

THE RIDER

Written by

Chloé Zhao

I/E. FLIP CAM / CELL PHONE FOOTAGE

The Badlands of South Dakota. Young Indian cowboys at the Great Plains rodeos, on the Pine Ridge reservation. At parties in motel rooms, on the road. Harsh, raw and wild.

BRADY, 21 years old, riding saddle bronc at various rodeos. A final ride shows the near fatal moment when he is bucked off and trampled beneath the horse, sustaining a devastating head injury. The crowd gasps as people run to help the young man lying crumpled on the ground...

I/E. HOSPITAL/CORRAL (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Blackness. Sounds of a rodeo. Heavy breathing. Blurry flashing light.

Brady's eye, blood clogged, flutters open and closes. The blurry figures of doctors above him. Blood smeared across the white pillow.

Intercutting, linking Brady's body to that of a horse's body:

Brady's scar-covered right hand twitches violently. / Horse hoofs kicking up dirt.

Doctor's hands put breathing tubes into Brady's mouth and down his throat. / Brady's hands putting a metal horse bit into a horse's mouth.

Doctor's hands putting oxygen tubes around Brady's face and up his nose. / Brady's hands putting a leather halter around a horse's face.

Nurses's hands holding Brady down, putting straps over his arms. / Brady puts a heavy saddle on the horse.

Brady struggles, trying to pull himself away from the bed. / The horse Brady is breaking struggles not to be rode, bucking, shaking, neighing loudly.

Black.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAWN

The silence of a peaceful prairie at dusk.

The sky shades of purple and orange. Short grass, rolling hills. Faint howls of coyotes in the distance.

A small figure breaks the stillness.

Brady walks across the plains wearing a hospital gown and cowboy boots. He has a gauze on the right side of his head. Fresh bruises around his eyes. He has run away from the hospital, dazed and tired from the long walk.

He splashes through a stream of mud and horse shit.

He walks towards the warm orange light of the trailer house in the distance.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Brady walks into the dim living room. The light flickers. He is pale, covered in sweat and out of breath.

BRADY

Dad?

He stands still. No answer.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LILLY'S ROOM - MORNING

Brady walks in and finds his little sister LILLY asleep. She is 14 year old, bright, spirited and on the brink of womanhood. She has Asperger's Syndrome.

BRADY

Hey Lillian... Do you know where
dad is?

Lilly is still half-asleep.

LILLY

No...

BRADY

Ok... Go back to sleep.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BRADY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Brady wakes up in bed covered in sweat.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - MORNING

Brady throws up in the toilet bowl.

He takes a handful of prescription medication.

The bloody gauze is stapled to his head. He feels the staples with his fingers, taking deep breaths and begins to pull them out of his head with a hunting knife.

The bloody staples drop onto the counter one by one.

The fresh wound, stitched together on the back of his shaven head is shocking. It looks fresh and raw.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Brady wraps his head with plastic wrap and takes a shower awkwardly, taking care that his head doesn't get wet.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Brady walks through the messy living room towards the fluorescent glow in the kitchen.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - MORNING

Brady waits as the coffee brews, spacing out.

He takes a sip of the hot coffee. Another sip.

His right hand twitches suddenly and starts to shake. Surprised, he quickly grabs it with his left hand, but drops the coffee cup. It shatters to the ground, coffee spilling across the cracked vinyl floor.

Panicked and confused, Brady shakes his hand.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - MORNING

In the blue dawn, Brady can be seen from a distance, walking from the little trailer towards the corral, where a pale horse is tied up.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - CORRAL - MORNING

Brady pets GUS, his favorite horse and oldest companion. He's a large, and magnificent, pale colored Palomino. The love between them is clear.

Brady's hand runs through Gus's smooth coat.

BRADY

It's good to see you Gus.

Brady notices a cut on Gus's leg.

BRADY (CONT'D)
What did you get yourself into?

He checks the wound nervously.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Fighting over mares again? You're
lucky it wasn't any deeper.

He wraps his arms around Gus' neck, like a child that has
been away from home too long.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - FRONT YARD - MORNING

Brady practices lassoing with a ranch rope. He's rusty,
missing the target repeatedly.

An old pick-up pulls up. WAYNE, Brady's father, an old-school
cowboy wearing a black denim jacket and cowboy hat, comes
back drunk.

Brady is not happy to see him.

WAYNE
What the hell are you doing here?

Brady ignores him.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
I seen Tanner at the bar and he
said you escaped.

Wayne giggles as he climbs out of the pick-up.

BRADY
Told you to check me out.

WAYNE
Doctors said you had to stay,
buddy.

Wayne goes up to Brady.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Give me a hug.

Brady backs away.

BRADY
Why don't you just go inside and
sober up?

WAYNE
Sober up!? Let me see you rope
that.

Wayne points at the plastic steer dummy.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Checking yourself out of the
hospital like your uncle Rowdy?

Annoyed, Brady ropes anyway and misses it again.

Wayne starts laughing.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
What the hell? Can't you rope
anymore? Maybe you should've stayed
in the hospital.

Taking a deep breath. Brady ignores him.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
You got any chew?

Brady sighs, takes his tobacco chew out of his pocket and tosses it to Wayne.

Wayne puts the chew in his mouth and walks up to Brady again.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Just give me a hug.

Brady lets his father hug him. His expression is blank.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Your hat and chaps are in the
backseat. Love ya...

Wayne staggers away into the house. Brady watches him for a moment before going back to roping again.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BRADY'S ROOM - MORNING

Brady puts his rodeo hat on the panelled wall. He takes his leather chaps and his spurs out of a black trash bag.

He sits on the edge of the bed and cleans them.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - DAY

Brady plays cards alone at the table. Wayne, sobered up, makes three microwaved burgers (Chuck Wagons).

WAYNE
Lil, Lilla! Hustle!!

Wayne calls Lilly to come eat.

LILLY
Be quiet!

Lilly walks in a small voice recorder and an apple.

WAYNE
Are you ready?

LILLY
Ready for what?

WAYNE
To eat!

LILLY
No! Just point down!

Lilly goes to sit down despite her protests.

LILLY (CONT'D)
I'm just doesn't no understand. And
I can't use to imagine that.

WAYNE
There's supper. You better have a
bit of that Chuck Wagon.

LILLY
No way! I don't like it!

Wayne puts the soggy microwaved burger in front of her.

WAYNE
Just look at it. Just look at it
for a second.

Lilly stares at it.

LILLY
No. I'm sick of it.

She pushes it away and looks over at Brady.

LILLY (CONT'D)
But I can't do anything and it's
making me all mad. Now it's a dream
and it's not a plan as well.

WAYNE

Ok, ok. I will make a deal with you. A bite of the Chuck Wagon or... wear a bra.

LILLY

But I don't like that bra ever!

WAYNE

Brady, get her that bra.

BRADY

You shouldn't try to force her to eat things she doesn't wanna eat.

WAYNE

She has to eat something and this is the only food we got.

LILLY

No way! I don't like it! Just BS!

WAYNE

You're stubborn just like your brother. Look how he ended up!

LILLY

That's dirty.

WAYNE

Big old gash on the side of his head. I told you not to go and ride that son-of-a-bitch anyway.

BRADY

Yah well, I would've won the rodeo if I had got her rode.

Wayne looks away for a moment.

LILLY

Excuse me, guys...

WAYNE

Whole point is... I told you to stay home.

Wayne chucks down his beer.

Brady stares blankly into his burger.

EXT. FAMILY CEMETORY - DAY

The Blackburn family grave yard - a cluster of wooden crosses. Some ancient and some new.

Rusted horseshoes and weathered cowboy boots are scattered around the long grass.

Brady opens the barbwire gate. A bell tied to the metal, chimes gently as he closes it behind him.

Brady prays silently in front of his mother's grave. On the wooden cross it reads: Mari Blackburn. 1963-2013. A few children's star stickers pasted on the weathered wood. Lilly's handy work.

Brady looks up at the wooden cross.

BRADY
I was tough, mom.

The sound of bell chimes and long grass blowing in the wind. Brady sits there and listens.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brady is trying to take a nap. The wound on the side of his head looks dried up. He can hear Lilly's laughter.

Lilly walks in.

LILLY
What's the matter Brady?

She sees his wound.

LILLY (CONT'D)
Oh boy. Oh poor Brady.

BRADY
Sit down, Lil.

Brady grabs her hand and pulls her to sit down. She touches his shoulders gently while inspecting his wound.

LILLY
You won't get hurt yourself...

BRADY
I didn't mean to.

LILLY
It's ok. Come here.

Lilly gives him a hug.

LILLY (CONT'D)
Listen... This time... You don't...

Lilly struggles to find her words.

LILLY (CONT'D)
You don't hurt boo boo?

BRADY
Yah.

She points at Brady's wound.

LILLY
This is a head.

BRADY
Yah.

LILLY
It's called 'skull'.

BRADY
Yah. I hurt my skull. You know what they had to do? They had to do surgery.

LILLY
Surgery?! Don't joke me.

BRADY
You know what they do when they do surgery?

LILLY
What?

BRADY
What do they do?

LILLY
Got broke.

BRADY
Yah. Broke my skull.

LILLY
Yah. Broke my skull.

BRADY

And you have to cut it with a knife. Then they put a plate in there and then they sew it up.

LILLY

But, but, but you said...

BRADY

I'm not gonna... not gonna what?

LILLY

Bucking horse anymore.

BRADY

Uh... Maybe.

Lilly looks upset.

BRADY (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna die.

LILLY

Nope! I'm not gonna die either. I'm staying alive!

BRADY

Toughest cowgirl.

LILLY

Uh huh.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The sound of crickets and horned toads in the darkness.

Brady walks down the wooden steps leading to the front door. He sits on the last step, in the dreary porch light, and spits at the dirt. He is tired but he can't sleep.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - CORRAL - DAY

Brady walks towards the corral wearing his leather rodeo jacket. His eye is still bruised and he looks tired as hell.

Wayne is trying a bay horse, while the horse's owner, FRANK, is watching. Frank is an old-school rancher cowboy with rough skin and a hook for a hand.

FRANK

He's really moving good...

BRADY
How you doing Frank?

FRANK
Hey Brady, how you doing?

BRADY
Shit... I'm healing up.

Frank checks out Brady's head.

FRANK
Looks pretty wicked there...

Wayne rides over. He's cocky and knows how much Brady hates watching other people ride his horses.

WAYNE
Frank. This idiot for a horse
trainer you have ran away from the
hospital four days after the
surgery.

FRANK
Hey... Damn kid...

WAYNE
Don't listen to anything he says.
He may not be thinking too good.

The older cowboys laughs. Brady bites his tongue.

FRANK
(to Wayne)
You got him backing up pretty good?

Wayne makes a kissing sound and starts backing the horse up.

WAYNE
Halt baba.

Wayne pulls hard. The horse takes a few steps back.

Brady watches intensively.

BRADY
You should lay off that horse's
face a little bit. Then he wouldn't
be putting his head there like a
goose.

Wayne rides around and looks at Brady patronizingly.

WAYNE

You can tell me what to do when
you're riding the son-of-a-bitch.
Too bad you went to the rodeo and
got all fucked up.

Frank watches the father and son bickering as if he has seen
it many times.

BRADY

Well I was doing what I...

WAYNE

I'm doing your work here!

BRADY

I was doing what I fucking needed
to do, aright?!

WAYNE

Well, I'm doing what I need to do.
Finishing something you should be
doing.

Brady can't argue with that and looks away.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Brady sits alone on the sofa, watching rodeo videos on TV. A
young cowboy is riding a black bucking horse.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brady is taking a nap.

The door cracks open. Brady's rodeo friends, CAT, TANNER and
JAMES sneak in. They're a classic bunch of young Indian
cowboys, donned in cowboy hats, denim and flannel shirts.

They bend over excitedly, checking out Brady's scar, talking
in low whispers.

CAT

Holy piss!

TANNER

Jesus Christ. He looks like
Frankenstein.

CAT

It's fuckin' rank.

JAMES
Fuck that. That's just a scratch.

James takes the drag of his cigarette.

JAMES (CONT'D)
A little smoke will help.

He leans forward and blows the smoke into Brady's face. Brady flinches and wakes up. Everyone laughs.

Brady pushes James.

BRADY
Get the fuck out of here.

Brady rubs his eyes, half smiling.

CAT
You can wrap it up right?

BRADY
Why? What're you guys doing?

CAT
Put your wranglers on man.

TANNER
Yah. Let's go get fucked up!

Brady nods. The boys are already at the door.

CAT
Last of the Mohicans!

Brady laughs and sits up.

EXT. BADLANDS - DUSK

The epic landscape of the Badlands at dusk.

The boys have built a campfire on one of the large rocks. They are laughing, jumping over the fire and being rowdy.

The boys race up a steep hill, the half moon is bright in the darkening sky above them.

JAMES
Come on Brady!

Brady sits back near the glow of the fire. He watches them as they run up to the top.

Brady doesn't follow.

EXT. BADLANDS - NIGHT

It's dark now and the boys are huddled around the camp fire, sipping from beer bottles and talking about their rodeo injuries with great pride in the flickering glow of the fire.

BRADY

That horse I got on in Fargo...
Everything I heard about her was shit. But got on her and said 'fuck it'. She was good out there for a while, until the whistle, she got real trashy and started turning there by the fence. I went over the front of her. She stepped on my head. Popped me out. Didn't knock me out til I got to the hospital. I had a seizure and went into a coma.

CAT

Broke my thumb. Broke wrist twice. Broke my ankle. I mean I died eight times, that's why they call me Cat. Didn't even cry or anything...
Igmu! (Lakota for "Cat")

JAMES

Got kicked in Kadoka at Rodeo Bible Camp. Went out of the back door. That wasn't so bad. Was just kind of a stinger for a week.

TANNER

Got on this great big grey mare. I was getting pretty stretched out in the end. Thank god I heard the whistle blow. Right at the end she slammed me down on the dirt. Hardest I ever been slammed before. Broke three ribs on my right side. Brady over there, told me to get on my short go horse, even though my ribs hurt like a son-of-a-bitch.

Brady looks up at Tanner who is pretty drunk.

TANNER (CONT'D)

Ain't that right Brady? You don't let no pain put you down.

(MORE)

TANNER (CONT'D)
You ain't gonna be turning out
horses left and right just because
your head hurts a little bit, are
you?

Cat looks at the boys thoughtfully.

BRADY
I'm not, I'm drawing out of
anything. I'm just taking some time
off. Your brain is a little
different than yo ur ribs...

TANNER
Yah I know. It's all the same to a
cowboy. Ride through the pain.

Brady keeps quiet but his jaws are tense.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Now don't let this head injury go
to your head. Get you scared. I
know how that goes with some guys.
They get scared to get on again,
and they end up becoming farmers...

CAT
Hey Brady...

Cat interrupts the conversation and turns to Brady.

CAT (CONT'D)
You seen Lane lately?

BRADY
I didn't get a chance to see him
there for a while, while I was
rodeoing. But they just checked him
into a brand new rehab facility.

Cat looks back at the fire, lost in a thought.

Tanner wipes his face, looks restless after the mention of
Lane.

BRADY (CONT'D)
He probably could've won the world
if he'd had an honest chance. He
was a damn good bull rider.

Tanner stuffs tobacco chew into his lip.

TANNER

Remember when he went three for
three in McCool Junction? And won
it?

Brady smiles and nods.

BRADY

That was a good night for Lane.
You remember when he switched hands
at Elkhorn and won the bull riding
first time ever riding a bull with
his right hand? Eighty four points!

JAMES

Shit, one time me and Lane was
coming back from a party. We was
driving in Tanner's brother's car,
and we was kind of talking about
women. We was a little drunk and
Lane looks over at me and says
'James, you know what one thing
I've learned in life is' he says
'girls, they come in with a name
and they leave with a number'.

James and the other boys laugh.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Kind of fucked up, but...

CAT

Dirty dog!

JAMES

Yep. Lane.

The laughter fades and the boys become sombre. Cat looks back
at the fire.

CAT

Real wild. Real good guy too.

Brady looks over at Cat.

CAT (CONT'D)

I want to say a prayer for him, I
mean, it would be best if we said a
prayer every day, you know, the guy
sure could use it. But I want to go
ahead and just say...

Brady pulls his hood back. Tanner and James remove their
hats. They bow their heads in prayer.

CAT (CONT'D)

I pray to God that he takes in all
the strength from all his friends
across the nation. North, south,
east and west, 'cause over this
country.

Cat has a thoughtful smile on his face.

CAT (CONT'D)

I hope he gets to ride again. Feel
the wind in his back, watch it flow
through the grass. Be what he wants
to be, once again.

Brady listens. His jaw tightens.

CAT (CONT'D)

We are him and he is us. We're all
one in this together. Mitakuye
Oyasin.

Brady crosses himself. Tanner and James put their hats back on and take swigs from their beer bottles.

Cat picks up his guitar and starts strumming the chords of a country song he wrote called "Gambling Man" about the life of a rodeo cowboy. It used to be Brady's favorite now it's bittersweet for him to listen to.

Brady stares into the fire, watching the eerie blue flames curl around the glowing embers.

EXT. PRAIRIE/BADLANDS - DAWN

Music plays as time passes. Moments of silence on the Great Plains. A Badlands sunrise. Withering sunflowers in a field of dry grass. Windmills. Horses at dusk.

Brady wanders in the Badlands while a thunderstorm is brewing in the distance, coloring the sky an unusual blend of yellow and green.

A significant amount of time has passed since the boys prayed for their friend around the bonfire. Brady's hair has grown back, covering up his scar. He looks thin and pale. He watches the distance lightening.

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH BADLANDS - DAY

Brady's truck speeds along the highway. Not a soul for miles.

INT. BRADY'S TRUCK - DAY

Brady is driving. He looks restless and nervous.

EXT. REHABILITATION CENTER - DAY

Brady walks through glass doors of a physical rehabilitation center and stops at the front desk.

BRADY

Hello, Ma'am. I'm here to see Lane Scott.

EXT. REHABILITATION CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Brady walks down the hallway looking for Lane's room.

INT. LANE'S ROOM - DAY

Brady walks in and sees LANE sitting alone in the middle of the room in his wheelchair.

BRADY

Hey, brother, how you doing?

He walks over to Lane's chair. The room is sparse, with a small bed in the corner, a white support pole beside it leading into the ceiling. The walls are covered in old pictures of Lane in his younger years as an up-and-coming bull rider.

Lane can not speak. His bull riding accident has left him permanently paralyzed. He's barely able to lift his left hand, using sign language to communicate.

Brady gives Lane a hug, helping him to put his arm around him.

BRADY (CONT'D)

I missed you, brother.

Lane slowly closes his eyes as they embrace.

Brady pulls back after a moment.

BRADY (CONT'D)

You're looking good. How you feeling?

He looks at Lane's hand for an answer.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Feeling good huh. It's a pretty
good place here.

Lane starts to spell out each letter of the words with his
shaking left hand.

LANE (SIGN LANGUAGE)
How's your head?

BRADY
How's my head....? Feeling aright...

Lane starts to sign again.

LANE (SIGN LANGUAGE)
Rub some...

BRADY
Rub some...

BRADY (CONT'D)
...dirt in it.

Brady laughs.

BRADY (CONT'D)
And some Copenhagen too huh?

Lane slowly smiles and starts to sign. Brady reads it.

BRADY (CONT'D)
R, I, D, E... Ride. Can I ride? Am
I able to ride?

Lane gives him a thumb up.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Not supposed to for a while. I wish
I can ride, but... If I hit that
plate in my head, it will cave the
whole side of my head in... But...

Brady looks down.

INT. LANE'S ROOM - A WHILE LATER

Brady and Lane watch a video of Lane on YouTube on an iPad.

LANE (VIDEO)
*My name is Lane Scott. I'm eighteen
years old. I'm from Kennebec, South
Dakota.*

FRIEND (VIDEO)

Lane, he is young, but he is really good. Best bull rider coming out of South Dakota for sure.

LANE (VIDEO)

I mean... I mean, not trying to apply anything. But, me and superman have not been seen in the same room together, so...

Brady smiles and looks up at Lane. Lane smiles back. His face is a lot thinner now, than the young, vibrant man in the video. His facial muscle has been damaged by the paralysis, altering his looks. But Lane is smiling. He enjoys revisiting these moments.

The video starts to show Lane's wild bull rides, chasing after buffaloes, being a goofy teenager.

Lane stands in front of camera, wearing a cowboy hat and striped shirt.

LANE (VIDEO) (CONT'D)

I was about three years old when my dad introduced me to the rodeo world. There is nothing can really beat it. You get on a bull. Makes a good ride. Everybody in the stands stand up for you, yells and cheers. Your adrenaline is goin'. You just can't stop but smiling.

Lane, in his wheelchair, eyes bright, grinning happily. He has not lost his spirit.

LANE (VIDEO) (CONT'D)

There is nothing like strapping yourself on a 2000 pound animal and just going with it. That's what I want to do and I want to do it for the rest of my life. I can't imagine doing anything else.

Brady's smile slowly fades.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Brady checks the now healed scar on his head. He brushes the hair over to conceal it.

He takes a handful of prescription pills.

He puts on a necktie. As he pulls the tie through the pin, the fingers on his right hand suddenly grip the tie and lock onto it.

Brady pulls the tie out of the grip and peels his fingers open. He has gotten used to it now, he is not panicking.

He shakes his hand and puts his cowboy hat on.

EXT. TRIBAL JOB OFFICE - DAY

Brady's truck pulls up. He is a little nervous. He checks himself in the mirror.

BRADY
Stay in here all right Lil?

LILLY
Ok Brady.

Lilly focuses on her recorder.

LILLY (CONT'D)
I believe my pleasure is my
favorite thing to do is sing along.

Brady takes tobacco chew out of his mouth and throws it out of the window.

INT. TRIBAL JOB OFFICE - DAY

Brady sits across the table from HELENA. A Lakota woman with long braids and a strong gaze.

HELENA
Do you have a resume?

BRADY
No, ma'am.

HELENA
Any job experience?

BRADY
I'm a horse trainer.

HELENA
You can't do that right now?

BRADY
I would... But I can't for a while,
since I'm laid up... So...

HELENA

Well, you have two options. Oglala
Lakota College has a GED program.
The OST TERO office has job
training program for
construction... Road work...

Brady can't help but interrupts her.

BRADY

I'm looking for something a little
more temporary than that.

They look at each other.

BRADY (CONT'D)

...You know, I'm... probably gonna
be training horses in a few month.

HELENA

You still need something to fall
back on. You can't train horses
forever.

Brady looks away.

Helena looks at him for another moment, then she starts
writing on a posted.

HELENA (CONT'D)

I have a cousin who is the manager
of Dakota Mart. His name is Robbie.
They have some temporary positions.
Tell him I sent you.

Brady takes the posted.

BRADY

Ok... Thank you.

He gets up and walks towards the door.

HELENA

You look like your mom.

Brady stops and looks back to her.

HELENA (CONT'D)

I used to go to high school with
her. She was really awesome.

Brady nods, forces a smile.

EXT. DAKOTA MART - DAY

Brady walks across the empty parking lot towards the supermarket.

INT. DAKOTA MART - DAY

Brady picks up a bag of candy and looks over at the checkout.

He sees TERRI DAWN, a young woman with pink hair and dark eyes. She glances back at him.

He quickly looks away. Takes a deep breath and walks towards her. He puts on a smile.

BRADY

Hi Terri Dawn.

Terri Dawn greets him but she is not friendly.

TERRI DAWN

Hi Brady. How are you?

BRADY

Is the manager here?

TERRI

No, why?

BRADY

Never mind...

A moment of awkward silence as Terri scans the items. There's a history between them, and Terri Dawn is playing disinterested.

BRADY (CONT'D)

I didn't know you worked here.

Terri Dawn rolls her eyes.

TERRI DAWN

There's a lot that you don't know.

Brady hides his annoyance.

BRADY

So how have you been doing?

Terri Dawn ignores him. Another moment passes.

TERRI DAWN
I'm dating your friend Tanner, just
so you know.

Brady looks at her, not sure what to say.

TERRI DAWN (CONT'D)
\$9.50.

Brady quickly searches his wallet.

EXT. BRADY'S TRUCK - EVENING

Brady drives as Lilly is singing, the sun setting behind her.

BRADY
Lil, I'm thinking about going to
the rodeo. Do you wanna go with?

Lilly looks up at Brady and shakes her head.

LILLY
No. Nope.

BRADY
Take you to the carnival after? Get
on some rides?

LILLY
Carnival? Oh boy. Yes!

EXT. EAGLE BUTTE RODEO & FAIR - NIGHT

The announcers voice echoes out over the rodeo grounds.

Brady walks towards the glow of the flood lights above the stadium, and makes his way behind the chute.

Cat and the other RODEO BOYS are surprised but happy to see him. They shake his hand and check out his scar.

Brady sits back and restlessly watches everyone getting ready. He looks over at Tanner, who is getting ready for his bareback ride. Tanner gives Brady the finger. Brady shakes his head and looks away.

The Lakota Flag Song is sung over the speakers. Brady and the boys listens with their hats off in respect.

Tanner climbs into the chute, onto his horse. The horse starts to buck, rattling the steel bars, showing its power and aggression.

Brady and the boys steady it. The whistle blows. The gate opens. The bucking horse charges out and Tanner rides it hard into the arena.

Brady and the boys cheer loudly for him as he rides 8 seconds. A perfect ride. The crowd cheers.

The other riders soon follow. Brady watches a young rider gallop across the arena on his horse with envy. He wishes he was out there too.

EXT. EAGLE BUTTE RODEO & FAIR - NIGHT

Brady sits on a plastic horse on a carousel, feeling both nauseous and mortified. It feels like a bad joke.

Lilly happily sits beside him, singing on her horse with her hands in the air.

The spinning gives Brady a bad headache. Bright lights flash by in a blur of motion, overwhelming him.

EXT. HORSESHOE BAR - SAME NIGHT

Loud music. Neon lights. Rowdy cowboys.

Brady is sitting in the corner booth, dazed from his headaches, watching Tanner, Terri Dawn and Cat talking from across the table.

Tanner is gloating about the 8 seconds ride he made today.

He checks on Lilly, who is sitting at the bar watching Sesame Street videos on her phone with James beside her.

James playfully takes Lilly's soda and she wrestles it back.

Brady looks down. Having a hard time keeping his eyes open.

TANNER
Hey, wake up grandpa!

Tanner slams on the table.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Falling asleep over there! Are you
gonna enter for Water's Rodeo on
the 17th?

BRADY
17th?

TANNER

Yah.

Brady nods, although this is probably unlikely.

BRADY

I'll be ready to ride by then.

TANNER

Hell ya man. It'd be good..

Terri Dawn slaps Tanners arm real hard, surprising everyone.

TERRI DAWN

Tanner, quit that! He just got
hurt. Come on now.

TANNER

What's wrong with that? His head is
a long way from his heart. He won't
hurt it again.

TERRI DAWN

But he has a metal plate in his
head.

Brady is annoyed and embarrassed Terri is talking for him
about his injury. He can defend himself.

TANNER

So?! Metal ain't supposed to bend.
He'll be fine.

They both look over at Brady for a moment.

TERRI DAWN

It's too fucking dangerous...

BRADY

Why don't you just mind your own
fucking business?

Terri Dawn stares at Brady. Brady looks away.

TERRI DAWN

You know what? Fuck you.

Terri Dawn, wounded, gets up and walks over to the bar.
Tanner smirks. He gets up too.

TANNER

Yah. Fuck you Brady. It's
'DANGEROUS'.

Watching Tanner leave. Cat smiles and gives Brady a nudge.

CAT
Don't worry about it.

Brady sighs, trying to shrug it off.

BILL (V.O.)
Howdy.

BILL, an older cowboy, white hair beneath his hat, and a tooth pick in his cheek, sits down opposite Brady.

BILL
Are you Brady Blackburn?

BRADY
Yah.

BILL
Bill.

Brady shakes Bill's hand.

BILL (CONT'D)
I heard you're a horse trainer. I have a colt nobody can break. Will you come and look at him?

Brady looks over at the bar and sees Tanner sitting next to Lilly and playfully talking to her.

Lilly is still laughing at her Sesame Street video.

TANNER
Aren't you way too old to be watching Sesame Street? When I was 15 I was at the bar drinking with my dad.

Lilly ignores him and stares at her video.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Ya thirsty? You should have some of this stuff.

Tanner hands Lilly his half-drunk beer. Lilly laughs and pushes the beer away.

Bill is still trying to convince Brady to train his horse. Brady is barely listening.

BILL

So, what do you think? Will you come and look at him?

Brady looks back to Bill.

BRADY

Yah, maybe, in a couple of weeks, I got my head caved in...

LILLY (V.O)

I don't like to!

He looks over at Tanner and Lilly again, his patience is wearing thin.

Tanner tickles Lilly and pushes the beer bottle into her hand. She laughs and pushes it away again.

TANNER

Come on! You can have a beer!

Brady suddenly gets up and charges up to the bar.

TANNER (CONT'D)

This is way better for you than that crap you drink...

Brady grabs Tanner by the collar and shoves him HARD.

BRADY

What the fuck do you think you're doing?!

Tanner is shocked and grabs Brady by the shirt, pushing him back as others try to react.

TANNER

What the fuck man?! What you want?!

Terri Dawn quickly takes Lilly's arm and they head outside the bar.

TANNER (CONT'D)

I wasn't doing nothin'! I wasn't doing nothin' Brady!

Cat and the other cowboys pull them apart.

Tanner's cowboy hat falls to the ground. Red-faced and ruffled, he tries to compose himself.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Fuck you! I didn't fucking do
nothin'. Just being friendly that's
all.

Brady glares back at him. Everyone seems shocked by Brady's behavior. It has come out of nowhere and seems completely out of character.

CAT
Calm down, Brady. Calm down.

Cat pushes Brady aside.

CAT (CONT'D)
Tanner don't mean nothin' by it.

TANNER
Fuck man! What the hell?

Tanner fixes his jacket.

Cat looks at Brady, surprised as anyone by his actions.

Brady composes himself, also shocked by his own aggression. He feels the eyes of everyone on him. He looks away and quickly storms out.

EXT. HORSESHOE BAR - CONTINUOUS

Brady catches up with Terri Dawn and Lilly.

BRADY
Lilly, you aright?

LILLY
I'm fine, Brady.

Lilly runs to the truck, leaving Brady alone with Terri Dawn. She looks at him coldly. He's embarrassed.

A moment later, she sighs and reaches for her pocket. She pulls out a joint.

TERRI DAWN
This is what you need right now.

She signals him to follow and walks away, leaving Brady standing alone in the red neon light.

INT. BRADY'S TRUCK (OUTSIDE HORSESHOE BAR) - NIGHT

The pale, bright moon is high in the sky.

Coyotes howl from the distant Badlands.

Lilly is playing with her recorder in the front seat. Humming softly a melody she made up.

Brady and Terri Dawn share a joint in the bed of the truck. Their faces lit dimly by the red neon light of the bar. Both stoned.

Brady leans forward to check on Lilly.

BRADY

Lil, you hear them coyotes howling?

LILLY

Yes!

BRADY

Are you cold?

LILLY

No, I'm not cold. Guess what?

BRADY

What?

LILLY

You're the greatest adventure.

Terri Dawn takes a drag of the joint and coughs. She passes it to Brady.

TERRI

The problem with you boys... You don't like to get your pride hurt.

BRADY

He was making fun of Lilly.

TERRI

No, he wasn't. You know, we don't care how she is. She don't care how she is.

Brady leans his head back, too high to argue. A moment later.

TERRI (CONT'D)

We all love her. I think you're embarrassed of her. Not us.

Brady looks over at her for a moment. He moves clumsily towards her and leans forward. She is a little surprised but doesn't move away. He kisses her on the cheek and lowers his head into her lap.

She maternally strokes his hair as he closes his eyes.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

Gold star stickers are carefully applied onto Brady's chest.

Lilly is putting them on him while he sleeps.

LOUD KNOCKS. She giggles and quickly scurries out of the room.

Brady struggles to open his eyes.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - DOOR WAY - DAY

Brady opens the door, still half asleep, covered in star stickers.

MILES, a middle-aged, rough looking landlord and debt collector, with a red face and steely blue eyes, gives him a stern look as he passes. His young son, at most 12 year old, stands behind him with the same annoyed look on his chubby face, clearly emulating his pops.

BRADY

Hey Miles. What's goin' on guys?

They pass Brady and walk into the trailer.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - DAY

Miles struts around the trailer like he owns it - which he does. He checks the light switches.

MILES

Looking for your dad.

Brady wipes his face.

BRADY

He went to the horse sale yesterday. I haven't seen him.

MILES

He owes me quite a bit of money on this trailer. I need payment.

Brady hides his surprise.

BRADY
Didn't he pay last month?

MILES
No. It's been four month since I
seen money from him. I need
somethin'. You're gonna tell him I
need some money or I gotta come and
get the trailer. I'm tired of
lookin' for his ass.

Miles opens the fridge and gets a beer for himself. He gives
Brady another look, who is still covered in star stickers.

MILES (CONT'D)
I like your tattoos.

He opens the beers and walks out. His son following behind.

Brady looks down and finally sees the star stickers.

BRADY
Come on Lilly...

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - SAME DAY

Lilly is heating up a thin crust frozen pizza on a rotating
pizza oven on the counter. While she waits, she plays with a
Sesame Street music box.

She cuts the pizza into smaller pieces with a pair of
scissors.

Brady sits on the couch, staring at Lilly's cartoons on TV.
He is not really watching, but lost in thoughts.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - EVENING

Brady strolls across the hill. He looks down at his rundown
trailer beneath the darkening sky.

INT. DAKOTA MART - MANAGERS OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Brady sits opposite the Dakota Mart MANAGER, a large man,
with white hair and a sickly complexion.

Brady is filling out the application.

INT. DAKOTA MART - DAY

Brady looks uncomfortable and out of place in the store uniform as he learns how to use the check out scanner. His physical presence seems diminished, as if without his cowboy hat, and usual attire, he is somehow smaller.

Brady interacts with CUSTOMERS. He is nervous but tries to be polite and do a good job.

The line is long and he makes a mistake, running an item twice. One of the customer gets impatient. Brady quickly apologizes. (IMPROVISE)

When the line is finally cleared, Brady leans against the check out rubbing his brow.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - EVENING

Bray's truck pulls up. He climbs out like a wounded animal, tired and exhausted.

He walks towards the house.

INT. BRADY'S ROOM - EVENING

Brady sits in bed reading a rodeo magazine. He hears the sound of a pick-up truck and looks outside.

Wayne climbs out of the pickup with TODD, a local rancher. They talk business as they walk towards the barn.

Brady quickly gets out of the bed and heads outside.

EXT. BRADY'S CORRAL - EVENING

Brady walks towards the corral. He sees Wayne and Todd are talking by his horse, Gus, who is tied to a metal poll.

TODD
...I just don't know about you
horse traders...

BRADY
Hey Todd.

Todd turns to Brady. He's a large man, wearing dark sunglasses to cover the heavy scarring across his face. He shakes Brady's hand.

TODD
How you doin' Brady?

Wayne looks over at Brady nervously.

BRADY
Pretty good... What're you doing
here?

WAYNE
Hey Todd, I haven't talked to Brady
about this. Can you just come back
tomorrow and pick him up?

TODD
Aright I can. See you Brady.

Todd senses the awkwardness. He shakes their hands and leaves.

BRADY
What was that about?

Brady stares at Wayne while petting Gus.

WAYNE
I had to sell him Gus, Brady.

It takes Brady a moment to process what Wayne has said.

BRADY
Sell him Gus? What do you mean you
had to 'sell him Gus'?! Gus is
mine.

WAYNE
Gus is part of the family. I guess
it's his turn for us to make a
living.

Brady is furious. It's incomprehensible to him that his father could even consider this.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
You want Miles to haul the trailer?
Me and Lilly have no place to live?

BRADY
You didn't make any money at all?

WAYNE
Costs a lot to live.

Wayne is being dismissive, avoiding eye contact and untying Gus's reins.

BRADY

Yah. Costs a lot to go to the fucking bars and casinos.

He's overstepped the line. Wayne bites back.

WAYNE

Fuck you, Brady, I don't need your shit. It's not like you can ride anymore, we gotta make a living somehow...

Brady grabs Wayne's shirt and pushes him against the metal gate. Wayne regains his composure calmly, staring Brady down.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

What're you gonna do? Fight me?

Brady looks away.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you?

Wayne walks away leaving Brady alone with Gus.

EXT. PRAIRIE - SAME EVENING

Brady goes hunting rabbits with his pistol. Partly to let off some steam. He flips the gun in his hand like a pro.

The sky is cold. Brady moves through the plains. Stops. Stays still. A moment later, he fires.

He picks up the dead rabbit from the tall grass.

EXT. CAT'S TRAILER - SAME NIGHT

Brady dresses the rabbit on the deck under a dim lamp.

Unmoved as he pulls back the fur, revealing the bloodied, raw torso and breaks the thigh bones.

INT. CAT'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The buzzing of a tattoo gun.

GABBY, Cat's girlfriend, is cooking the rabbit on the stove at the end of kitchen.

Needle outlining the large tattoo. Blood seeps from the lines of ink. Cat is finishing up the outline of a tattoo on Brady's back. Brady welcomes the pain. It helps him to stay calm and focused.

BRADY
My dad sold Gus today.

CAT
No shit. Who did he sell it to?

BRADY
Todd.

CAT
Sorry about that man.

BRADY
Yah... Wish I can ride him one last time though... Finished the outline?

Cat wipes the tattoo clean. It's a bull rider on a bucking bull in front of a cross.

CAT
Yah.

BRADY
Just need to shade it huh?

CAT
Probably wait till next time.

Gabby walks over to take a look. She passes Brady a joint.

GABBY
Looks really nice Brady. Who's this supposed to be?

BRADY
My buddy Lane.

CAT
You know him?

GABBY
No.

BRADY
He was a pretty good bull rider.

Brady stares through the smoke of his joint.

BRADY (CONT'D)
A lot of times, you know... you get hurt... But, you don't think you'll get hurt like that... I'm just... happy I came out as lucky as I did.

INT. BRADY'S TRUCK DRIVING THROUGH BADLANDS - NIGHT

No street lights or headlights. The road ahead is dim and eerie. Brady drives. Tired. Distant.

INT. BRADY'S LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Brady makes himself some coffee.

He stands silhouetted in the side door of the trailer and looks out over the plains -

Gus is seen as a little shape on the horizon, grazing on the hill, against the early morning glow.

Brady watches Gus for a moment, a calm expression in his eyes.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - DAWN

Brady walks by a saddle on the fence and grabs a halter hanging next to it.

He walks up the hill towards Gus, determined.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAWN

Brady slowly approaches Gus.

Gus stands still, as if he were waiting for Brady. Brady gently puts the halter around Gus' head.

He pets his old friend's face and puts his forehead against Gus's, praying softly.

BRADY
God, I ask you to take care of Gus on his travels. Be with him all the time and protect him. Keep him safe, God... In Jesus's name I pray, Amen.

Brady's hands take a firm hold on Gus's mane.

Brady's face, nervous but determined.

Gus's dark eyes blinks.

Kicking his feet, Brady swings his body onto Gus bareback effortlessly.

He steadies his nervous breathing. Petting Gus gently. Hearing the wind blowing across the prairie.

The first ray of sunlight appears in the distance.

Brady rides Gus, slowly walking across the open field.

He kicks a little harder, Gus starts trotting.

The sun is up. Bright and blinding.

Gus is galloping now. Brady is back in his element.

As he rides the sky seems to gets bigger, the plains vaster.

EXT. BRADY'S CORRAL - DAY

Brady loads Gus into Todd's fancy trailer. He gives Gus a kiss on the nose and pets his neck. This is goodbye.

He walks out of the trailer, Gus's eyes stay on him as the door swings shut.

He hides his sadness as he watches Todd's pickup and the trailer drive away.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - HALLWAY - DAY

Brady walks in, taking off his cowboy hat. He stops when he hears Lilly's voice.

LILLY (O.S.)
Here's the moon!

Brady turns and heads towards the warm, reddish glow emanating from behind Lilly's bedroom door.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Brady opens the door and sees Wayne and Lilly in her room.

Wayne is holding a rotating lamp that projects colorful stars onto the walls. Lilly's room is already lit by a bright pink lamp. The blue stars make the space feels like a dream.

WAYNE
Look, jump over the moon.

Wayne projects the half moon from the lamp onto the wall.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Watch.

He grabs Lilly's Elmo toy and throws it over the moon projection.

LILLY
Hey! My Elmo!

Wayne and Brady exchange a look.

LILLY (CONT'D)
Elmo! Are you ok? Look!

Lilly holds Elmo up at the stars on the ceiling.

LILLY (CONT'D)
Look at all the stars!

Blue star swims across Brady's face. Seeing how content Lilly is and the warmth between her and Wayne, Brady he can't help but to smile.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - DUSK

Brady walks up to the front of Frank's house. He whistles.

BRADY
Frank!

Frank walks out of the front door, still sleepy in his pajamas.

FRANK
Brady? What the fuck are you doing here?

BRADY
You still want me to train those horses for you?

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - CORRAL - MORNING

Brady starts training a young mare named Crystal. He circles the corral with her. She is agitated. Panting, kicking dirt. After a few rounds, he catches her and puts a halter on her.

He then carefully puts on the saddle, firmly commanding her to stay calm when she tries to run.

He holds the rein, runs in circles around her, forcing her to turn with him.

After a while, she is used to him. He gets on. She is nervous. He rides her around the corral, slow at first and then suddenly fast. She seems to be comfortable.

Everything is going well. Brady is back doing what he loves.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - PRAIRIE - SAME DAY

Storm clouds are gathering.

Brady rides Crystal across the hills.

He takes his pistol out of his gun holder and holds it next to Crystal's nose, letting her smell it before shooting a few times into the distance.

Crystal reacts badly and tries to run. Brady holds her still, lets her smell the pistol again, and shoots again until the horse is desensitized.

EXT. HORSE SALE - A FEW DAYS LATER

Brady walks towards the horse sale, passing rows of pick-up trucks and horse trailers.

TANNER (O.S.)
Hey Brady!

Tanner and Terri Dawn are sitting in Tanner's pick-up. Terri avoids eye contact.

BRADY
Hey... what's up guys?

TANNER
Not much... What're you doin'?

It's still awkward between Brady and Tanner after their fight at the bar.

BRADY
Uh... Just looking for my dad. You seen him?

TANNER

He was back there in the back pin
riding loose horses earlier.

BRADY

Ok.

Brady looks at Terri Dawn. She ignores him.

Brady gives up and walks away.

EXT. HORSE SALE - BACK PIN - DAY.

The back pens are packed with horses for sale. Brady and Wayne are looking at a pin filled with at least fifteen horses. They swarm back and forth like fish in a net.

WAYNE

Victor is looking for a buckskin.
What do you think of that one?

Wayne whistles and seems to get the attention of a large and beautiful buckskin.

BRADY

Looks good. Victor doesn't have
money.

WAYNE

Oh, I think he came up with some
recently.

INT. HORSE AUCTION - DAY

The horse auctioneer is holding the sale with his fast talking auction chant.

The round stands are filled with OLD-TIMERS. Ranchers, horseman, horse traders, mostly dressed in Wrangler jeans and cowboy hats. A WOMAN is holding a raccoon on a leash.

A SKINNY MAN wearing a green trucker hat is riding a horse in the middle of the stands, displacing the quality of the horse for the auction.

Brady and Wayne are at home. They talk to each other, discussing each horse.

A YOUNG COWGIRL, about 15, wearing a brown felt cowboy hat, shyly greets Brady and shakes his hand in admiration.

INT. HORSESHOE BAR - DAY

Brady eats a burger, watching Wayne flirting with SUMMER, a blonde bartender, who's best days are behind her.

INT. HORSESHOE BAR - LATER

Wayne is gambling at the slot machines with Summer. Brady walks over.

BRADY

You ready to go dad?

WAYNE

In a little bit.

It's clear Wayne has had a few drinks too many.

BRADY

Come on, we need to get to
Victor's. It's gonna get dark.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Victor has lights.

Knowing it's useless to argue, Brady sits down to play the slot machine himself. Summer peaks over at him.

SUMMER

(to Wayne)

Is that Brady?

WAYNE

Yah.

She looks at him again over Wayne's shoulder.

SUMMER

Aren't you one hell of a bronc
rider?

Brady stops playing, but doesn't answer.

WAYNE

We don't talk about that.

SUMMER

Ok...

Brady goes back to playing, but his mind is elsewhere.

EXT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - EVENING

Brady leads the buckskin horse they bought at the horsesale out of an old rusty horse trailer.

VICTOR, a Lakota man, with a shaven head and smudged with tattoos, stops feeding his herd of chickens and greets them.

Brady watches Wayne and Victor checking out the horse for a moment and walks away.

He wanders through Victor's land, littered with junk cars and old home appliances, almost swallowed up by sage bushes.

He stops when he passes the corral and sees a beautiful bay horse tied up by the fence.

He walks towards the horse carefully, stopping when it starts to get agitated. The horse is clearly wild. He reaches for the horse's nose, it pulls back violently, eyes wild, nostrils flaring.

Gently and patiently, Brady reaches out and pets his nose to keeps him calm.

Victor walks up behind him.

VICTOR
That's Apollo.

BRADY
Is he broke?

VICTOR
Some fucker tried to ride him and
got bucked off. He quit and now
it's got all kinds of bad habits.

BRADY
What are you gonna do with him?

VICTOR
Probably just keep him wild.

Brady keeps his eyes on Apollo for a moment.

INT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Victor's living room is dim, covered with wall art. He is holding up a massive joint.

VICTOR

This right here, is gonna save us.
Save us all.

WAYNE

It may cure the Meth.

Wayne sits back on the couch, chimes in.

VICTOR

There is gas in here. There is oil
in here. There's cloth in here.
There is rope in here. It's the
future boys.

Brady lights the joint.

WAYNE

So what do you think about that
horse?

VICTOR

Looks pretty nice to me.

WAYNE

I want twelve fifty cash. She's
worth way more if you take her to
town.

VICTOR

See you boys checking out them cars
out there. Looks like you need some
parts. Willing to make a deal?

WAYNE

...I need a back windshield for an
82' Camero.

VICTOR

What do you say I throw in that
back window and I got seven hundred
dollars?

Brady rubs his forehead, annoyed.

WAYNE

Seven hundread...

VICTOR

Seven hundred and this bag of weed.

BRADY

Dad, I know someone that'll pay
more than that.

VICTOR
But I have the cash now.

WAYNE
We can take this money now, buy
another horse and make some money.
You always smoke my weed up. Might
as well just trade with him a
little bit of grass.

BRADY
If that's what you wanna do...

WAYNE
Alright, we got a deal.

VICTOR
Damn right.

They shake hands.

Brady looks down, it's pointless to argue.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - CORRAL - THE NEXT DAY

Brady trains Crystal by riding her and roping at the same time, getting her used to the rope. He rides her around the corral as fast as she can.

The midday sun is bright. Brady struggles with the heat and a headache.

BRADY
Let's take a break girl.

Brady gets off Crystal. Suddenly his hand shakes and grips onto the rein.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Shit.

Brady tries to peel his hand off of the rein.

Crystal seems to sense Brady's panic and begins to pull away, yanking Brady along with her.

Brady still can't get his right hand to let go of the rein.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Halt Crystal. Halt!

Panicking now, Crystal shakes her head, shaking Brady's arm along with it and backing away faster, until -

CRACK! Crystal's body slams hard onto the wooden fence, breaking the fence in half. The pressure pulls the rein out of Brady's hand.

Out of breath and still in shock, Brady hits his hand hard and quickly goes over to check on Crystal.

Crystal breathes heavily and backs away from Brady. A trust has been broken.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Halt Crystal. Halt girl...

Brady manages to grab Crystal's halter and starts to pet her.

BRADY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry girl...

Crystal slowly calms down. But Brady can't. He looks down at his hand. Concerned.

INT. DAKOTA MART - DAY

Brady is working. He is in a bad mood.

He is lining up women's deodorant on the shelf. OLLIE and SAGE, two young Lakota boys walk by. Ollie is about 15, tall and good-looking. Adriano is 12, awkward, wearing a white cowboy hat. Ollie notices Brady first.

OLLIE
Excuse me. Are you Brady Blackburn?

Brady turns around.

BRADY
Yah?

OLLIE
My lil brother is a big fan of
yours. Can we take a picture?

Ollie pushes Sage towards Brady. Brady smiles and shakes Adriano's hand.

BRADY
What's your name buddy?

ADRIANO
Adriano.

BRADY

Adriano. You're gonna be a bronc
rider when you grow up?

ADRIANO

Yes sir.

Brady puts his arm around Adriano.

BRADY

You riding pony broncs yet?

Adriano smiles.

ADRIANO

Yes sir.

BRADY

You're gonna stick it to them when
you get older huh?

ADRIANO

Yes sir.

BRADY

You bet.

Ollie takes the photo.

OLLIE

Alright. Thank you. So... You
like... work here?

BRADY

...I'm just trying to stay busy
while I'm healing up.

The two boys nod, slightly confused.

ADRIANO

Hope you get better soon. And
looking forward to see you ride.

BRADY

Thank you, buddy.

ADRIANO

Yes, sir.

OLLIE

Nice to meet you.

BRADY

You boys spur them high.

The boys walk away. Brady looks over. Adriano waves at him before they disappear around the corner.

Brady takes a moment and starts putting the deodorant onto the shelf.

INT. DAKOTA MART - LATER

Brady works the check out line.

Victor puts a basket of baby product down on the counter.

VICTOR

Wow, Brady.

BRADY

Hey, Victor.

Brady starts to ring up his items. Victor looks at him.

VICTOR

What... You work here now?

BRADY

Yah. A man is gotta do what he gotta do I guess.

VICTOR

Hm... I don't know. You gotta get back to riding horses and rodeo.

BRADY

I know. I'm riding some gentle ones. But I just don't have the stamina like I used to.

VICTOR

Apollo is waiting for you.

Brady smiles, keeping his eyes on the check out screen.

BRADY

He's a good one going to waste for sure.

VICTOR

I'll let him go for seven.

BRADY

Well... I'll see what I can do.

VICTOR
A horse like that needs someone
like you.

Brady smiles faintly and hands Victor his groceries.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Hey, don't give up.

Victor walks away, leaving Brady at the check out line.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lilly is reading her book out loud. Enjoying herself.

Brady sits on the sofa and takes his hat off.

BRADY
Lil, since you're in high school,
what do you think about taking up
some sports?

LILLY
Well... Do some... Shoots and hoots
for... Basketball.

BRADY
You wanna play basketball?

WAYNE
The only sport she's gonna play is
barrel racing.

LILLY
No way!

Wayne sits down next to Lilly.

WAYNE
I stopped by family dollar and got
you a surprise.

He tosses a plastic bag to Lilly.

LILLY
Me? Yah!

Lilly opens it and pulls out a pink bra. Her smile drops
immediately.

LILLY (CONT'D)
I don't think you.

WAYNE

You don't think so. Why the hell not? You wanna go to that rodeo with me, you gotta wear a bra. It's public place.

LILLY

No!

Brady watches the usual bickering and decides to join in.

BRADY

You're in high school now, Lil. You can wear a bra.

LILLY

I don't like...

BRADY

Come on. You're fifteen years old.

LILLY

But I don't like fifteen anymore. I just want fourteen years old.

Brady can't help but to smile.

WAYNE

You can't do a fourteen no more dear.

LILLY

Yes you well! Because... It's like a celebration coming on. But I just have... two, four, six, eight and one, three, five, seven, nine, is not a plan ever!

INT. LILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Lilly is sitting in her room next to her pink lamp, cutting up the bra into pieces.

Brady walks in and sits next to her.

BRADY

Hey Lilly.

Lilly picks up a speaker phone that lights up every time she speaks into it and alters her voice to a strange pitch.

LILLY

Hey. I don't like to wear a bra
anymore. It's all yuckey.

Brady laughs.

BRADY

Lil, you know dad is just trying to
watch out for you right?

LILLY

Yah. I sure better tell him to
watch out for the revolving door.
He should just grease it.

BRADY

If you don't wanna do something
you're just not gonna do it right?

LILLY

Right.

BRADY

You're stubborn like your big
brother.

Lilly continues to cut the bra. Brady watches her and smiles.

INT. BRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Brady takes some money in a zip-lock bag from under his
mattress. He counts it. It's not enough to buy Apollo.

He looks up and sees photos of himself riding bucking horses.

He looks down at his bronc saddle in the corner of the room.

EXT. BLACK HILLS PAWN - DAY

Brady walks towards the pawnshop with his saddle over his
shoulder.

INT. BLACK HILLS PAWN - DAY

Brady walks in and notices a roll of saddles ready to be
pawned by the door.

MOE, the pawn shop employee inspects the saddle.

MOE

Definitely looks like you got some wear and tear on it. A little rough there. Some custom bolts here... Uh... You definitely used it.

BRADY

It's only been on a hundred horses or so. I won it at a pro rodeo in Cherokee, Oklahoma.

MOE

Wow. Pro rodeo huh... Saddles, we are pretty stocked up on, you know, this time of the year. Something like this I can probably offer you, four hundred bucks if that'll help you out?

BRADY

You know one of those new ones will probably run two, three thousand dollars.

MOE

General rule of thumb, pawn shop offer about a quarter on the dollar, so... If it's worth two grant, huh... Maybe just five hundred just to help you out, since you're selling it. You don't want it back.

Brady thinks and gives in.

BRADY

Alright...

MOE

Perfect, let me get some paperwork going.

While Moe is typing at the computer. Brady rearrange the stirrup.

MOE (CONT'D)

You know, I see a lot of cowboys coming in with their saddles. A lot of them get rid of them. You can't rodeo forever, right?

Brady looks down at the saddle, his hand holding onto the rough leather.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - EVENING

Brady takes the saddle from the back of the pick-up. Wayne is practicing roping.

WAYNE

What're you doing with that saddle?

BRADY

I was gonna pawn it.

WAYNE

Pawn it? For what?

BRADY

That big bay horse at Victor's.
Apollo. I think he's gonna turn out
to be a good one.

Brady waits. No response from Wayne. He turns and walks back to the trailer.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - EVENING

Brady walks in. Lilly is reading her book out loud.

BRADY

How's school, Lil?

LILLY

It was fun.

BRADY

Oh yah?

LILLY

A sing along. I show you.

Lilly starts to sing a lullaby in Spanish. Her voice is beautiful. Brady sits back and listens.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - EVENING

Brady is making frozen burgers. Wayne walks in and takes off his hat.

WAYNE

I called Victor. He said you can go
pick up Apollo tomorrow.

BRADY

What?

WAYNE

I sold that buckskin to a guy in
Minnesota. I told Victor I'll pay
once I get the money.

Brady is surprised. He stares at Wayne who is checking out
the burger on the stove.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Those burgers are bad.

He scoops the burger patties up and throws them in the trash,
opens the fridge and gets a beer. Brady still stares at him.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

I'm going to the bar.

He taps on the freezer.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

There's pizza in here for Lilly.

Wayne drinks his beer and leaves.

Brady stands alone in the kitchen. A moment later, he smiles.

EXT. VICTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Brady leads Apollo into the trailer and shakes Victor's hand.

VICTOR

Good luck to both of you.

EXT. BRADY'S CORRAL - DAY

Brady uses a rope to lasso Apollo's right hind leg. Apollo is
agitated, kicking dirt and resisting by the fence.

Once the rope is around Apollo's heel, Brady ties the other
end to a poll. He then grabs the saddle. Apollo starts the
struggle. He is tough and powerful, but his halter and the
rope holds him in place. The wooden fence shakes violently as
he thrusts his body to break free.

Brady puts the saddle on him and lets him loose. Apollo starts
bucking immediately. Brady isn't afraid, he welcomes it by
running at Apollo, getting him agitated and bucking. Brady
makes all kinds of loud and aggressive noises, waving his hat
and hands. Apollo bucks and runs. It's like a violent dance.
Finally, Apollo seems to calm down a little.

Brady starts to flap the stirrup against Apollo's body. Apollo starts to buck again. They go at this for a while until Apollo is desensitized.

Brady grabs the rein and Apollo's mane. He turns Apollo while keeping one of his feet in the stirrup. When he feels comfortable, he swings around and gets on Apollo.

Apollo's body freezes. Brady starts to kick and signals Apollo to move. Suddenly Apollo starts to run real fast and bucking at the same time. Brady hangs on tight. Instead of trying to calm Apollo down, Brady keeps making loud noises, kicking and getting Apollo to buck. Until finally, Apollo slows down and starts to run normally.

They run around the corral until both are exhausted.

Brady gets off Apollo and pets him. He backs away holding the rein, keeping his eyes on Apollo. Brady gets on one knee, lower himself to Apollo.

BRADY
Step forward. Come on, buddy, just
one step.

Slowly, Apollo takes a step.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Good boy. That's it.

Brady gently pets Apollo's nose.

BRADY (CONT'D)
I had a big ol' horse like you
named Gus. Now that he is gone,
think you can take care of me?

Apollo's eyes are a light shade of amber.

Brady smiles.

Music starts. Time is passing -

EXT. WOLF CAMP - DUSK - TIME PASSING

Music continues.

Brady's truck pulls up to a secret spot in the Badlands called "Wolf Camp".

Brady and Lilly walk out of the truck towards the edge of the Badlands. It's the most breathtaking view at sunset.

The Badlands stretches towards the horizon. The sky is a beautiful shade of purple, orange and blue.

Brady and Lilly are sitting at the edge.

LILLY

Good night sun! See you in the morning!

Brady watches the last ray of sun disappearing.

BRADY

You know Lil... I'm sorry I haven't been around that much... Busy rodeoing and all...

LILLY

I know. You just... Long time ago. It's good. You're fine. I'm good. Now I'm just feel sorry too.

BRADY

...Do you miss mom?

LILLY

Yah... I'm sure it's a good adventure again.

Brady looks back at the horizon. The sun has disappeared over the Badlands wall.

EXT. PRAIRIE - TIME PASSING

Music continues -

The sunrise.

Brady walks around holding a halter, calling out for Apollo.

BRADY

Come on Apollo! Come on buddy!

He stops when he notices Apollo on a hill grazing. He whistles loudly.

Apollo perks its head up, sees Brady, and runs down the hill towards him. He stops right in front of Brady.

Brady is riding Apollo across the plains. The purplish Badlands passing them as he gallops.

EXT. BILL'S CORRAL - EVENING

Music continues -

Brady trains Bill's horse - a brown Arabian colt that's never been rode before. Bill is the silver-haired cowboy who asked him for help at the bar.

The young horse runs around the corral, avoiding Brady and Bill at first, slipping, falling to the ground, getting up, runs again, panting, agitated.

Brady is calm. Like a fish to water, Brady seems to understand every movement of the horse, as if they are locked in some kind of telepathic dance routine.

Bill is speechless when Brady manages to get on the colt bareback in no time.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - TIME PASSING

Music continues -

Brady and Wayne are sitting at the table, sharing a joint and looking through horse papers.

BRADY

Heard about Superbars. He was a
good old horse back in 60s or so.
Wish he was buckskin.

Wayne takes a galp of his beer.

WAYNE

Every body gets color blind in the
horse world.

BRADY

You can't ride the color, you can't
ride the papers.

WAYNE

No.

The father and son continue to share their knowledge and love for horses.

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT - TIME PASSING

The harvest moon is bright in the sky. The edge of the Badlands is visible in the dark.

Brady walks around by himself.

Music ends. End of time pass montage.

EXT. BRADY'S CORRAL - MORNING

Brady rides hard, galloping across the prairie.

He slows down, pulling on the reins as the sun glares down above him.

He rubs his brow, suddenly feeling faint. He lurches forward and vomits. He loses control, jumping from Apollo and staggering before falling collapses onto the ground.

INT. HOSPITAL - ER - DAY

Brady wakes up in the dim hospital room. He is lying in bed, wearing a blue gown and oxygen tubes in his nose.

He leans forward, pulling them off and ripping off the blood pressure aneroid on his arm.

INT. HOSPITAL - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Brady sits opposite the DOCTOR at her desk, Wayne sitting on a chair in the corner. The doctor shows him the x-rays highlighting the severity of his injury. Wayne sits by Brady, slouched in a chair.

DOCTOR

What's going on with your hand is called a partial complex seizure. It's not uncommon with head injuries like yours.

Brady wipes his forehead. Wayne shifts in his seat.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Your brain is sending these impulses so fast to your hand that your hand can't keep up. This could explain your dizziness and it's probably why you fainted.

Brady looks down.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Resting is very important Brady... Your Dad says you haven't been resting at all? Is that right?

WAYNE

I told him to rest. He never
listens though. It's lucky he
didn't hurt his head.

DOCTOR

If you don't stop your seizures are
going to get worse. No more riding,
no more rodeos. You can't afford
another head injury on top of the
one you already have. OK?

Brady leans back in his chair. Dejected.

I/E. PICK-UP ON HIGHWAY - EVENING

Wayne is driving. He looks over at Brady.

WAYNE

Well, Brady, sometimes we gotta
play the cards we're dealt.
Sometimes... I guess... dreams
aren't meant to be.

Brady stays quiet.

Wayne looks over at him again.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

You know, I'm your dad. You can
talk to me.

Brady continues to keep quiet.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Too bad your mom ain't here. You
and her can be stubborn together.

Brady stares at the disappearing lights outside the window.
His face expressionless.

EXT. DAKOTA MART - DUSK

Brady stands alone outside the store. The sun has set and
people are climbing into their cars to head home. He spits
chew into an empty soda bottle and looks up.

He notices a young man riding a horse on the side of the
highway towards the parking lot.

JOHNNY, a young Lakota teenager, climbs from the horse and
ties him to a pole.

He walks passed Brady and they nod to each other in acknowledgement before Johnny goes into the store.

Brady walks towards the horse. He lets the horse smell his hand and pets him. The horse seems out of place in this urban environment of traffic and concrete.

Brady sighs.

INT. COMMON CENTS GAS & GROCERY - NIGHT

Brady cleans up the food prep room. Washing blood from carving knives.

He mops the floor in the dim hallway.

He takes off his store uniform, changes into his cowboy outfit and puts his cowboy hat on.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A collection of Brady's rodeo belt buckles sits on the drawer. Prescription bottles, bullets, tobacco chews and a grey colored bible on the night stand.

Brady watches videos of himself riding at various rodeos.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - THE NEXT DAY

BRADY
Stay back in your saddle.

Brady is training James to ride saddle bronc on a tall training barrel that moves like a bucking horse, while Cat operates it with a lever handle.

Brady is holding the rope and shows James how to keep equal pressure, how to squeeze the swells.

BRADY (CONT'D)
You're gonna kick. See how that
works? Keep the slack out of your
rein.

Brady and James's hand grip the rope as the large barrel creeks back and forth.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Ready? No slack! Pressure! Where's
the pressure?

James, his face flushed and dotted with sweat, leans back, his arm in the air, rock back and forth in an imaginary ride.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Like that! Perfect. Just like that.

JAMES
So after that I throw my shoulder back?

BRADY
Yes, to get rid of the slack in your rein then up in the air and to your left.

The younger James dotes on his every word. Acting out the action as Brady speaks.

Cat lifts the lever handle, as James rocks back and forth, throwing his legs forward, blowing air from his cheeks as Brady gives instructions.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Ride like it's gonna be the last horse you ever get on. Because any bronc could be the last one.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LATER

Brady climbs up onto the training barrel.

CAT
Big ol' shaggy bronc.

Brady laughs as he arranges the rope.

BRADY
Ok, I'm gonna feel the jump. Go ahead.

Cat pulls the lever as Brady finds the right length for his rope. He's satisfied and gives Cat the nod to start pushing. Brady rocks back and forth, kicking his legs out, and turning his rigid body in synchronization with the rocking of the barrel. He's serious and focused.

BRADY (CONT'D)
See how I go back and across?

Cat smiles as he pushes down on the lever. Its good to see Brady up there again, even if only on a practice barrel.

CAT
Lift!

BRADY
See? Give him some rein. Hold him a second then beat him back to the ground! Fast feet!

CAT
Be like water my friend.

The intensity on Brady's face lifts for a second. He's already out of breath. He leans forward.

BRADY
James, you wanna try?

As Brady leans forward he finds he can't let go of the rope. His hand is gripping around the rope tightly and he can't control it. Trying hard not to make anything of it in front of the other boys, he struggles to peel open his fingers.

CAT
You aright?

BRADY
Yes, I'm fine.

Brady pulls his hand free and lowers himself to the ground.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A rodeo blares from the large TV in the corner of the room.

Brady holds a yellow cowboy shirt. He's giving James his old rodeo gear since the young cowboy is just starting out.

BRADY
This is Lane Scott's old riding shirt. He won about 15 thousand dollars in one summer wearing this shirt. It was mine for a while. I probably had my best summer in it. If it fits you, you can have it too. Too short in the arms for me.

Brady hands James the shirt and sits down next to Cat.

JAMES
Damn.

CAT

Some cowboys believe yellow is
superstitious. That ones lucky
though, ha?

Brady smiles.

BRADY

That one must just be 'stitious'.

They smile and watch James as he tries on the shirt.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Don't make it look bad.

James fastens the buttons and holds out his arms.

JAMES

I like it.

BRADY

You can try those chaps on too. If
they fit, go ahead and take them.

He watches James trying on his chaps and spurs. Like a
superhero seeing someone else wearing his cape.

JAMES

They fit perfect. Thanks Brades.
Appreciate it.

BRADY

Yep.

JAMES

I can't wait to ride in these bad
boys.

James motions the action of being on a bucking horse. He's
trying to seem manly, but it doesn't come off.

Brady watches James for another moment. James notices his
stare and quickly looks away.

BRADY

James, do you still wrestle?

JAMES

Huh?

BRADY

Do you still wrestle?

JAMES

Sometimes. Haven't practiced in a while though.

CAT

I'm down for a match or two.

BRADY

Come on. Let's wrestle then.

James looks confused.

Cat smirks, although he too seems unsure if Brady is serious.

JAMES

Why?

BRADY

Why not? We used to practice together.

JAMES

Yah... Well... that was tenth grade.

CAT

Been a long day. Shake it up a bit.

Brady looks determined. James gives in.

JAMES

Alright. Ok.

Brady and James shake hands. The boys start to circle around each other. Very soon James has a smile on his face too.

They go at each other, wrestling as hard as they can. Clearly both of them have some training in the past.

It looks like an even match for a while. James even seems to have an upper hand.

Then, suddenly, Brady takes it seriously. He grabs onto James and puts him in a choke hold, flips him over his shoulder and pins him onto the ground.

James struggles to get out of Brady's hold. His legs kicking out. But Brady holds him tight, too tight. James struggles to breathe.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Alright! I'm good. Brady. I'm pinned!

James is clearly in pain. But Brady doesn't let him go, keeping him in the choke hold.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Ok... Brady...

CAT
Alright, alright.

Cat pulls Brady away from James.

JAMES
Fuck Brady!

Now getting some air in his lungs, James gets up quickly.

CAT
You aright?

Brady immediately feels guilty.

BRADY
Didn't hurt you, did I?

JAMES
Told you I was pinned! Told you I was done! What's the matter with you!?

CAT
Cowboy up partner.

James shakes his head and walks away.

Cat walks into the kitchen, leaving Brady alone.

Brady wipes his face, steadies his breath. He looks up at the TV - the screen shows the replay of a cowboy riding bucking horse in slow motion.

EXT. CAT'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A moth rest on the florescent light. The sound of a tattoo gun buzzing.

Cat is finishing up the tattoo of Lane on Brady's back.

BRADY
You don't think I was too hard on James, do you?

CAT
Nah. He is aright.

The room falls silent again.

Cat looks at Brady for a moment, while wiping blood off of his fresh tattoo.

CAT (CONT'D)
You know, I know about your hand. I know you ain't supposed to be rodeoing or anything like that.

Brady doesn't react. Cat starts tattooing again.

CAT (CONT'D)
Must be tough. I know it's tough. But... You just gotta learn to let it go, and move on....

Cat stops his tattoo gun and looks up at Brady.

CAT (CONT'D)
Or it will eat at ya.

Brady's jaw is tense. He stays quiet.

CAT (CONT'D)
It's gotta be tough... I mean... I understand.

BRADY
No. You don't understand.

Cat stops, looks at Brady, waiting for him to say something else. But Brady is silent.

INT. LANE'S ROOM - DAY

Brady shows Lane the tattoo. PBR bull riding national finals is broadcasting on the radio.

BRADY
It's you Lane. Your favorite picture of yourself on a bull.

Lane is smiling and he starts to sign with his left hand.

BRADY (CONT'D)
S, a, l, t, y, salty.

Brady laughs.

BRADY (CONT'D)
It's pretty salty huh. I really like it!
(MORE)

BRADY (CONT'D)

I really like how he puts the feet
on there. That was a pretty good
call huh?

Lane sighs with a thumb up, grinning.

Brady is helping Lane to change out of his t-shirt into a cowboy shirt.

Lane's body is thin and frail from the lack of movement. On his back there is a large tattoo that reads "Say I wont".

Brady helps him to put the shirt on one sleeve at a time, wiping drool off of his mouth. There is a large tattoo covering the whole side of Lane's body - the late legendary bull rider Lane Frost riding a bucking bull. Next to the tattoo, a gastrostomy tube is inserted into Lane's flesh.

Brady bottoms up Lane's shirt. Lane looks up at him.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Looking good stud muffin.

Lane smiles.

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - TRAINING ROOM

Four PHYSIOTHERAPISTS help Lane to get on a practice saddle - a saddle strapped on a wooden platform with reins attached in the front.

Lane's shaking hand reaches for the horn of the saddle. Brady quickly takes his hand and places it onto the horn and holds onto Lane's hand so it doesn't slip off.

It's a difficult process, but Lane eventually sits onto the saddle. He looks up at Brady with a big grin on his face.

Brady takes Lane's cowboy hat and puts it onto Lane's head.

BRADY

Don't wanna get a sunburn.

Lane starts to move his body back and forth as if he is on a galloping horse, holding the reins in each hand, while Brady holds the other two ends of the rein, standing in front of Lane. Lane has trouble keeping his head up.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Look up at me brother. Look up at
me, Lane.

Lane slowly rise his head. Shaking his body faster as if he is riding fast.

Brady starts laughing with Lane out of pure joy at seeing his friends spirits so high.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Halt boy. Now slow him down a little bit. Back him up.

Lane stops shaking and slowly pulling the reins back.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Now sit up straight. Let's do some loping. Go fast!

Lane starts to shake his body again. They both start laughing.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Really loping off to the distance huh? You bet. Now stop. Say halt boy. Let me hear you say halt...

Lane makes a low sound through his damaged vocal cords.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Good job. Now you better watch out. She may start bucking. Keep a good tight seat on there. You better lift up your rein.

Lane struggles to keep his head up.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Lift, lift... lift...

Lane's head sinks lower.

BRADY (CONT'D)
You got her pull up now...

Suddenly, Brady stops smiling, a wave of sadness hits him. He looks down, takes a deep breath and looks up at Lane, whose head is still down.

Brady straightens his body, his face firm.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Look up Lane. Look up at me brother. Pick your head up. Way up.

Lane struggles painfully but lifts his head up slowly, with a proud smile on his face.

BRADY (CONT'D)
There you go Lane. Good work. You
got it now. Stay tough.

Brady says goodbye to Lane. They do their usual complicated hand shake. Brady helps Lane with his hand. Then he lifts Lane's arm up so they can give each other a hug.

They hug for a moment.

BRADY (CONT'D)
I love you brother. It's really
good seeing you.

Lane gives Brady the thumb up.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Gotta get home though. I will be
back soon. Keep working hard.

Brady walks away leaving Lane behind him.

INT. BRADY'S TRUCK - DAY

Brady drives for a while in silence. Loud wind blowing outside the window.

He tries to hold back but can't. Tears roll down his face. He quickly pulls over and breaks down sobbing.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brady puts his hat on the wall. Takes off his shirt and starts cleaning the room. He notices his rodeo bag in the corner, gathering dust.

He pulls his chaps and riding rope out of the bag. Holding the black and white rope tightly in his hand, stretching out in front of him as if he is riding a bronc horse. Then slowly, he stops and puts the rope down.

Brady sits at the edge of the bed and cleans his pistol. He sits back in bed and draws the pistol as if he was in an old western movie, aiming the gun at himself in the closet mirror. The broken mirror distorts Brady's face, fracturing it as he rubs his throbbing brow. Lilly's paper stars dot the wall behind him like bullet holes.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Brady walks around. It's windy. He whistles and calls out for Apollo.

He grows impatient. His whistle louder. But there is still no sign of Apollo in the wide open plains.

Brady keeps walking. He stops when he notices something -

A broken fence. The barbwire is broken and tangled.

Brady quickly runs over. Blood and flesh scatter the ground.

Brady finds Apollo.

The barbed wire has badly cut through his joint like a hacksaw. Apollo is breathing harshly.

Brady looks at the deep, bone cutting wound. His heart sinks.

He tries to get Apollo to walk, but the injured horse trips and cries out loudly, neighing, panting.

Brady knows what needs to be done. He sits down for a moment. Looks at Apollo for a long time.

BRADY
I'm sorry buddy. Should've stayed
close to home...

Brady takes his pistol out of the gun holder. He stands up, takes a deep breath, toughens up and points it at Apollo.

Suddenly Apollo shakes his head, panicked, neighing, whining, as if he understood what Brady is about to do.

The last bit of toughness in Brady is gone. He can't do it. He uncocks the pistol.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DUSK

The sun has disappeared behind the Badlands.

Wayne checks the bullets in the pistol and takes the rein from Brady.

WAYNE
Whistle for him when you walk away
please.

Brady walks away from them.

Wayne points the gun at Apollo, unmoved. He has done this many times.

Brady stops. He is facing away from Wayne and Apollo. He waits for a moment. The wind picks up.

He whistles.

BANG! A loud gun shot immediately follows, echoing out over the hills.

Brady steadies his breath, staying tough. He spits and walks away. Behind him, Wayne takes his hat off as he looks down at Apollo's lifeless body.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Slow motion of Brady's hands, washing away Apollo's blood. Water dripping down his face. His eyes are blank.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Brady wakes up slowly.

He gets dressed methodically for the rodeo.

He puts his rodeo hat on - a grey felt hat with an eagle feather. He looks himself in the mirror. Determined.

INT. BRADY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lilly is reading. Brady sits next to her.

BRADY
I love you Lilly.

LILLY
I love you too.

Brady watches Lilly for a moment.

BRADY
Apollo got hurt and we had to put him down.

LILLY
No.

BRADY
Yah.

LILLY
Like skeleton?

BRADY
Yah. You know I got hurt too,
right? Just like Apollo did.... But
I got to live...

He takes his cowboy hat off and looks at the dent still left from the horse hoof.

BRADY (CONT'D)
I was only kept alive because...
I'm human... If an animal around
here... got hurt as bad as I did,
we'll have to put them down. It
just not fair to them if they can't
do what they were born to do...

LILLY
Heaven.

BRADY
Yah. They go to heaven.

EXT. BRADY'S TRAILER - DAY

Brady loads the saddle into his pickup. Wayne walks up.

WAYNE
Where are you going with that?

BRADY
Where does it look like I'm going?
I'm going to the rodeo.

Wayne is surprised.

WAYNE
You fucking crazy?

BRADY
I'm gonna ride. I figured you'll
come and watch.

WAYNE
What the fuck do I wanna come for?
Watch you kill yourself?

BRADY
I'm gonna fucking ride, aright,
dad?

WAYNE

Whatever. You never listen to anything anyone says.

Brady almost laughs. He turns around to face Wayne.

BRADY

I don't listen?! I always fucking listened. Everything you ever fucking said to me! What happened to "cowboy up", "grit your teeth"? Didn't you always say "be a man Brady! Fucking step up, get back on, be a man!?" What happened to all that, Dad?

Wayne doesn't look at Brady. His stern face now has a hint of sadness.

WAYNE

Well, not today.

He tries to take Brady's bronc saddle from the truck.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

You don't need to fucking go...

BRADY

Bull shit. I'm fucking riding!

Brady grabs the saddle to keep it in place.

WAYNE

Fine!

Wayne lets go of the saddle.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Go kill yourself then!

He walks away.

BRADY

Look at you now. What're you good for?

WAYNE

I made you!

Brady watches Wayne walking back to the trailer.

BRADY

I'm not gonna end up like you.

Wayne stops for a moment, but there's nothing to say.

Brady quickly gets into the truck and drives away.

EXT. BRADY'S TRUCK ON HIGHWAY

Brady's truck is seen from a distance. A tiny vehicle barreling through the endless badlands.

INT. PICK-UP ON HIGHWAY

Brady's eyes are fixed on the road. He looks down at the passenger seat and notices something - Lilly's recorder.

He picks it up and presses play. Lilly's cheerful voice rattles out of it. As always Lilly's words are unique only to her, but Brady finds comfort in hearing her voice. He can't help but smile.

LILLY

I know it's your train Elmo, but I only played a little minute. I'll give it back, I promise. And you know what? This is amazing! Good! Always names like me... Lilly!

The recorder goes dead.

Brady's smile drops and his eyes focus on the road.

EXT. WATERS RODEO - DAY

Brady walks into the rodeo with his saddle and gear across his back.

He is reunited with the boys. Moving passed Tanner and James, shaking hands as he goes. Everyone is happy to see him.

JAMES

Hey Brady!

TANNER

Hey Brady! What you doing here?

Brady forces a smile.

He takes a spot by the fence and starts to put on his chaps and spurs.

He looks over to see Cat giving him a look as he too gets ready to ride.

The rodeo is in full swing. A bareback rider leaps from the gate and is immediately bucked off his horse in a cloud of dust. The crowd gasps and cheers as he hits the ground hard.

Brady puts on his spurs and prepares his saddle. He keeps shaking his right hand.

He sits on the saddle on the ground and puts chalk onto the grip. ANOTHER RIDER approaches him. They shake hands.

RIDER

Good to see you back, Brady!

BRADY

Yah, you too!

Brady goes back to his saddle and immediately grabs his head, rubbing his temple. He's in pain and it shows.

Brady goes behind the chute to get his horse ready. The wild bucking horse begins to go berserk in the Chute. Leaping up, trying to get free. The riders try to hold it down as it kicks and struggles against the metal bars. You have to be either brave or stupid to get on an animal like that. Brady seems determined to be both.

The horse falls to the ground and Brady lowers his body down dangerously into the chute to pull the horse back to its feet. The Horse stands and smashes once again against the bars before finally calming down.

Brady stops for a moment, watching another ride. He looks around and something catches his eye.

Wayne and Lilly are in the audience, standing by the fence.

Lilly sees Brady and waves.

Brady is surprised to see them. He holds back his emotions and forces a smile.

Wayne nods at Brady, acknowledging his son. Letting him know that his family have come to support him.

Brady nods back, but quickly walks away, jumping from the chute and tries to focus, doing his stretches, going through his routine. The bright sun glares behind him.

Brady is pacing back and forth. He is breathing hard. He looks down at his hand and realizes that, once again, it's gripping on its own, so tight, his knuckles are pale. He tries to peel open his hand but it doesn't work.

He struggles to let go.

Brady thinks for a moment, then he steadies his breath and slowly closes his eyes.

The sound of the crowd starts to fade around Brady. He is not struggling anymore, he just stands there.

Then -

His hand, still trembles, but his fingers slowly open up on their own and let go.

The heavy rope drops onto the ground.

Brady opens his eyes. Almost surprised as he looks down at his open palm.

The boys are calling out to him now. It's his turn to ride. But Brady doesn't move.

Cat jumps off the chute to check on him.

CAT
You aright?

Brady looks at his relaxed hand and up at Cat.

BRADY
Yah.

CAT
Come on then.

Brady doesn't move. They look at each other for a moment.

BRADY
Good luck, partner.

Brady reaches his hand out. Cat looks at him thoughtfully. Then he reaches out to shake Brady's hand in a moment of quiet understanding and respect.

CAT
You too, Cowboy.

Brady turns and walks away.

Music plays -

The beautiful moments of the rodeo at dusk. Young riders risking it all in the arena. Their friends cheering them on in the chute. Kids sitting on top of the fences, their dark hair blowing in the wind - the next generation of riders.

Brady walks towards Wayne and Lilly, who waits for him in the distance. Wind picks up and blows the dust into the air.

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH BADLANDS - DUSK

Brady and Lilly sit in the back of the truck. The Badlands is a shade of purple and blue around them.

The road unravelling behind is endless, stretching all the way to the horizon.

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - DAY

Music continues -

Brady watches as Lane takes little steps with a walking machine at the rehabilitation center. Each step he makes is an achievement, each made with great effort and pain, but Lane is smiling. His spirit is unbreakable.

Brady cheers Lane on as Lane walks towards him.

Music continues -

INT. LANE'S ROOM - LATER

Back in Lane's room, the boys watch a winning bull ride Lane made years ago. He is at the stand, pumping his fist in the air. Everyone cheers for him.

Brady and Lane both smile down at the video.

LANE (VIDEO)
Motors runnin', feelin' great!

BRADY
There's my brother.

Lane has a big grin on his face. The video stops. Brady's smile slowly fades. He struggles with his words.

BRADY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry that I couldn't be
around. I was always rodeoing,
going so much. I feel bad...

He looks up at Lane.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Now I kind of understand how you
must've felt... And... now that...

BRADY (CONT'D)
I can't rodeo... for a while... I
can at least come visit you more
often.

Brady looks down. It's painful to finally admit it.

BRADY (CONT'D)
So...

Lane stares at Brady. His hand shakes harshly, trying to convey his words to Brady. Brady spells out the words reading Lane's hand gesture.

BRADY (READING LANE'S SIGN LANGUAGE)
(CONT'D)
...Don't... give up on your
dreams...

He looks at Lane, who nods firmly at him. He continues to sign with his shaking left hand. Brady reads.

BRADY (READING LANE'S SIGN LANGUAGE)
(CONT'D)
...You've...got a... You've got a
better chance than I do...

Lane nods again. Satisfied to have communicated it to Brady.

Brady looks down, holding back his emotions. He gets up and stands in front of Lane.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Come on. Look up at me brother.

He takes Lane's hands and Lane looks up at him.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Grab your reins. Now wheel them to
the left.

Lane pulls on Brady's hand as if he were on a horse, and brady's hands are the rein.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Now to the right... Good job Lane.
Go ahead, stop him. Back him up.

Lane pulls Brady's hands towards him.

BRADY (CONT'D)
You still got it.

Lane has trouble keeping his head up. But he is smiling.

BRADY (CONT'D)
You're... You're on big old Gus
again. You remember old Gus. Loping
across there.

Lane is imagining riding Gus as Brady describes it. His face, full of life and hope. Lane begins to remember -

EXT. BADLANDS - DUSK

The plains and the Badlands - drifting through towards the light on the horizon.

BRADY (V.O)
Through the Badlands, chasing them
cows out of the trees...

A horse's hooves gliding through the tall grass.

INT. LANE'S ROOM - DAY

BRADY
The sun's shining. Wind blowing.

Brady's face, watching Lane. He looks calm and content.

BRADY (CONT'D)
Remember the wind on your face. The
sun in your eyes.

Lane lifts his head up with a smile on his face. He closes his eyes.

EXT. BADLANDS - DUSK

POV from the rider - the head of the horse as it moves through the plains. The horse's mane blowing in the wind.

The rider is Brady.

Brady is riding Gus again, in a luminous glow of sunlight. The wind is blowing. Gus gallops across the plains. His powerful hooves flying through the grass. Brady's face against the sky, content. Exactly where he wants to be.

CUT TO BLACK

Music continues -

Title. Credits roll.