for the night. Everyone trades polite nods.

INT. IL CASALE - NIGHT

John lights a candle, and carries it down the hallway.

INT. LIVING ROOM

He places the candle on the mantle, starts to unsnap his
shirt as, behind him, in the middle of the room...

... A man drops down from the ceiling.

John hears him land, and spins. It's Carlo.

CARLO
Evening, John.

John just nods. Carlo eyes the hole in the ceiling.

CARLO (CONT'D)
I thought it was the best entrance.
Plus, I can't be seen here. I'm the
enemy, you know. Hey, pretty scarf.

John fingers the Tartuca scarf around his neck.

CARLO

They send a little kid to give it to you? Sure, they know their business. They do the bit of "catching" you at your extra deals, then telling you it's okay, they trust you? That's a good one. Bet they did it well.

That rattles John a bit. He watches Carlo circle the room.

JOHN

What do you want, Carlo?

CARLO

I want to make you an offer. One of those super special secret offers.

JOHN

Thought you didn't go for that stuff.

CARLO

Oh, I lied. About that. About everything really. Mostly about how I'm at peace with Francesca. I still have "issues," darn it. It's not that I want her back. No, I'm not naive enough to think she'd ever go for that. But I want those who helped her leave me... punished.

JOHN

And they are...?

CARLO

Just one man, really.

John thinks about it. Realizes.

JOHN

You're kidding.

CARLO

No. The damnable Eraldo Barzanti. See, your father helped Francesca and I get married, so I was always rather grateful to him--

JOHN

Have to stand in line for that.

CARLO

-- But Eraldo helped Francesca leave me. Told her she'd be okay, helped her with the divorce, convinced her to go away to law school to "heal." I've been plotting his humiliation ever since. He's going to pay for that.

JOHN

Sounds kinda medieval, Carlo.

CARLO

I don't care how it sounds. I just care that it happens. And now.

John thinks about it. Realizes.

JOHN

... Second. Shit.

Carlo has circled the room to the mantle, lifts up the photo John tipped face down. He look to John, "sincere."

CARLO

So cute.

(then)

I'll pay you enough to make it worth your while. Enough to get you out of Siena in style.

John scoffs, shakes his head. But he doesn't say "no."

CARLO

I'm talking 100 thousand, John.

JOHN

C'mon. What is that, 50 bucks?

CARLO

100 thousand dollars.

John just stares. Carlo knows he's got him on the hook.

CARLO

See, you're gonna want revenge, too. They're playing you, John. Eraldo's made his own deals on top of yours, so as long as you "try real hard," he makes money no matter what, but they don't think you can win this.

JOHN

So what. I probably can't.

CARLO

But they're afraid you'll try and just miss, and do the unspeakable by accident. So Eraldo's made other deals... deals against you, John.

John says nothing, can't believe this. Carlo understands.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Tomorrow you see if I'm lying, and at the start I'll give you a sign.

Carlo brings up his hand, taps his forehead twice.

CARLO (CONT'D)

You give the sign back to me and everyone will stay out of your way. You'll come in second. You'll be rich. And you'll be very happy.

Carlo starts down the hallway, then pauses to turn back.

CARLO

Don't forget.

He taps his forehead twice, grins, and leaves.

INT. IL CASALE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Morning. John is asleep. Then the rooster walks over, pecks his forehead. John rouses, sits up. Eyes the bird.

JOHN

You're back.

(then)

What does that mean?

INT. PALAZZO PUBBLICO - REGISTRATION AREA - DAY

The registration of the jockeys. Eraldo and John (Eraldo in a suit, John in uniform) are in line for Team *Tartuca*. John eyes Eraldo, who smiles at him. But... it's a tight smile. Wary. And it makes John swallow, tight himself.

Then they get to the registration desk. As it has been for centuries, it is a simple wooden table, with two OFFICIALS sitting at it, pen and parchment in hand.

OFFICIAL

Tartuca. Nome di fantino.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 You have to give them a name. Not
 your own, a race name. "*Americano*"?

JOHN
 No. *Il Pagliaccio*. The Clown.

Eraldo says nothing. It is recorded. They step aside.

OFFICIAL
Chiocciola. Nome di fantino.

Carlo was behind them. He steps up, beckons, and out from the darkness of the inner courtyard strides... not the scared novice... but Massimo. As strapping as ever.

Eraldo gapes, then whispers to John, disgusted.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 So, he has healed fast, has he?

Massimo looks at Eraldo, rubs his fingers together... "\$"
 Eraldo burns. Carlo eyes Eraldo and John, poker-faced.

INT. TARTUCA CHAPEL - DAY

Latin echoes. A PRIEST invokes the mass.

John stands there, head bowed. Next to him stands Gemma. Inside the church. The *Tartuchini* are here to bless their sacred beast and her brave rider. While the Latin drones, John looks up, nervous. Next to him, Eraldo whispers.

ERALDO BARZANTI
 If the horse makes the poop in the
 church, it is considered good luck.

John finds that odd. Then he looks around, finds something more odd. No one has their head bowed, no one is looking at the Priest. They're all looking at Gemma's hindquarters and, sure enough... her tail goes up.

Presumably, the road apples drop, because a CHEER goes up. Even the Priest pumps a fist. Then he snaps the bible shut, and the mass is over. Everyone starts out.

Giulio takes Gemma, leads her away. Eraldo motions for John to follow, but he holds up a hand.

JOHN
 Give me a minute. For... prayers.

Eraldo finds that odd, but relents. John takes a moment, then turns to walk out, seeing Enrico and Nataleo ahead, waiting. He passes the confessional... and he ducks in.

INSIDE THE CONFESSIONAL BOOTH

John just sits there a beat. He gulps, then opens his palm where he's inked a "cheat sheet" "Block Owl, Ram, Caterpillar. Help Shell. Whip Eagle." And... "100,000"

John stares at it. Looking more lost than thrilled. Then he hears rustling behind the priest's screen.

It's Francesca. Through the gauze she looks like Sophia Loren, in a scarf and sunglasses. She's cold and curt.

FRANCESCA

I know about Carlo.

JOHN

I know about you.

FRANCESCA

You don't know what you know.

JOHN

I know that in my tiny little world, you either play or get played. And, lady, I don't get played. Got that?

FRANCESCA

You think the opposite of being betrayed is to betray. The opposite of betrayal is loyalty.

JOHN

Listen to you. Loyalty...

(then)

I'm doing what I have to do.

Francesca pulls off her sunglasses, takes a new tack.

FRANCESCA

You've always done what you had to do. Had to play, or be played, of course. Had to hate. Had to leave. But today... today you could do what you want to do. What is it you want to do, John? Do you even know?

Then she leaves the booth. John just sits there, burning.

INT. PALAZZO PUBBLICO - CORTILE DEL PODESTA - SIENA - DAY

The horses are at their "posts," pillars where they are tethered before the race. The jockeys stand next to them, including the Panther *Fantino*, who coughs theatrically at John, then leans down to tie his shoe. John leans down next to him, lamely pretending to "tie" his cowboy boot.

JOHN

What.

PANTHER FANTINO

First it was two thousand to block.
It has just become ten thousand to
knock you off completely. How about
you fall on your own, save me the
trouble, I cut you in for half. It
may be the only money you see today.

John says nothing, just scoffs. The Panther Fantino shrugs, stands, moves off. John calls after, too loud.

JOHN

I used to do this for a living, pal.
I'm wise to the last minute psych out.

Now everyone stares. John just gulps.... psyched out.

EXT. PIAZZA DEL CAMPO - DAY

The *fantini* exit the *Cortile* out into the *Campo*. The CROWD, 20,000 STRONG, ROARS. John, third out, gapes.

A policeman hands him his whip, the same as the others. He hefts it. It'll do some damage. So will the others.

Then the mortar blasts. Giulio is there, with Gemma. John nods to him, then hauls himself onboard and now...

ON THE TRACK

John, on Gemma, walks around the track, soaking it in. It's as close to being a gladiator as he will ever get.

The other *fantini*-- coarse, hard men from Maremma and Corsica-- even they appreciate the purity of the moment.

AT THE MOSSA

The Starter loads the *fantini* into the gate. A rope in front of them, a rope behind. As each horse goes in, its *contrada* erupts in cheers and song. It's deafening.

John goes in fourth. Panther is second. He looks over.

PANTHER FANTINO

So? Easy way? Or the hard way?

John ignores him, looks to the bleachers, to the *Tartuchini* section...

The Teenage Guy gives him thumbs up, nudges Teenage Girl, who blows John a kiss. Enrico, Nataleo, Lorenzo... The Widow... The *Vignano* folk, GianFranco, the Marios, Sabatino... Faces John knows now, all looking at him...

... All hoping he will do his best. Then he hears...

MASSIMO (O.S.)

Get on with it, *Americano*.

John looks up the line. Massimo, sixth in, sneers at him.

MASSIMO (CONT'D)

Let our boss know you are ready.

John looks to the Judges' Stand, where the *capitani* view the race. He finds Carlo, who brings up his hand and taps his forehead, twice. John doesn't respond. Instead...

He looks two seats down from Carlo, where Eraldo looks right at him. Then Eraldo looks away. Now, Francesca steps up next to Eraldo, staring at John, her face stone.

On the track, the Panther Fantino leans up, impatient.

PANTHER FANTINO

Last chance. What do you want to do?

John looks back to the *Tartuchini* section. And the KID. Wide-eyed. Wearing his scarf. It's almost over the top.

Now, John looks at Francesca again. And it becomes this... moment. Just the two of them. No one else. Then she slowly raises an eyebrow... in her sly, amused way...

Well...?

And now John relaxes. He looks over to Carlo who, by now, is glaring and tapping his forehead again, fully miffed.

And John slowly reaches up a hand, but instead of tapping his own forehead, he just extends his middle finger...

In the Judges' Stand, Carlo swears a blue streak. Francesca just smiles. Takes her father's arm, pleased.

On the track, John shoots a grin to the Panther Fantino.

JOHN

Know what? I wanna win.

Massimo hears that. Leans out, nearly spits this:

MASSIMO

You Americans. You think because now you want to win, you will?

JOHN

Not really. I just think I have ass.

Chuckles from a few *fantini*. John grins, feeling cool, but when he checks his "cheat sheet," it's gone, his palm wet with sweat. He regrips, eyes the fantino to either side.

JOHN

How about a thousand dollars each, you boys give me some room?

They answer him by moving in closer, hemming him in. John nods, "o-kay," and then somehow it gets more tense...

The Starter is ready. The crowd is going crazy. The *rincorsa* is about to run in. John looks back, looks ahead, steadies Gemma, then leans forward as suddenly...

... The rope drops. And they're off.

IT'S THE PALIO

Moving with John, the sound is incredible. The thundering hooves, snorts of the horses, grunts of the *fantini*. And the roaring crowd. It's like 20,000 people in ecstasy...

John, however, is in hell. Panther immediately starts with the whipping. Stinging blows. John winces, dodges, then throws Gemma to the outside to escape the attack.

They're heading into the *San Martino* turn. John has a bad line, and Panther knows it. He drives John further out.

It's a pack of four going around the sharp turn. Tower goes down, doing an end-over-end tumble into the mattresses. He leaps up, knowing he's busted for selling out, starts running away. His employers give chase.

John drives hard, catches Owl, blocks him to the outside.

IN THE BLEACHERS, Skinny Guy yells, thrilled. **IN ANOTHER BLEACHER SECTION**, the *Leocorno* Priest pumps a fist, happy.

On the track, John catches Panther going into *Casato*. Panther tries to drive him outside again, but John suddenly pulls Gemma up behind Panther, dives inside.

By doing this, John blocks Ram, who was coming up hard. Ram panics, tries to cut it sharper, ends up falling off.

IN THE BLEACHERS, Gangly Guy jumps up and down, giddy.

Coming around to the finish for the end of Lap One, Panther and John are still neck and neck, tied for fourth. Eagle is in third. Massimo second. Goose is the leader.

LAP TWO

On the straightaway, John lets Gemma run. And she's fast. Eagle is running hard, but suddenly John is next to him, whip up. He lashes into Eagle, making it look good.

JOHN

Sorry, I need the money.

IN THE BLEACHERS, the Widow screams to the Eagle folks.

WIDOW

Quello è per sughero del vino, fori dell'asino!
That's for the wine cork, assholes!

On the track, John dives around *San Martino*, but the whip deal slowed him. Still, there's only Massimo and Goose ahead of him. He heads into *Casato* with a good line but--

-- Panther has caught him, on the inside-- forces him wide-- John has nowhere to go-- heads for the bleachers-- he tries to turn. She does, but John does not.

John flies off Gemma. Sails through the air. WHAM. He lands in the bleachers. Sienese and tourists scatter.

... This is the moment of the race.

IN THE JUDGES' STAND, Francesca shuts her eyes, wincing.

BACK IN THE BLEACHERS, John's dazed. He fights to his feet, looks back to the track, sees...

Gemma is running the wrong way.

But John's not done yet. He whistles.

ON THE TRACK, Gemma wheels around and runs back towards him. John scrambles along the bleachers, jumping over people as he goes, focused only on Gemma.

JOHN

Excuse me. Coming through.

He leaps to the bleacher rail and tightrope runs that. Then, with Gemma alongside, he jumps back onto her.

... And he's back in the race.

IN THE JUDGES' STAND, Francesca gapes, loving this.

ON THE TRACK, it only took seconds. John's now in fourth. But the field has thinned, so he's not in traffic anymore.

So he rides.

It's blisteringly fast. He passes Goose (who has faded) at the starting line, and has only Panther and Massimo.

THE FINAL LAP

Panther is about to come up behind Massimo at *San Martino*, when suddenly John is there, cutting low on the inside...

... the same trick Panther pulled on him. And Panther can't make the turn, goes sailing, smacks the mattresses hard, flopping over them and tumbling out of sight.

On the track John closes in on Massimo. Gemma wants it. John wants it. Ahead, Massimo looks back. He doesn't.

John catches him just before *Casato*. And that's when the Massimo starts whipping. It's vicious. John realizes he dropped his whip somewhere, and will have to just take it.

Going around *Casato*, it's too much. John nearly flies off again, causing the same folks in the bleachers to gasp and scramble, but John manages to somehow stay with Massimo.

As they close in on the finish, Massimo is raining blows down on John. To his face, his hands. Brutal. Then he goes to work on Gemma. To her head, her ears. Awful.

And now Gemma starts to falter. John knows she's hurting. He looks ahead to the finish. Gemma is slowing badly...

There is no way he will come in anything but second.

IN THE TARTUCHINI BLEACHERS, all jaws have dropped.

IN THE JUDGES' STAND, Carlo grins, loving this. Eraldo covers his face, defeated. Francesca sags, looking lost.

WITH JOHN, ON GEMMA

He makes a decision, leans down, whispers in Gemma's ear.

JOHN
Go, girl.

And then he does something very odd. He pushes off...

... AND IN SLOW MOTION...

John tumbles off the back of Gemma, arms out, limp.

Like a soldier taking a bullet. Backwards he goes as...
ALL SOUND FALLS AWAY. Only John's breathing remains.
In, out. Measured. As he goes upside down...

FROM JOHN'S POV - STILL IN SLOW MOTION

The view rolls from the sky above to the horses behind him (upside down) to the earth below, rushing up at him and...

BACK IN REAL TIME

Sound violently returns as John slams hard into the dirt.

He rolls four times in a split second, wrenching his shoulder, smacking his head, finally coming to a stop and quickly climbing to his knees, looking, hoping, praying...

WHILE AHEAD, AT THE FINISH LINE

Massimo stares, helpless, as the riderless, lighter Gemma inches past him by the proverbial nose. He can't believe it. And no one else can, it seems, because...

AROUND THE CAMPO

For the first time in centuries, the piazza goes completely silent. But then the mortar blasts and...

... The *Tartuca* sort it out. A win is a win. They throw up their arms, and a ROAR GOES UP.

IN THE JUDGES' STAND, Carlo slumps, destroyed.

ON THE TRACK, IN THE PANDEMONIUM

Giulio grabs Gemma and grins at John, who is instantly swarmed. People slap his back, shake his hand, laugh, cry, raise their hands to Heaven above. Then...

There's Francesca, amazed at John, who can only shrug.

JOHN

Wasn't exactly what I wanted to do.

Now, Eraldo pushes through the crowd until he is next to Francesca. John eyes them both, sobering, wondering...

JOHN (CONT'D)

But did you guys really...?

Eraldo turns to Francesca, who gives her father's shrug. It's a Sienese non-answer, and it makes John laugh...

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hell, I woulda done the same thing.

ERALDO BARZANTI

Of course. You are *Tartuca*.

Now the *Tartuchini* surround him, lift him up onto their shoulders, and start to carry him away. As they break out into a rousing *Tartuca* song, John looks back at Eraldo and Francesca, and flashes his own winning smile. A vision...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. IL CASALE - DAY

Francesca's Vespa motors down John's dusty road, across his beautiful new stone bridge, and right up to...

John's oak tree, where he sits, his arm in a sling, some scrapes on his face. She climbs off, eyes him. He stands, wincing a bit, then walks over to her.

JOHN

I was hoping I'd see you.

FRANCESCA

Everybody was wondering how you were.

JOHN

I'm fine.

He comes over to her, closer. She turns to the house. They both look at it a beat. It's almost a nice place.

JOHN
It's still gonna take a lotta work.

FRANCESCA
Sure will.

It's about them as much as the house. And John falters.

JOHN
I don't know if I can do this. I
mean, really... can I stay here?

Francesca just looks at him, patient.

FRANCESCA
You can stay for lunch, can't you?

Now John looks at her. Really looks at her. And smiles.

JOHN
Yeah. I can stay for lunch.

FROM THE WIDER VIEW

It's Tuscany. The rolling hills, the cypress trees.
Just gorgeous. And there, beside an old farm house...

.. Stands a man. And a woman.

FADE OUT