

Training Taylor

By

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Into The Storm: A short story by April J. Miller

INT. GORDON HOUSEHOLD, NIGHT

KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Typical Los Angeles household. CONNOR (12) sits alone at the table eating while his parents, MILES and SHARON get ready for a night out. He's a good kid, but not above seeing what he can get away with. Connor pulls out an envelope and hands it to his mother as she walks by.

CONNOR

Here, Mom. Happy Mother's Day.

Sharon takes the envelope and opens it. Inside is a home-made Mother's Day card. After reading it, she bends down and kisses his cheek.

SHARON

Thank you. I love it.

CONNOR

Now can I go with you?

SHARON

No.

CONNOR

I'll sit in the corner.

SHARON

No.

MILES

Connor. Guys don't take other guys on dates with their girls.

CONNOR

But she's my girl too.

MILES

She's your mother. There's a difference.

CONNOR

And it's Mother's Day which means I should be the one going out.

The doorbell RINGS.

SHARON

That's Mrs. Shelby.

Sharon opens the front door and Mrs. DORIS SHELBY (40's) enters.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR  
Hi, Mrs. Shelby.

MRS. SHELBY  
Hey, Connor. You mean you haven't talked them into letting you go, yet?

MILES  
It's not happening.

MRS. SHELBY  
Bummer. Looks like I get to trounce you at race cars again.

CONNOR  
It's not happening.

SHARON  
How quickly they catch on.  
(To her husband)  
Ready to go, hon?

MILES  
Yep.  
(To Mrs. Shelby)  
If you need us, we'll be at Italian Gardens. Number is on the fridge.

MRS. SHELBY  
We'll be fine. You two have a wonderful date night. I am totally jealous. Even when Charles was alive, I barely got a card and candy bar.

CONNOR  
I think I have a candy bar in my room.

MRS. SHELBY  
If you happen to notice a certain young man hanging out the window by his feet, just ignore it.

MILES  
No problem.  
(To Connor)  
Remember, tomorrow is school. Not too late.

Miles and Sharon leave. Connor gets up and puts his plate in the sink

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Can we play the race cars now?

MRS. SHELBY

Sure. You set it up and I'll be in as soon as I get something to drink.

Mrs. Shelby opens the fridge.

LIVING ROOM, NIGHT

Connor gets the video game ready to play. Mrs. Shelby walks in and sets her drink on a side table. Sitting next to Connor on the couch, they are quickly involved in the game.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The room is quiet. Mrs. Shelby sits on the couch, reading. Connor enters dressed in his pajamas, rumpled with sleep.

CONNOR

Aren't they home yet?

Mrs. Shelby glances up at a wall clock. The clock reads 11:15 pm.

MRS. SHELBY

Not yet.

CONNOR

They're usually home by now.

MRS. SHELBY

They could have decided to see a movie. I wouldn't worry too much.

Connor turns around and walks out.

Mrs. Shelby is just getting back to her book when the door bell rings. She walks to the door and opens it.

A POLICEMAN stands at the door.

POLICEMAN

Is this the Gordon residence?

MRS. SHELBY

Yes.

Connor stands across the room in the doorway, listening.

(CONTINUED)

POLICEMAN

There's been an accident.

CONNOR

Mom? Dad?

POLICEMAN

I'm sorry.

He hears a sobbing cry from Mrs. Shelby. He runs across the room and wraps his arms around her, holding on tight and burying his head while she holds him.

INT. GORDON HOUSEHOLD, DAY

Connor and Mrs. Shelby slowly pack Connor's room, mostly his clothes. Connor tries hard, though unsuccessfully, not to cry. He's putting too much into his suitcase.

MRS. SHELBY

Remember, you can only take so much on the plane. I promise I'll have everything else sent to you.

CONNOR

Why can't I stay here with you. You don't have any children or husband. We can help each other.

MRS. SHELBY

Because, love, we're not related. I would gladly adopt you, but you have an uncle who has agreed to have you live with him.

CONNOR

I've never met him.

MRS. SHELBY

He came once when you were a little baby. Of course you don't remember, but he seemed like a really nice man. He's married now, but doesn't have any children.

CONNOR

Where is Montana?

MRS. SHELBY

Oh, come on. You're twelve and you don't know where Montana is? It's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MRS. SHELBY (cont'd)  
between Idaho and North Dakota,  
just below Canada.

Tears fill his eyes.

CONNOR  
It's too far away. I'll never see  
you again.

Mrs. Shelby hugs Connor.

MRS. SHELBY  
Yes you will, darling. It's just  
that time seems like forever when  
you are young. I promise I'll come  
up and see how you are doing.

CONNOR  
Can I come and visit? Maybe spend  
the summer with you?

MRS. SHELBY  
Sure, if your uncle will let  
you. But I have a feeling that,  
once you get up there, you'll love  
it so much you won't want to come  
back.

CONNOR  
If he doesn't have any kids, then  
what am I supposed to do? Do they  
have game systems there?

MRS. SHELBY  
Of course they do. He also has a  
ranch which means you'll have dogs  
to play with and animals to take  
care of.

CONNOR  
Work.

MRS. SHELBY  
Yes, but, believe it or not, work  
can actually be good for you.

CONNOR  
Can I have my own gun and go  
hunting?

MRS. SHELBY

I don't know. Your Uncle Jonathan will have to decide that. Although, I have heard your dad say he goes fishing quite a bit.

CONNOR

That's something. I hope they have things like running water and bathrooms.

MRS. SHELBY

Connor, you're going to Montana, not Siberia.

CONNOR

Almost the same thing.

MRS. SHELBY

Hardly.

CONNOR

It'll probably be like that movie I saw where the guy had to run outside to go to the bathroom. And they used lanterns for light and a pump outside for water.

MRS. SHELBY

I think you're going to be very surprised when you get there. It's going to be a great adventure for you, you'll see.

CONNOR

But one without Mom or Dad or you.

MRS. SHELBY

I will always love you, and you have a home with me anytime you need one. Now we've got to get going, the plane leaves in a couple of hours.

LAX OUTSIDE TERMINAL - DAY

Mrs. Shelby and Connor walk into the terminal building to the airline counter. Connor looks around while Mrs. Shelby checks in his one large suitcase. Not far away he sees a MAN in full cowboy costume. He grimaces.

Mrs. Shelby puts her hand on his back and urges him forward.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. SHELBY  
Onto the concourse.

CONNOR  
You know, I hate westerns.

MRS. SHELBY  
What?

CONNOR  
Westerns. You know, cowboys,  
horses, cows. I never liked those  
movies.

Mrs. Shelby just sighs and directs him forward.

CONCOURSE GATE

Mrs. Shelby walks up to the GATE ATTENDANTS behind the desk.

MRS. SHELBY  
I have Connor Gordon. He's twelve  
and will be flying alone.

ATTENDANT  
Thank you. The plane will be  
boarding in just a few minutes. He  
can go on board now and find his  
seat.

MRS. SHELBY  
Thank you.

Mrs. Shelby turns back to Connor.

MRS. SHELBY  
Promise me you'll call and let me  
know how you're doing?

Connor throws his arms around her waist. He's fighting  
tears. Mrs. Shelby cries.

MRS. SHELBY  
Try not to worry. It only lets  
your mind create things that are  
not true. The Lord will watch over  
you.

Connor nods. He picks up his backpack and walks towards the  
plane. An ATTENDANT checks his ticket and sends him  
along. Connor turns around one last time and waves, then  
runs the rest of the way.



INT. MISSOULA AIRPORT, DAY

JONATHAN GORDON (late 30's) waits for Connor. He wears the outdoors like a glove. Tall and lean, everything about him screams "rancher".

Connor is one of the first to get off. He scans the crowd. To the side is a man dressed as a cowboy. Connor grimaces and looks elsewhere, hoping.

JONATHAN

Connor.

It's the cowboy. Connor resigns himself and turns to meet his uncle. The man holds out his hand.

JONATHAN

I'm your Uncle Jonathan. I'm sorry to hear about your mom and dad.

Connor shakes his hand.

CONNOR

You didn't come.

JONATHAN

One thing you'll learn about a ranch is that it doesn't allow you to do what you want when you want. I wanted to come, but something came up.

Connor nods and shoulders his pack. They leave.

Outside it is almost dark with clear skies. Connor looks around gaping at all the sky and space as they walk to Jonathan's truck.

CONNOR

I'm going to miss the ocean.

JONATHAN

Our ocean is made of grass.

CONNOR

What do you mean?

JONATHAN

You'll see. You hungry?

CONNOR

A little. Haven't eaten since this morning.

Jonathan throws Connor's suitcase in the back of the truck. They get in and drive away.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - NIGHT

Two headlights blaze a trail through the darkness as the truck rolls down the driveway. On each side is paddock fencing. The truck pulls in front of the ranch house. The windows glow, promising comfort.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Jonathan puts the truck in park and turns the engine off. He glances at Connor who is sound asleep. He leans over and shakes his shoulder.

JONATHAN

Connor.

Connor doesn't waken. Jonathan unbuckles Connor's belt then gets out of the truck.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - NIGHT

He walks to the passenger side and opens the door. Picking Connor up, he carries him to the house. The door opens allowing TWO BORDER COLLIES out followed by SHEILA GORDON (30's), Jonathan's wife. Ranch life has taken its toll on her, but the goodness of her heart radiates from her face.

JONATHAN

Will you get his backpack, hon,  
while I carry him in?

SHEILA

Of course. He looks dead tired.

JONATHAN

He slept most of the way. I  
stopped to get him something to  
eat. He barely finished it before  
he was out cold.

INT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Jonathan carries Connor inside. Though the room says "Ranch", it says it will style and money. The border collies are excited.

JONATHAN

Down, Ready. You'll see him in the morning. Bridget, go lay down.

Both dogs return to their places before the fireplace. Jonathan carries Connor upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sheila pulls away the covers and Connor is placed on his bed. Jonathan removes his shoes and socks, but leaves his clothes on and covers him. He stands by his wife and puts his arm around her as they contemplate the boy.

SHEILA

So young to lose so much.

JONATHAN

It was hard for me to hear about Miles and Sharon. I can't imagine what he has gone through.

SHEILA

I hope he'll be able to settle in all right. It's going to be so different for him. How is a ranch going to compete with a big city?

JONATHAN

He'll be so busy learning new things, I doubt he will miss much. Lord, I just hope I'm up to teaching him.

SHEILA

Jonathan, you're going to do fine.

JONATHAN

I don't know, Hon. I've never been around kids. I couldn't even handle them when I was a kid. Why God allowed this, I'll never know.

SHEILA

Well, God did and the boy is here. We'll just take it one day at a time and pray - a lot.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

You always make the solutions sound so simple, but I know better. I need to go get his suitcase from the truck. I'll be back in a minute.

Jonathan leaves. Sheila stays for a moment longer.

SHEILA

Father, please help Connor adjust. Heal his pain and give him a fresh start. And teach Jonathan how to be a father just like you.

Sheila walks to the door, turns out the light and quietly closes the door leaving the room in darkness.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Connor opens his eyes. He's disorientated. He looks around and does not recognize anything. Slowly, his memory returns and he realizes where he's at. Outside, he hears a dog bark.

He throws the covers off, walks to the window and opens the curtains.

POV:

Outside, under a brilliant sun, is a beautiful, sprawling ranch nestled beneath a large mountain. Connor gapes. The dog barks again. He sees a black and white dog barking at the heels of some cows as he herds them down a chute and into a truck.

CONNOR

Whoa!

As the last cow goes in, his Uncle Jonathan steps from behind the truck, lifts up the ramp and closes the doors. He bangs on the back of the truck. The truck drives away. Jonathan and the dog walk back towards the house.

Connor brushes his hair, changes his shirt and puts on his shoes and socks. He runs out the door.

INT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Connor slows as he descends the stairs, looking everywhere at once. In the living room, his Uncle Jonathan is standing looking at a sheet of paper while drinking some coffee. The two Border Collies leave their place by the fireplace and come to meet him. He pets them. Jonathan looks up.

JONATHAN

Good morning. How are you feeling?

CONNOR

Okay. I don't remember much.

JONATHAN

That's because you practically fell asleep in your dinner. I had to carry you in. Hungry?

CONNOR

Sure.

JONATHAN

Come on down and into the kitchen. I'm sure your Aunt Sheila will fix you something.

Connor descends the rest of the way and follows his uncle into the kitchen area.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

In the kitchen, Sheila Gordon sets dishes in the dishwasher. They walk in.

SHEILA

Good morning. Now I can see what you look like with your eyes open.

JONATHAN

Connor, this is your Aunt Sheila.

CONNOR

Pleased to meet you.

SHEILA

And you. We've been wanting to come see you for years, but something always came up.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR  
So I've heard.

Uncomfortable pause.

SHEILA  
Would you like some breakfast?

CONNOR  
Yes, please.

SHEILA  
Then have a seat. Would scrambled  
eggs and bacon be okay. I made  
extra biscuits.

CONNOR  
Yea, sounds good.

JONATHAN  
Normally, breakfast is around  
6:30, but we'll make an exception  
this time.

CONNOR  
6:30! The sun isn't even out yet.

JONATHAN  
It is during the summer. Anyway,  
I've already worked several hours  
before I eat.

CONNOR  
Please don't tell me I have to get  
up that early.

JONATHAN  
Not until you get used to things.

CONNOR  
Which means that later I will.

JONATHAN  
It depends upon which chores I give  
you. Everyone on a ranch has to do  
their fair share. No exceptions.

Sheila puts a plate down in front of Connor.

CONNOR  
(To himself)  
Great, I ended up in a work camp.

SHEILA

It's not all work. We make time for other things. Plus, I think you'll find that some of the work can actually be fun.

CONNOR

Like what?

SHEILA

One of my favorites is taking the four-wheelers out to hay the cattle.

CONNOR

Really? You guys got ATVs?

JONATHAN

It's part of the job. Can you ride a horse?

CONNOR

No. Not many horses in LA.

JONATHAN

Well, you'll learn soon enough.

CONNOR

Why do you need horses? Why not use the four-wheelers?

JONATHAN

Because some stock, like sheep, spook around those things. And sheep can run into places only a horse can go.

CONNOR

Ride-em cowboy.

JONATHAN

That's it.

CONNOR

As long as I don't have to dress the part.

INT. BARN - DAY

Gordon's barn is huge. Along with the horse stalls are several smaller enclosures. The bleating of a lamb says what's inside. A COWBOY is taking hay from a wheelbarrow and placing it inside stalls. Jonathan and Connor walking in the huge double doors.

JONATHAN

Frank, this is my nephew,  
Connor. He's staying with us now.

Frank and Connor shake hands.

FRANK

Pleased to meet you.

CONNOR

You, too.

FRANK

Sorry to hear about your  
parents. I met your dad once. I  
really liked him.

CONNOR

Thanks. I miss them.

FRANK

I'm sure you do. If there is  
anything you need or want to ask,  
just let me know. I'll even teach  
you how to sneak around the boss  
here when you need to.

Connor loosens up enough to smile.

CONNOR

I'd appreciate that.

JONATHAN

Okay. Frank why don't you saddle  
Skippy for Connor before you get  
yourself fired. I'm taking the  
lamb back up to the herd.

FRANK

Sure thing. Connor would you mind  
finishing the haying for me? I  
just have these three stalls to  
go. Just divide the rest of this  
up and throw it over the door.

(CONTINUED)



CONNOR

Okay.

While Franks walks across the barn to pull out a horse, Connor does as he was instructed. Jonathan gets his own horse from a stall and throws the lead rope over a door. He picks up a brush.

JONATHAN

Over here Connor.

Connor joins him.

JONATHAN

You might as well start learning how to care for a horse. First thing is that you never saddle a horse without brushing him. That gets all the dirt and hay off him.

He demonstrates how it's done.

JONATHAN

There's a brush over there. Why don't you work on Skippy.

CONNOR

I've never been around horses. He won't bite will he?

JONATHAN

Not Skippy. That horse isn't anything but an overgrown puppy.

As Connor approaches the horse, Frank walks up and hands him a piece of carrot.

FRANK

Here, give him this. He'll be your best friend forever. Just hold your hand flat with the carrot on it. Now, put your hand under his mouth.

Connor does as instructed. The horse takes the carrot with a wiggle of his lips.

CONNOR

That tickles.

FRANK

It's a lot better than being bit, isn't it? Don't worry, ol' Skippy

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FRANK (cont'd)  
will never purposely hurt  
you. He's taught many a novice how  
to ride.

CONNOR  
The horse teaches people how to  
ride?

FRANK  
Sure. A good, gentle horse is the  
best teacher in the world. Now,  
see if you can brush him the way  
your Uncle Jonathan showed you.

Connor brushes his coat causing Skippy to nod his head up  
and down.

CONNOR  
What's he doing?

FRANK  
He's saying that feels  
wonderful. A little more to the  
left, please.

Connor laughs while he brushes with more vigor.

FRANK  
Okay, now we need to check his feet  
to get out any dirt or manure that  
may be inside.

CONNOR  
Manure, gross.

Frank answers as he's picking Skippy's feet.

FRANK  
It may be gross, but you'll get  
used to it soon enough.

CONNOR  
What do you mean?

JONATHAN  
He means that mucking the stables  
will be one of your  
chores. Everyone starts out doing  
it. We need to get going, Frank.

FRANK

Yes, sir. I'll have the saddle on  
by the time you get the lamb.

Connor stands back while Frank finishes tacking Skippy.

FRANK

Okay, Mr. Connor, come over here  
and I'll show you how to get on.

Connor is not so sure. He walks slowly to the horses side.

FRANK

The first time can be hard so I'll  
help you.

Frank bends down and cups his hands together.

FRANK

Put your left foot in my hands,  
then as I lift you put your right  
leg over the saddle and sit. Hold  
onto the saddle horn as you go.

The action goes smoothly. Connor sits still while Frank  
adjusts the stirrups.

FRANK

Skippy is trained to neck  
rein. Take his reins in your right  
hand. Now, if you want him to go  
right move your whole arm to the  
right.

Connor does so and Skippy does a little circle.

FRANK

Boss, you told me he's never been  
on a horse before. He's reining  
like a pro.

JONATHAN

That's what he told me.

FRANK

Okay, smarty. Now rein to the  
left.

Connor moves his arm to the left and Skippy does another  
little circle.

FRANK

So, how do you stop?

CONNOR

I don't know.

FRANK

You pull straight back. But don't pull too hard, you'll hurt his mouth. He only needs a little pressure.

Connor pulls back and Skippy backs up.

FRANK

Whoa, you've got it in reverse. Not so hard.

CONNOR

So how do I get him to go forward?

FRANK

Give him a light kick in his side with your legs.

Connor does and Skippy starts forward. A light pull on the reins stops him.

CONNOR

This is incredible.

JONATHAN

Okay, Mr. Incredible, we need to go. Frank, we'll have to go slow until Connor gets the hang of things so we'll probably be later than normal.

FRANK

You got it, boss.

As Jonathan and Connor leave the barn, Jonathan whistles sharply and the two Border Collies join them.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Jonathan and Connor riding.

JONATHAN

Would you like to try to run a little?

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Think I can?

JONATHAN

Sure. The easiest way to learn is to lean forward and kind of stand in the stirrups. If you need to, hold onto the saddle horn. Now kick him.

Connor does what he is told and they both break into a canter.

JONATHAN

When you have the feel of it, sit back in the saddle. It'll be like sitting in a rocking chair.

CONNOR

I'm doing it!

JONATHAN

You sure are. You're a Gordon all right.

MOVING:

We follow them as they run. They stop at a small cabin. Behind it is a large shed with double doors.

CONNOR

What's this place?

JONATHAN

The shepherd's hut. The place behind it is the shearing shed. Roberto should be up with the sheep.

Jonathan whistles for the dogs. When they come up, he commands them.

JONATHAN

Find the sheep. Find Roberto.

Ready and Bridget streak away.

CONNOR

They know what you said?

JONATHAN

Border Collies are the smartest breed of dog on earth. Watch, once

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN (cont'd)  
they find them, one will stay with  
the herd while the other comes  
back. We can start walking that  
way. Hopefully, they aren't too  
far away.

They ride forward at a walk.

CONNOR  
What happened to the lamb?

JONATHAN  
She broke her leg while trying to  
follow her mother up a  
cliff. Another sheep bumped her  
off the trail and she fell. We had  
to splint it and keep her  
penned. Roberto could have done  
it, but there were too many new  
lambs so your Aunt Sheila took care  
of her.

CONNOR  
She's okay now?

JONATHAN  
Sure. Your Aunt Sheila is great  
with young animals. She's as good  
as new.

They hear barking.

Ready comes running back, twirls then takes off again.

JONATHAN  
Good, they're not far away. Can  
you run again?

CONNOR  
Sure.

They kick the horses into a run to follow Ready.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

They ride into a large pass, one side is filled with grazing  
sheep. To the side, ROBERTO is standing with JACOB, another  
BORDER COLLIE. Roberto is dressed in Spanish peasant  
clothes. One hand holds a rifle, the other a staff. He  
lifts his arm in welcome. Jonathan dismounts. Connor  
watching how he does it and tries to imitate his  
actions. He ends up on his bottom.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

You didn't tell me how bad it would hurt.

JONATHAN

You didn't ask. Don't worry, it's only until you get used to it.

CONNOR

And how long will that be?

JONATHAN

Oh, about a week.

Connor flops backwards to lay on the ground.

CONNOR

Ahhhh!

JONATHAN

(To Roberto)

Roberto, the drama queen over there. .

CONNOR

That's drama KING.

JONATHAN

Is my nephew, Connor who, as you can see, is learning how to ride a horse.

Roberto looks as though he should have a Spanish accent, but his speech is articulate.

ROBERTO

Good morning, Connor. You looked as though you were doing a pretty good job for one learning to ride.

CONNOR

Thanks.

Connor stands up and brushes his pants.

JONATHAN

I brought the lamb back. She should be fine now.

ROBERTO

Great. Just let her go. Jacob, take it to the herd.

(CONTINUED)

Jonathan puts the lamb on the ground. It starts towards the herd. Jacob follows. They watch it for a few seconds. The lambs bleats are quickly answered by its mother. The two unite and the lamb begins feeding.

ROBERTO

You two want to come down to the hut for something to drink?

JONATHAN

I'm sure Connor could use a little walk and some refreshment.

CONNOR

Walk? I can barely hobble.

JONATHAN

Walking will help take the stiffness out.

CONNOR

I'd rather just lay down here and die.

JONATHAN

Come on D.K. dying is not an option on my ranch.

(To the dogs)

Ready, Bridget, stay and watch.

As they walk away, Connor looks back over his shoulder at the two dogs laying on the ground.

CONNOR

Why are they staying?

JONATHAN

Because there are animals in these mountains that love to eat sheep. They'll stay as added protection while Roberto is away.

CONNOR

What kind of animals?

ROBERTO

Bears, wolves, coyote, sometimes cougar. Even saw a stray dog attack a lamb.



## INT. ROBERTO'S CABIN - DAY

The cabin is one room with a kitchen area. Simple, although in one corner is a desk with a computer. Next to it stands a bookcase crammed with agricultural books.

The door opens and Roberto enters followed by Jonathan and Connor. Connor quickly grabs the only large chair in the cabin while Jonathan takes the chair at the desk. Roberto opens one cabinet and pulls out three glasses. From his small fridge, he takes out a picture of water and pours a glass for each. He hands one to Connor who takes a drink.

CONNOR

It's cold.

ROBERTO

Generator.

JONATHAN

The only way Roberto consented to work for me was if I provided a computer and time for his research. That meant electricity even up here.

CONNOR

Research?

ROBERTO

You don't think I'm up here for the great pay and wonderful benefits do you? Although I must say your uncle does pay a descent wage.

(To Jonathan)

You can owe me later.

They fist bump.

ROBERTO

Truth is, I'm working to develop a new breed of sheep,

CONNOR

Sounds. . . interesting.

JONATHAN

It is if he can pull it off. As his partner and patron, I'll get a good size percentage of whatever he produces, plus, the first herd of this super sheep.

Jonathan stands up.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

We've got things to do down below. Supplies will be up in four days. Let me know if you need anything.

ROBERTO

Will do, boss. Good meeting you, Connor.

CONNOR

You, too.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Jonathan and Connor walk to their horses.

CONNOR

How is Roberto supposed to tell you if he needs anything if he can't leave the herd? Send the dog with a note?

JONATHAN

Satellite phone.

CONNOR

Oh. I knew that.

They mount their horses. Jonathan whistles. Ready and Bridget join them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sheila has the table set for lunch. Frank is already sitting. The door bursts open and Connor and Jonathan walk in.

CONNOR

Aunt Sheila, we rode up to see Roberto and the sheep. I rode a horse named Skippy, you know, like the peanut butter. I got so good we even ran.

He talks as he sits at the table and begins making a sandwich. Jonathan interrupts.

JONATHAN

Connor.

Connor stops.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

First, we always wash up when we come in the house. Once we're all seated, we say grace and then we eat.

Connor's embarrassed.

CONNOR

Sorry, I didn't know.

JONATHAN

Well, you do now. Now go wash up.

Connor leaves the room.

SHEILA

That was a little hard.

JONATHAN

The boy needs to learn.

SHEILA

Yes, but you didn't need it to sound as if he purposely misbehaved. He'll learn, just give him time.

Connor comes back in and sits at the table, touching nothing. Jonathan washes his hands at the sink. When Jonathan and Sheila sit down, they all hold hands.

JONATHAN

Father, thank you for this food. Bless us as we work and seek you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Food is passed around and sandwiches made.

JONATHAN

Sheila, you should have seen Connor riding like an old hand. He practically ran Skippy into the ground.

SHEILA

Wow. Did you like riding?

CONNOR

It was fun, but I'm still sore. How do you handle it every day?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Your muscles get stronger. After a while, it won't even bother you.

SHEILA

Although your butt still hurts on long rides.

CONNOR

I'll make sure to bring a pillow.

EXT. OUTSIDE BARN - DAY

Early morning. Connor walks into the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

He walks to a stall that Frank is cleaning.

FRANK

Ready to start work?

CONNOR

Not really.

FRANK

Sorry about that, but everyone has to pull their weight. Come in here and I'll show you how to do this.

CONNOR

Doesn't look like much except fork it up and dump it in.

FRANK

That about says it. However, unless the stall is really bad, you only have to do the messy parts.

CONNOR

Which looks like pretty much everything.

FRANK

That's because Beau likes to kick things around. His stall is usually the worse which is why I decided to do it for you on your first day.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Thanks.

FRANK

No problem. Use the fork to pick up the pieces. Then, move the shavings around to find the wet. When you do, you have to dig all that out. See?

CONNOR

Gross. Concentrated horse pee.

FRANK

They haven't figured out how to keep a diaper on them yet.

Frank finishes and hands the fork to Connor.

FRANK

When you fill the wheelbarrow, take it out back and dump it. You'll see the mound.

Connor rolls the wheelbarrow outside and returns with it empty.

FRANK

Okay, here's the fork. I'll put Beau back in.

CONNOR

But what if the horse is still in the stall?

FRANK

Then you take a lead rope, snap it on and put them into another stall until you're done. Quick hint, use the same stall to hold them or you'll be cleaning every one twice.

Connor watches as Frank opens a stall and grabs the horse by the halter. He places it into the stall he just finished.

FRANK

I have to do some mowing. Let me know if you need anything.

Frank leaves.

(CONTINUED)

Connor picks up a lead rope and, opening a stall, clips it onto the horse inside. He puts the horse where Beau came from. He begins cleaning.

When he's finished, he re-opens the stall, but he has forgotten the lead rope. Remembering what Frank did, he grabs the horse by the halter and leads it out. When the horse walks into the hallway, it jerks its head out of Connor's grip. Connor panics, scaring the horse. The horse runs out of the barn.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Connor is scared. He runs out to catch the horse, but it is trotting down the driveway. He hears the lawnmower and runs behind the house to get Frank.

CONNOR

One of the horses is out.

Frank jumps off the mower and runs.

The horse is half-way down the drive, talking to another horse over a pasture fence.

FRANK

Darn, it's Hershey. She's a pain in the back-end. Hold on a minute.

Frank goes into the barn and returns with a coiled lariat.

FRANK

I'm going to try and get to the other side and herd her back. See if you can send her towards the barn.

Connor looks uncertain.

CONNOR

Okay.

Frank walks down the drive. Hershey sees him coming and trots further away. Frank returns.

FRANK

I could be chasing that horse all day. It'll be faster on another horse.

He disappears into the barn. A moment later, he comes riding out and trots down the drive.

(CONTINUED)

VOICE OFF CAMERA  
What's happening?

Connor turns to see his uncle walking up. He hesitates answering.

JONATHAN  
Connor, I asked you a question.

CONNOR  
The horse got loose.

JONATHAN  
How did that happen?

CONNOR  
It wasn't my fault. The stupid thing jerked out of my hand and ran away.

JONATHAN  
I don't see a lead rope on it.

CONNOR  
(whispered)  
No, sir.

JONATHAN  
What?

CONNOR  
(louder)  
No, Sir.

JONATHAN  
We'll talk about it later. It looks like Frank was able to lasso her. That Hershey has always been a pain.

Frank rides up leading the mare. He gets down and hands the rope to Connor.

FRANK  
Here you go. Make sure you close the door before you take the rope off.

Connor leads the mare back to the barn.

JONATHAN  
How did the mare get away?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Don't know. I was mowing out back.

JONATHAN

It looks like he tried to move her without a lead.

FRANK

John, you know that horse is as slippery as a rabbit in cover. And, the boy has no experience with horses.

JONATHAN

You're right. Hopefully, he'll learn something from this.

INT KITCHEN - DAY

All four are eating lunch. Connor looks subdued.

JONATHAN

Did you finish the barn okay?

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

JONATHAN

I remember the first time that mare got away from me. It took me three hours to chase her down.

SHEILA

Hershey?

JONATHAN

Who else?

FRANK

Connor discovered first hand that an eight hundred pound horse can do pretty much what it wants given the right opportunity.

CONNOR

Why do you call her Hershey?

JONATHAN

Because she's dark brown like a Hershey bar. She's a good trail horse, but too smart for her own good. She loves to think up ways to get into trouble.

(CONTINUED)



CONNOR

Horses can do that?

JONATHAN

Let's just say they're quick to find an opportunity to get their way. Hershey loves running free, and she'll take whatever means she can find to do just that. From now on, never move her without a lead rope and hold onto that tight.

CONNOR

Yes, sir. You know, if you put Skippy and Hershey together you can have Peanut Butter Cup.

Groans.

JONATHAN

Frank, what are you working on?

FRANK

One of the tires on the hay trailer is flat. I'll be changing it.

JONATHAN

I have to go into Missoula. I'll get another one. Anyone want to go?

CONNOR

I'll go.

SHEILA

I think I'll sit this one out.

JONATHAN

Okay. We leave in a half hour.

EXT. MISSOULA - EXT.

The truck parks in front of a feed store. A MAN and TWO BOYS are coming out. Jonathan glances at Connor who is playing a game on his electronics.

JONATHAN

That's Leroy and his sons. They have the ranch next to ours. I believe the youngest is about your age. Come on, I'll introduce you.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Okay

Jonathan and Connor get out of the truck.

JONATHAN

Hey, Leroy, I want to introduce you to some one.

Leroy McCleary is a thirty-something, strong built rancher. He's a no nonsense guy who is passionate about his ranch and family. His boys are Hunter, 14, and Ty 12. The two men shake hands.

JONATHAN

This is my nephew, Connor. Connor, meet Hunter and Ty.

Connor shakes hands all around. He's quiet and unsure. The boys are sizing him up.

LEROY

(To Connor)

I hope you'll come by sometime.

(To Jonathan)

Actually, why don't you all come by after your church on Sunday. I'll have Ellie make some fried chicken.

JONATHAN

I think we can do that. I'll ask Sheila if she'll make her famous peach pie.

LEROY

Sounds like a plan. See you then.

Leroy and the boys get in a truck and leave.

JONATHAN

I have an idea. How would you like to go fishing tomorrow?

CONNOR

That would be great.

JONATHAN

Good. Let's go in and get you set up.

Jonathan and Connor go inside the store.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

The truck drives up to the ranch. Frank walks up to meet them.

FRANK

The new bull came while you were gone. We placed him in the paddock.

JONATHAN

Thanks. Put the feed in the barn while I go and see him.

FRANK

Sure thing.

Jonathan and Connor walk to the paddock. Inside is a large black Angus bull. He's excited at his new surroundings.

JONATHAN

Be sure to stay away from him. Bulls are dangerous, especially when in a new place.

CONNOR

Do they really charge red capes like on TV?

JONATHAN

Some bulls will charge anything that moves. He should settle down after a while, but it'll take some time. Just stay away.

Jonathan walks away. Connor stays and watches.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connor hays the horses. He's watching Frank who is checking a horse's leg. Frank puts it down and takes the lead rope.

FRANK

Okay, you should be all right with a day's rest.

He takes him to a stall.

FRANK

In you go.

He releases the horse, closes the door and walks out of the barn.

Connor throws the hay into the next stall on the horse's head. He grabs a red horse blanket and runs out the back.

EXT. PADDOCK - DAY

Connor walks to the bull pen. He watches a moment then climbs through the slats. The bull watches him. Connor holds the blanket out and shakes it.

CONNOR

Toro, toro.

The bull trots towards him.

CONNOR

Toro. Come on, bull.

The bull paws, then charges. Suddenly, this wasn't such a great idea. Connor turns to run, but the bull right behind him.

A black and white blur passes Connor as Ready gets between them, barking. The bull pauses. Ready snaps at it's face. Enraged, the bull tries to run him down, but he dodges out of the way.

Connor watches from the side. Hands suddenly grab him and he's dragged out the gate.

JONATHAN

What were you thinking? I told you to stay away from him.

CONNOR

I was trying to be a matador. You know, waving the red blanket.

JONATHAN

You were almost killed.

Ready comes up to join them. Jonathan bends down to pet him.

JONATHAN

Atta boy, Ready. You're a good boy.

(to Connor)

I want you in the house - now!

Connor runs to the house.

INT. KITCHEN NIGHT

They are finishing dinner. Everyone is silent. Frank stands up and puts up his plate.

FRANK

I'll be heading to my bunk. The meal was wonderful as usual, Mrs. Gordon.

Frank leaves.

JONATHAN

Connor, there will be no fishing trip tomorrow.

CONNOR

But.

JONATHAN

No buts. You almost got yourself killed today. I'm not going to reward you for doing something stupid. And, after you muck the stalls, you're going to weed your aunt's garden. I don't want to see a one weed when you're done.

CONNOR

I hate this.

JONATHAN

Then next time you can do what you're told.

Connor gets up leaves the kitchen.

JONATHAN

(To Sheila)

Will you come outside and sit with me?

SHEILA

The dishes.

JONATHAN

Can wait. I'll help you with them later.

They get up to leave.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

They sit on a bench on the porch. Quiet pause.

JONATHAN

I don't think I've ever been so scared in my life as when I saw that boy being chased by that animal.

Sheila remains silent.

JONATHAN

I don't get it, Sheila, why me? Why did God allow Miles and Sharon to die. I don't know anything about kids. They scare me. I have no clue what to do.

SHEILA

All you can do is the best you know how. You can't do more than that.

JONATHAN

But that's just it - I don't know how. I didn't want to be around kids when I was a kid. All they did was torment and call me names. I couldn't go anywhere without them bullying me. I hated them. And now, suddenly, I am a parent to one.

SHEILA

John, God doesn't leave us in our hurts. He wants us to be whole. You were hurt by children while you were growing up and it is still inside of you creating pain and fear. I think He wants to use this to heal you.

JONATHAN

But it's not working. I feel like I'm letting God down because I can't feel anything for the boy. I want to, but it's just not there.

SHEILA

He's only been with us a few weeks. You have to give it time.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

So what do I do about today? How am I supposed to handle this?

SHEILA

What you did was exactly right. Hopefully, the next time he'll consider the consequences.

JONATHAN

This is why I love you so much.

SHEILA

You'll love me even more when we finish the dishes.

They get up and go inside.

INT. UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Sheila walks down the hall with towels in her hands. As she passes Connor's room, she hears soft crying. She puts the towels in the bathroom and returns to his door. She knocks.

CONNOR (O.C.)

Yea?

SHEILA

May I come in?

CONNOR (O.C.)

Sure.

Sheila opens the door and enters.

INT. CONNOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Connor lays on the bed, crying. Sheila sits at his side.

SHEILA

Upset about what happened?

CONNOR

I miss my mom and dad so much it hurts.

SHEILA

I know, honey. I wish I could wave a magic wand and make the pain go away, but it doesn't work like that.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Why did they have to die? Why did God take them? I wish he'd had taken me to. I tried to get them to take me with them, but they wouldn't. Now, they're gone.

SHEILA

I don't have those answers for you. I'm sure if you ask God, He might tell you.

CONNOR

You think so? He's never talked to me before.

SHEILA

Well, maybe the need wasn't great enough. But it is now. Give it a try and see what happens.

CONNOR

I'll try. Aunt Sheila, why does Uncle Jonathan hate me so much.

SHEILA

He doesn't hate you.

CONNOR

He's always angry at me. I don't mean to get into trouble, it just happens.

SHEILA

That's called being a boy. You know, this isn't easy for Jonathan either. He's never been around kids and he's not sure what he's supposed to do.

CONNOR

But he's a grown up. They're always supposed to know what to do.

SHEILA

I'm afraid kids don't come with instructions. He's having to wing it just like you are.

CONNOR

That explains a lot.

(CONTINUED)



SHEILA

Like what?

CONNOR

Like he doesn't know how you're always supposed to be patient and never yell at kids.

SHEILA

I think you're making that up.

CONNOR

Well, maybe, but it's still a great idea.

SHEILA

I'll make sure to mention it to him. Now, I think you need to get some sleep. Remember, mornings come early around here.

CONNOR

Too early. There's got to be a law about getting up before the birds.

SHEILA

Until it's passed, you still need to get up. I'll see you in the morning.

CONNOR

Night Aunt Sheila. Thanks.

SHEILA

Good night, Connor.

Sheila turns out the light and closes the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Connor comes down the stairs. Jonathan, walking through the room, stops when he sees him.

JONATHAN

Today's Sunday. Change clothes when you get the stalls done.

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

We'll be going to LeRoy's house afterward.

CONNOR

What are the boys like?

JONATHAN

They're nice enough. I don't think you'll have a problem with them not liking you.

CONNOR

But we've got nothing in common.

JONATHAN

Then that means you have lots to teach each other. They've never lived in a big city next to the ocean. In fact, I don't think they've ever seen the ocean.

CONNOR

Yea, I see what you mean.

JONATHAN

Okay, see you in a little bit.

Connor leaves.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The truck parks in the church parking lot. The three get out and walk towards the door.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jonathan, Sheila and Connor walk down the aisle. Jonathan and Sheila greet everyone, but Connor looks lost. A few PEOPLE say hi, and he gives a very small wave. They take a seat.

PATOR KENNETH MORGAN (60'S) stands up. An open and friendly person, his life is serving God and the people of the church with wisdom and integrity.

Behind him is a small stage with several MUSICIANS ranging from age 14 to 56. Connor is interested to see Hunter in the band.

(CONTINUED)

PASTOR KEN

Before we get started today, I want to introduce a very special young man whom I have not met personally yet but have heard many wonderful things about from his uncle, Jonathan Gordon. Can everyone welcome Mr. Connor Gordon?

Applause

PASTOR KEN

After church I hope you will take time to get to know him and welcome him. So, let us begin by giving praise to our God and Creator. He alone is worthy of our praise. Miles?

MILES STALLINGS (20's) takes center stage. The band plays. Their songs are contemporary with a country beat.

When they finish, Pastor Ken stands up.

PASTOR KEN

For those of you who were not here last Sunday, we've started a series on The Hard Questions People Ask. Today, I want to talk about Where Is God When It Hurts.

I speak today with much fear and trembling because I know there probably some of you who have set minds on how things are and nothing outside of the Second Coming will change that.

The people laugh.

PASTOR KEN

(Continue)

Eight years ago, when our three-year-old son, Luke, was killed by that drunk driver, I did the religious thing. I bowed my head and said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away". But inside, I was resentful. Every day I asked, "Why did you take him?" It got to the point where I wanted to give up.

(CONTINUED)

Connor listens, enraptured. Sheila reaches over and covers his hand with hers.

PASTOR KEN  
(Continued)

Then, one day I told a friend how I felt. He said that, if I was going to blame God for a drunk driver, then I would have to blame him for every evil done on the earth.

It stopped me cold. As soon as I got home I got into the Word. What I discovered changed everything.

There are things that just plain come from the devil. God didn't tell that man to get drunk and drive crazy. It was his own free will. Could God have stopped it? Yes, but if God intervened for every person in trouble, where would free will be? Life happens some times, but Jesus is the restorer who makes all things turn out for our good.

Pastor Ken's voice fades into the background as Connor and Jonathan think on what they have heard.

MOMENTS LATER

Everyone walks out.

JONATHAN

Hunter, we're on our way to your dad's house. Want a ride home?

HUNTER

Thanks, that would be great. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon go out of their way to pick me up. I'll let them know.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Connor and Hunter get into the back seats. Connor takes out his game and starts playing.

JONATHAN

Put that away. I can't believe you brought it to church with you.

(CONTINUED)

Connor jams it back into his pocket. He fishes for something to say.

CONNOR  
So, your family doesn't go to church?

HUNTER  
We're working on that.

CONNOR  
You were really good on the guitar. Do you play a lot?

HUNTER  
Not as much as I want to. The ranch and school takes up most of my time, but I get in a few minutes at night.

CONNOR  
So you grew up on the ranch?

HUNTER  
I was born there. I've only been out of Montana once when we went to Idaho for a cattle auction.

CONNOR  
Wow, so you've never seen the ocean?

HUNTER  
No, but I'd like to some day.

CONNOR  
It's really great.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The truck turns into the long, dirt driveway of the Rolling J Ranch.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

CONNOR  
What does the "J" stand for?

HUNTER  
Jeremy. It was my grandfather's name. He's the one who built the place.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR  
Is he still alive?

HUNTER  
No, he died a couple of years ago.

CONNOR  
My parents died in May

HUNTER  
I heard. I'm sorry. Maybe if we  
have time, we can take the ATVs out  
for a ride.

CONNOR  
(To Jonathan)  
Can we do that?

JONATHAN  
We'll see. It depends on what  
Leroy says.

Outside the window we see the truck pull up to the house. Leroy comes out followed by his wife, ELLIE, Ty and ten-year-old JULIA. Everyone gets out.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - DAY

Jonathan and Leroy shake hands while Sheila hands Ellie one of the two pies she is holding. Julia walks up to Connor and holds out her hand.

JULIA  
Hi, I'm Julia. You must be Connor.

Connor shakes hands.

CONNOR  
Yea. Uh, pleased to meet you.

JULIA  
You want to see our new pups?

ELLIE  
Wait until after lunch, honey.

CONNOR  
How did she know what you said?

JULIA  
Don't you know? Moms always know.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Come to think of it, my mom used to do the same thing.

JULIA

Used to?

CONNOR

Both my parents are dead.

ELLIE

Julia, honey, why don't you go in the kitchen and finish setting the table?

JULIA

That's mom talk for shut up. Sorry, didn't mean to pry.

LEROY

Come on, everybody, let's go inside.

INT. MCCLEARY HOUSEHOLD - DAY

The McClearys are more traditional in their decorating. They enter a large dining room. Everyone sits down.

LEROY

How do you like Montana, Connor?

CONNOR

It's okay. It's taking a lot of getting used to. You just can't go to the ocean or the mall when you want to.

TY

What's the ocean like? See any big sharks?

CONNOR

The ocean is great. I was learning how to surf. The only time I've seen a shark is when I was in a boat, but I've also seen whales and stuff. Once in a while, whole schools of jellyfish come to shore and they have to close all the beaches.

(CONTINUED)

LEROY

I hear the air gets so bad you can hardly breath.

CONNOR

It used to be a lot worse, but it's better now. You get used to it.

ELLIE

I would never want to get used to it. One thing I love about Montana is that it's so pure and clean.

HUNTER

Dad, when we finish can we take the ATVs out for a little while? We won't go far.

LEROY

Is that okay with you, John?

JONATHAN

Fine by me. Connor have you been on one before?

CONNOR

No, but I rode a mini-bike once.

LEROY

About the same thing. Okay, boys, but keep an eye on our guest and don't go anywhere where he can get hurt.

HUNTER

Thanks.

JULIA

Can I go to?

Hunter and Ty give their dad a "no, please" look.

LEROY

Maybe next time, honey. Let's let the boys have some guy time.

Julia sulks but remains quiet. Her mother leans over a whispers something in her ear that makes her smile and nod.

JULIA

Can I at least take Connor out to show him the pups?

(CONTINUED)



LEROY

Sure, but come right back in and help your mom with the dishes.

JULIA

Yes, Sir.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - DAY

The three boys and Julie come out of the house like they just out of school. While Hunter and Ty run to a large shed, Julie takes Connor to the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

In the back is an enclosed area. They walk up to see a litter of Collie puppies. Julia picks one up and hands it to Connor. He doesn't know what to do with it.

JULIA

They just turned ten weeks. Their daddy won second place in the sheep dog trials.

Connor holds it away from his body.

CONNOR

Nice.

JULIA

No. Hold it close, like this.

She demonstrates. Connor does the same and the puppy licks his face.

CONNOR

Hey, cut it out.

JULIA

He's just being friendly. Mean you've never had a dog before?

Connor puts the pup back.

CONNOR

No. We lived in the city and wasn't home enough to have a dog. I need to go now, thanks.

Connor almost runs out the barn.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - DAY

Connor finds the boys taking the ATVs out of the shed. Hunter gives Connor some basic instructions. They leave.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The boys stop on a dirt road.

TY

Let's do the hills in the calf pasture.

HUNTER

You know dad won't allow it.

CONNOR

What's wrong?

HUNTER

Dad doesn't allow us to ride in the pastures unless we have to do something. He says it tears up the grazing.

TY

No more than the cows do.

(To Connor)

The calf pasture has hills you can jump. I sneak out there once in a while to have some fun. Dad won't know.

HUNTER

If you go, I won't.

TY

Then we'll leave you. Come on, Connor.

Ty leaves. Connor hesitates, then follows.

EXT. CALF PASTURE - LATER

They arrive at the pasture.

TY

Be careful of the northwest corner, there's a pond there you can't see.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Okay.

The boys have fun riding around and jumping hills. Connor jumps one hill and almost hits a calf on the other side. He swerves, goes over another hill and splashes into the pond. Ty drives up.

TY

Are you okay?

CONNOR

I'm stuck.

TY

Dad's going to kill us.

CONNOR

Help me get it out.

Together the boys pull the ATV from the mud.

CONNOR

Can we clean it up?

TY

Only when we get home. We'll go in the back way where they won't see us.

CONNOR

I hope they're not ready to leave yet. I'm filthy.

TY

The dryer is by the back door. We'll wash off your pants and throw them in real quick.

CONNOR

Okay.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - LATER

Leroy and Jonathan come out the front door and walk to the shed.

LEROY

Looks like they're not back yet.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

I have work to do. They'd better get back soon.

LEROY

We can take the truck and find them.

JONATHAN

If you don't mind, I'd appreciate it.

They get in the truck and leave.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Driving down the dirt road, they come upon Hunter.

LEROY

Where are the boys?

Hunter ducks his head.

LEROY

Hunter?

HUNTER

They went to the calf pasture. I told them you wouldn't like it, but they went anyway.

LEROY

I see. Head back to the house and we'll go get them.

HUNTER

Yes, sir.

They drive further.

LEROY

I'm going to tan that boy's hide. He knows it tears up the grass.

JONATHAN

Why the calf pasture?

LEROY

It has hills that they like to jump. It also has a pond that you can't see until you're on it.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

Sounds like something boys would  
love to do.

LEROY

And there they are.

They see Ty and Connor coming towards them. Ty rides while  
Connor pushes his ATV. Half of him is soaking wet and  
muddy.

JONATHAN

Looks like Connor found the pond.

Leroy stops. Both men get out.

TY

Dad, I'm sorry.

LEROY

We'll talk about it when we get  
home. Right now, help me get this  
on the truck.

It takes both men and Ty to wrestle the ATV on the  
truck. Connor watches, miserable. Finished, they head  
towards the cab. Jonathan stops Connor.

JONATHAN

You're muddy. You need to sit in  
the back so you don't get his seats  
wet.

CONNOR

Okay.

Ty gets on his ATV.

LEROY

Ty. I'm sure I can count on you to  
get that thing home safely.

TY

Yes, sir.

LEROY

We'll see you there.

Connor climbs in the truck bed and they leave.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - DAY

The truck and ATV pull up. Everyone gets out.

JONATHAN

You sure you don't want me to take this with us. I'd love for Connor to learn how to clean one of these up.

LEROY

No, I think that's going to be Ty's job. He's the one who instigated it. He's going to tear it down, clean it until it shines like new and then put it back together. Won't you, Ty?

TY

Yes, sir.

They take the ATV off the truck. Ellie and Sheila come out.

ELLIE

What happened? Is everyone all right?

LEROY

Everyone is fine. Ty thought it would be a wonderful idea to ride in the calf pasture.

ELLIE

Oh, no. The pond.

LEROY

Oh, yes. Connor had a close up introduction to it.

SHEILA

We are so sorry.

ELLIE

It's fine. It's not the first time one of our ATVs has taken a dip.

JONATHAN

If you're ready, hon, I think it's time we go. We've caused enough excitement for one day.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA  
Sure. I'm ready.

ELLIE  
How about the pies?

SHEILA  
Please, keep them. I'll pick up  
the tins later.

ELLIE  
Thanks. They are delicious.

Sheila gets in the truck. Jonathan and Connor open their doors. Jonathan stops and nods for Connor to get in the back. He closes the door and Connor climbs into the bed. They drive away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

They walk into the living room.

JONATHAN  
Connor, you're to stay in your room  
for the rest of the day. From now  
until I say otherwise, you will be  
doing nothing but work. I'm going  
to keep you so busy, you won't have  
a chance to get into trouble.

CONNOR  
That's not fair. It was Ty's  
fault.

JONATHAN  
So Ty pulled your arm behind your  
back and forced you to go.

CONNOR  
No.

JONATHAN  
Then that means you knowingly did  
something you knew you were not  
supposed to do.

CONNOR  
I didn't know we weren't supposed  
to ride in the pasture.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN  
Hunter didn't tell you?

CONNOR  
No.

Jonathan pulls out his cell phone.

JONATHAN  
If I called Hunter right now, he  
would tell me he did not tell you  
not to ride in that pasture.

CONNOR  
No. Yes.

JONATHAN  
What is it yes or no?

CONNOR  
Yes, he told us.

JONATHAN  
Then you just lied to me. Give me  
your game and go to your room.

Connor takes out his game and hands it to Jonathan. He runs  
up the stairs.

JONATHAN  
(to Sheila)  
I supposed you're going to tell me  
I was too hard on the boy.

SHEILA  
Nope, in fact if you had done less  
I would have kicked you. At least  
he didn't yell, "You're not my  
father."

CONNOR (O.C.)  
You're not my dad, you know.

SHEILA  
I stand corrected. I have an  
idea. I don't have to make  
dinner. Why don't we go for a walk.

JONATHAN  
Why not, it might settle me down.

They leave.



EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - TWILIGHT

They head towards a nearby hill.

SHEILA

Have I ever said, "Thank you?"

JONATHAN

For what?

SHEILA

For marrying me. If you hadn't I would be able to live on this beautiful place.

JONATHAN

You could have married Charlie.

SHEILA

No, his place isn't as nice as yours. Plus he had five kids.

JONATHAN

I can see where that could have been a problem

SHEILA

By marrying you, I got the most beautiful ranch in the valley, plus you all to myself.

JONATHAN

Not anymore.

SHEILA

No, not anymore, but that's okay. Connor's a good kid. He'll grow up soon enough.

JONATHAN

If we can keep him alive until then.

SHEILA

He does have a knack for finding trouble doesn't he? Tell me, how many scrapes did you get into growing up?

JONATHAN

Not many. Dad made sure we worked too hard to do much. Although, there were a few I won't mention.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

It seems to be in the male gene.

JONATHAN

If it is, then Miles missed them. He was the responsible one. When he moved away to the city, it about broke my Dad's heart, but he knew Miles was wired differently. He never would have been happy working a ranch.

SHEILA

Is Connor like him?

JONATHAN

So much so it scares me. It's like seeing my brother as a child again, yet I'm grown up.

Ready and Bridge run up to join them.

JONATHAN

Just notice we were gone?  
(to Sheila)  
So, what do we do now?

SHEILA

What do you mean? We raise him the best we can day by day. That's all you can do.

Ready flushes a rabbit. The dogs chase it.

JONATHAN

I've never been able to break him of chasing rabbits.

SHEILA

It's doggy instinct.

JONATHAN

Like male genes?

SHEILA

Something like that. The problem is you were never allowed to be boy enough to get into much trouble. You have a hard time relating to one that is.

JONATHAN

I had my scrapes.

SHEILA

Well, did you just grow out of it?

JONATHAN

Actually, my dad was a genius at coming up with ways to sidetrack us.

SHEILA

Such as?

JONATHAN

Once, after staying out almost all night and being too tired to get up in the morning, he gave me my first calf to raise. I had to bottle feed it early in the morning and throughout the day. The one time I tried to sleep in, he placed the calf in my room. It bawled so loud, there was no way I could sleep. I never stayed out again.

SHEILA

Then, that's the answer.

JONATHAN

A calf?

SHEILA

Nope, something better. Something every boy should have.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Connor comes out of the barn and walks towards the house. The truck drives up and stops. Jonathan gets out.

JONATHAN

Connor, come here. I've got something for you.

Connor walks over. Jonathan leans into the cab and brings out a six-month-old border collie puppy. Connor stops.

CONNOR

A puppy?

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN  
Not just a puppy.

He hands the pup to Connor.

JONATHAN  
You're going to train him to be a  
sheep dog like Ready and Bridget.

CONNOR  
But I don't know anything about  
dogs.

JONATHAN  
You'll learn.

Jonathan walks away.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sheila finishes the dishes. Connor walks in holding the  
pup.

CONNOR  
Aunt Sheila, look what Uncle  
Jonathan gave me.

SHEILA  
He's beautiful. So what are you  
going to name him?

CONNOR  
I don't know. I just got him.

SHEILA  
That's okay. You've got plenty of  
time to think of one.

CONNOR  
What do I do with him?

SHEILA  
You've never had a dog before?

CONNOR  
No.

SHEILA  
The first thing is feeding  
him. He'll have to eat Ready's  
food until we can get some puppy  
food.

(CONTINUED)

Sheila goes into a cupboard and brings out two bowls. She pours a little dog food into one and water into another. She places the bowls in a corner.

SHEILA

Bring him over and see if he's hungry.

Connor sets the pup by the bowls. He begins eating.

SHEILA

I guess he is. Next is the most important thing of all. When he's finished, you'll need to get him outside and let him pee.

CONNOR

Yuck.

SHEILA

Better outside than in the house. Whenever you see him begin to squat, pick him up and run him outside.

The puppy demonstrates by making a puddle.

CONNOR

Oh, gross.

SHEILA

Get a paper towel and clean it up.

CONNOR

Me?

SHEILA

It's your dog.

CONNOR

But I didn't ask for him.

SHEILA

Doesn't matter. He needs taking care of and you're it.

CONNOR

I hate dogs.

SHEILA

You'll think differently soon enough.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Connor walks into the barn carrying the puppy. He sees Frank placing bedding in one of the back stalls. Frank looks up.

FRANK

Over here.

Connor walks over.

FRANK

I'm making up a bed for the pup. I'll get some boards and fill in the space between the slats so he can't climb out. You can keep him in here when you're not working with him.

CONNOR

Thanks, I appreciate it.

FRANK

One of the first things you need to learn about raising a sheep dog is that you can't treat it like any other dog. He's not a lap dog or a house dog, he's a working dog. He's bred to herd and you need to train him to do just that without any distractions.

CONNOR

What do you mean?

FRANK

It's a Border Collie's instincts to herd. You will even see them doing it as puppies; chickens, ducks, children, it doesn't matter - they'll herd it. Your job is to steer him in the right direction without stifling those instincts.

CONNOR

I don't know how to do that.

FRANK

We'll be here to help you. And, once he gets older, Ready and Bridget will help, too. Put him in here.

Connor places the pup in the enclosure.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Go get his feed and water and let  
him settle down for the night.

Connor leaves.

INT. CONNOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Connor lies in bed wide awake. Through the open window comes the pitiful cries of a puppy. He turns over - doesn't help. He finally gets up, puts on a pair of jeans and goes leaves.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The light turns on. The puppy wails from its pen. Connor walks over and looks at it.

CONNOR

You're going to be a lot of  
trouble, aren't you?

He picks up the puppy who immediately licks him.

CONNOR

Oh, no. Kissin up isn't going to  
help. Come on, you have to be  
quiet so I can sleep.

He puts the pup down and turns to walk away. It begins to cry again.

CONNOR

Will you be quiet already?

Doesn't work.

CONNOR

I don't like dogs, okay? I don't  
even want you.

Connor walks to the door and turns out the light. He closes the door. The pup is still wailing. Pause. The door opens.

INT. CONNOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Connor sleeps soundly, the puppy beside him.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Connor wakes up to the puppy licking his face.

CONNOR

Wha..?

He wakes fully.

CONNOR

Great, not only do you keep me up half the night, you're an alarm clock as well.

He begins playing with the puppy.

CONNOR

You remind me of a friend I had once. We used to stay awake for hours talking and playing. He even had black hair. How about I name you after him?

He picks him up

CONNOR

So, what do you say? Want to be named Taylor? Okay, Taylor it is. Let me get dressed and I'll get you breakfast.

He sets Taylor down who immediately pees on the bed.

CONNOR

Nooo. Couldn't you wait until I got dressed? Now I'll have to wash it without Aunt Sheila finding out.

As Taylor starts playing, Connor can't help smiling as he takes his pajama top off.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Connor walks in. Sheila has her back turned, fixing breakfast.

SHEILA

Take him outside first.

CONNOR

How? Okay.



EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - MOMENTS LATER

Connor walks outside. He puts Taylor down on the dirt. The puppy starts playing. Jonathan walks up with Ready and Bridget.

JONATHAN

Put the pup in his pen. You have work to do.

CONNOR

But he cries all the time.

JONATHAN

Of course he does, he's a baby. He'll get used to it soon enough.

Taylor chases after Ready and Bridget who are trying to get away from him.

CONNOR

Why don't they like him?

JONATHAN

He's a stranger. Dogs need time to get to know each other - just like people. Now, take him to the barn.

Connor picks him up and walks to the barn.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Breakfast is underway.

JONATHAN

Connor, I'm going to be gone for about a week, helping Roberto take the sheep to their summer pasture.

CONNOR

Can't I go?

JONATHAN

You're still grounded, remember? I expect you to help Frank and your Aunt Sheila with anything they ask you to do. I've given Frank a list of chores I want done by the time I get back.

Connor sulks, angry.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

If I hear a good report about you,  
I'll see about letting you off  
early.

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

Jonathan and Frank take their plates to the sink and walk out.

SHEILA

You know, I'm a pretty mean hand at  
race cars.

CONNOR

That's what my babysitter, Mrs.  
Shelby used to say, and I still  
beat her.

SHEILA

We'll see.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - LATER

Two horses stand outside; one with a saddle, one with a large pack. Jonathan gives Sheila a kiss.

JONATHAN

I'll see you in a week.

SHEILA

Take care.

Jonathan nods. He mounts his horse, whistles for Ready and Bridget and rides away.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connor mucks stalls while Taylor plays in the shavings. The puppy is covered with wood chips. Connor finishes and pushes the wheelbarrow out of the stall. Taylor tries to follow, but Connor stops him.

CONNOR

You'd better stay here. I'll be  
right back.

Connor shuts him in the stall and leaves.

(CONTINUED)

Frank walks in from the other direction leading Hershey. He walks to the stall Connor just finished and opens the door. Taylor runs out.

FRANK

What the . . . ?

Hershey goes nuts. She pulls away from Frank and runs out the door.

FRANK

Hershey, come back here. You're going to be glue sticks this time next week.

Connor!

Connor walks back in with the wheelbarrow.

CONNOR

What?

FRANK

Did you leave your dog in this stall?

CONNOR

Yea. I'd just finished it and thought it would keep him out of trouble.

FRANK

Well, he just scared Hershey into the next county.

CONNOR

I was trying to do right, okay? I'm sorry.

Frank calms down.

FRANK

No, I'm sorry. I understand. It's just that allowing a pup to run loose on a ranch is dangerous. They can get hurt real easy. You need to keep him on a leash when you have him out, okay?

CONNOR

Okay.

FRANK

So put him up and help me catch Hershey.

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

Connor walks to the chicken pen with a wheelbarrow of straw. Taylor romps beside him. They both see that a hen has escaped with her chicks.

CONNOR

Oh, no. Taylor!

Too late. Taylor runs for the chickens and tries to herd them into a group. Connor stands, amazed. The hen confronts Taylor to protect her chicks. When Connor finally grabs Taylor, he takes his leash from his pocket and ties him to the wheelbarrow. Connor opens the door to the pen to herd the chickens inside. However, while trying to get them in, more come out while the rooster attacks Connor.

CONNOR

Get away you crazy chicken.

Excited, Taylor pulls over the wheelbarrow.

CONNOR

Oh, no. This can't be happening. Come on, get back in.

The leash comes loose from the wheelbarrow and Taylor runs around the chickens, herding them.

CONNOR

That's it, Taylor. Get them in the pen.

But they're scattering even more. Frank comes out of the barn.

FRANK

Connor, what in the blazes?

CONNOR

Frank, help me get them in.

FRANK

Grab Taylor. I'll be right back.

(CONTINUED)

Connor chases Taylor and grabs his leash. Frank returns with a pail of feed.

FRANK

Okay, get him back.

Connor takes Taylor away. Frank shakes the pail and walks to the pen door.

FRANK

Here girls. Come on inside.

He throws food on the ground inside the pen. The chickens enter the pen and start feeding. Frank slips out the door and closes it.

FRANK

Chasing chickens is like herding cats. It can't be done. You lead them with food

CONNOR

Sorry. When I tried to put one back in, they all got out.

FRANK

It's okay. It's a lesson learned.

CONNOR

You were right about Taylor. He was trying to herd them.

FRANK

That means he's got strong instincts. That's a good thing. Come on, let's let them settle down. Then you can finish cleaning the coop.

They walk away.

INT. BARN - EARLY EVENING

Connor places Taylor in his pen. The pup begins to cry.

CONNOR

No. You've got to learn to be by yourself. Maybe once you grow up and learn to stay out of trouble, you'll be able to come out and stay in the house like Ready and Bridget. Good night.

Connor leaves and closes up the barn.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Connor and Sheila eat dinner. Connor picks at his food. They can hear Taylor crying in the background.

SHEILA

He'll be okay. Once he gets used to it, he'll stop crying.

CONNOR

I just feel bad leaving him alone. Ready and Bridget get to come in the house.

SHEILA

Ready and Bridget are old enough not to get into trouble. Jonathan spent years training them. Border Collies are smart, but it still takes time.

CONNOR

But he's afraid to be alone.

SHEILA

Any baby animal is at first, but that doesn't mean I'm bringing the calves and lambs in the house. Animals adapt, its their instinct.

CONNOR

I put Taylor in a stall that I'd just cleaned so that I could take the shavings out back. Frank came in and opened it.

SHEILA

Oh, no.

CONNOR

Yea, and he had Hershey with him. He threatened to turn her into glue sticks.

They both laugh.

CONNOR

I think she ran two miles before we caught her. Boy, he was mad. I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR (cont'd)  
have to keep Taylor on a rope now  
when he's out of his pen.

SHEILA  
Is that his name, Taylor?

CONNOR  
Yea, because he looks like a friend  
I had named Taylor.

SHEILA  
It's a good name. And Frank is  
right. Until he learns right from  
wrong, he needs to be restrained.

CONNOR  
But how do I do that? Teach him?

SHEILA  
You start with the basics. Tell  
him he's a good dog when he does  
something right. With Border  
Collies, you say, "That'll  
do". Then you give him a stern  
"Stop" when he does wrong.

CONNOR  
That'll do.

SHEILA  
Perfect. But you must be careful.  
You want him under control but  
never afraid. He must be totally  
confident to work  
livestock. Always be patient.

CONNOR  
That's gonna be tough. He gets  
into enough trouble already.

Sheila laughs

SHEILA  
Sounds like someone else I  
know. Okay, how about race cars  
tonight?

CONNOR  
Prepare to be slaughtered.

SHEILA

Never.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Jonathan, Roberto and the three dogs are slowly herding the sheep on horseback.

ROBERTO

We should get to the creek just before dusk. We're right on time.

JONATHAN

Can't wait to get off this horse.

ROBERTO

You're getting too old and soft. You need to be out in the elements all day like I am.

JONATHAN

The sun is baking your brain and giving you delusions. Maybe I need to find another shepherd until you come back to reality. I'd like to see the day I couldn't work you into the ground.

ROBERTO

But you see, that's the advantage of being delusional, I'm not stupid enough to work that hard. Anyway, you've got two good ranch hands to help you out.

JONATHAN

Define good. Frank is good, Connor is a kid who finds more trouble than one boy is allowed.

ROBERTO

Connor is giving you trouble?

JONATHAN

Not on purpose. He never thinks before he does something. Then, when he gets caught, he doesn't understand why he's being punished. I don't know what to do.

(CONTINUED)



ROBERTO

He sounds like a typical boy to me.

JONATHAN

That's what Sheila says. Last week he let one of Leroy's boys talk him into riding an ATV in their calf pasture, when he knew he wasn't supposed to. He ended up in the middle of their pond.

Roberto laughs.

JONATHAN

It wasn't funny. I was so embarrassed, I wanted to strangle him.

ROBERTO

John, Leroy has two boys, he knows what they can get into.

JONATHAN

Before that, he tried to play matador with a bull.

ROBERTO

A live bull.

JONATHAN

A live bull. It almost killed him. Thankfully, Ready and I were just coming to see it when we saw him. Ready stopped the bull and I grabbed the boy.

ROBERTO

That was either really brave or really stupid.

JONATHAN

My vote is on stupid.

ROBERTO

So, have you grounded him until he's 60?

JONATHAN

Close. Most of the summer. I don't know what else to do. I'm at wits end. However, Sheila did talk me into doing one more thing.

(CONTINUED)

ROBERTO

What's that?

JONATHAN

I got him a pup.

ROBERTO

A what?

JONATHAN

A Border Collie pup. Sheila thinks it will teach him responsibility and help keep him out of trouble. You grew up around brothers, what do you think?

ROBERTO

It's not the same. A bunch of boys together will find trouble no matter what. Connor is basically alone. Giving him a friend may be the best thing you can do for him.

JONATHAN

I like Connor, but this is the hardest thing I've ever done. Sheila says I'm doing good, but I'm constantly questioning myself. I've always been sure of what needed to be done. Now, I don't know.

ROBERTO

I think I would be more worried if it didn't bother you. It sounds like you care about him and are trying to do your best. No one can do more than that.

JONATHAN

I'm glad to hear you say that because next summer, when the pup is old enough, I'm sending them both to you for training.

ROBERTO

Not fair.

JONATHAN

I'm your boss. I don't have to be fair.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

Jonathan rides into the yard. Franks walks up.

JONATHAN

Would you mind putting the horses up for me? And give them an extra ration of grain. They deserve it.

FRANK

Sure thing.

Jonathan walks to the house.

INT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Jonathan walks in the door. Sheila sits on the couch, reading a book. She looks up and smiles.

SHEILA

Hi. Good to have you home.

Jonathan joins her putting his arms around her. They kiss.

JONATHAN

Good to be home. Even better sitting on something that's not moving. How did everything go?

SHEILA

Just fine. Nothing fell apart or burned down. Everything is just as you left it.

JONATHAN

And Connor?

SHEILA

Actually, he didn't do too bad. Only a few minor mishaps, but he learned from them.

JONATHAN

How minor?

SHEILA

Sure you want to hear it?

JONATHAN

Every gory detail.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA  
Well, he left Taylor in a stall. .

JONATHAN  
Who's Taylor?

SHEILA  
That's the name he's given the pup.

JONATHAN  
Okay. He's in a stall. . .

SHEILA  
He put him there because he had just cleaned it and he wanted the pup to stay out of trouble until he got back from the shavings pile. Unfortunately, Frank didn't know that.

JONATHAN  
Oh, no.

SHEILA  
And he had Hershey.

JONATHAN  
How long did it take to catch her.

SHEILA  
Let's say she gave them a merry chase.

Jonathan wants to laugh. Sheila does.

SHEILA  
The next day when he went to clean out the chicken coop, a hen was out with some chicks.

JONATHAN  
Don't tell me, Taylor started herding them.

SHEILA  
He's got strong instincts. He's going to be a great herding dog some day.

JONATHAN  
It's in his blood line. What I'm hoping is that, when he's grown and fully trained, he'll help keep Connor out of trouble.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

I think you'll be surprised. He's already starting to understand consequences.

JONATHAN

That's encouraging. I'm just hoping this will slow him down enough for me to keep up. Where is he now?

SHEILA

Frank has him painting the fence beside the house.

Jonathan gets up.

JONATHAN

Okay. Let me get a shower and cleaned up then I'll go out and see him.

SHEILA

If you're hungry I'll start an early dinner.

JONATHAN

Starving.

SHEILA

How about steak and potatoes.

JONATHAN

Perfect. Make mine a double.

Jonathan walks out.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - LATER

Connor slowly paints the fence. There is almost as much paint on the ground and him as on the fence. Jonathan walks up behind him without being noticed. He follows a line of paint paw prints to where Taylor is playing. The pup is splotched in paint. Jonathan sighs.

JONATHAN

How's it going?

Connor turns.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR  
Painting the fence.

JONATHAN  
I noticed. And a few other things  
too.

Connor turns and looks at Taylor.

CONNOR  
He kind of rubbed against the  
fence. I think he was after a  
grasshopper.

JONATHAN  
Have much more to do?

CONNOR  
Naw. I've only got from here to  
the corner, then I can stop.

JONATHAN  
That's not far.

CONNOR  
Frank said I could do the rest  
tomorrow.

JONATHAN  
Sounds fair. I need to talk with  
Frank for a minute. I'll be back  
to help you clean up and give  
Taylor a bath. How's that?

CONNOR  
Sounds okay. I'll hurry.

JONATHAN  
No, no, you're doing good just the  
way you are. I'll be back. Just  
keep an eye on the pup.

Jonathan walks away. Connor hurries anyway and does not notice that Taylor has followed Jonathan. He wanders away and discovers a large rattlesnake. The snake coils, ready to strike. The pup is curious, but cautious. His barks alert Ready and Bridget who run over to see what's wrong. Ready distracts the snake while Bridget returns to Jonathan.

JONATHAN  
Something is wrong.

Jonathan and Frank run over and see the snake.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN  
Ready, that'll do. Frank, get my  
gun. I'll grab the pup.

Frank leaves while Jonathan grabs Taylor.

Connor runs up.

CONNOR  
What's happening.

JONATHAN  
Stay back, it's a rattlesnake.

Frank returns with a rifle and shoots the snake.

CONNOR  
Wow, look at the size of that  
thing.

JONATHAN  
And it almost killed your  
dog. What is it going to take for  
you to realize that when I say  
something, I mean it. I told you  
to watch him.

CONNOR  
But I was painting the fence like  
you told me.

Sheila comes running from the house.

SHEILA  
I heard a gun shot.

JONATHAN  
Rattlesnake. Almost got the pup.

Tears stream from Connor's eyes.

CONNOR  
I was doing what you told me.

JONATHAN  
I also told you to watch your dog.

Sheila puts her hand on Jonathan's arm.

SHEILA  
Let it go for now. You need to let  
things calm down.

JONATHAN

Let it. . ?

SHEILA

Yes. You can talk to him later.

JONATHAN

Okay. Connor, go clean your dog up.

FRANK

I'll put the paint up.

JONATHAN

Thanks.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Connor has Taylor on his leash. He takes him to the area where they wash the horses, pulling and jerking on the leash. He ties him up and turns the hose on him, hard.

CONNOR

Man, I hate you. All you do is get me into trouble. I wish you'd never been born.

The pup stands soaked and shivering. Connor turns off the water and pours shampoo on him. He rubs it in harshly, yelling.

CONNOR

Why can't you just stay out of trouble? Why can't you do what you're told? You know what? You're grounded. You're not coming out of that pen again - ever. I don't care how much you cry. Not until I know I can trust you.

He stops, eyes unfocused and mouth open. He sits back. Taylor crawls over and puts his head on Connor's knee. Connor gathers him up and holds him.

CONNOR

I'm sorry.

Taylor licks his face.



INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Connor walks in soaked and muddy. He takes off his shoes. Sheila is busy making dinner.

CONNOR

Aunt Sheila may I make a phone call? I'd like to call Mrs. Shelby.

SHEILA

As soon as you change clothes.

CONNOR

Okay

INT. CONNOR'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Connor has changed clothes. He's sitting on the bed dialing the house phone.

INT. MRS. SHELBY'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

The phone rings. Mrs. Shelby picks it up.

MRS. SHELBY

Hello?

CONNOR

Hi, Mrs. Shelby.

MRS. SHELBY

Connor? Hey, how are you?

CONNOR

Okay.

MRS. SHELBY

You sound sad. What's wrong?

CONNOR

Mrs. Shelby, am I a good kid?

MRS. SHELBY

Of course you are. Is anyone there telling you different?

CONNOR

Not really. Did I get in a lot of trouble?

(CONTINUED)

MRS. SHELBY

No more than any other boy. What is this about? Are you in trouble?

CONNOR

Kinda. I did some things wrong and Uncle Jonathan has grounded me for the summer. Then Taylor almost got killed by a rattlesnake and now he's really mad.

MRS. SHELBY

Whoa, slow down. Who's Taylor?

CONNOR

Taylor is my puppy. He keeps getting in trouble which is getting me in trouble.

MRS. SHELBY

So, you're grounded for something your dog did?

CONNOR

No, I'm grounded because I rode an ATV into a pond when I wasn't supposed to.

MRS. SHELBY

You are having adventures, aren't you? Okay, let's go back to the beginning. What's happening?

CONNOR

I was painting the fence and didn't notice Taylor had left.

MRS. SHELBY

And you were supposed to keep an eye on him.

CONNOR

Yea. Then he found a big rattlesnake that almost bit him. Frank shot the snake, but Uncle Jonathan was so mad he yelled at me.

MRS. SHELBY

He was probably more scared than mad.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

He told me to give Taylor a bath because he had paint on him. Right then, I hated him.

MRS. SHELBY

Your Uncle Jonathan?

CONNOR

No, Taylor. I told him I wished he'd never been born and I was never going to take him out of his pen again.

MRS. SHELBY

So, you grounded him.

CONNOR

Exactly. And then I realized I was doing exactly what Uncle Jonathan does when I get into trouble. Now, I'm confused.

MRS. SHELBY

Connor, boys and puppies want to have fun, and they don't know how to look ahead at the consequences of what they do. Therefore, they get into trouble. It's an adult's responsibility to teach them right from wrong.

CONNOR

I think I'm starting to understand that.

MRS. SHELBY

Because you are growing up.

CONNOR

But I'm only twelve.

MRS. SHELBY

Age doesn't matter. What does is that you are starting to understand that your Uncle Jonathan is only reacting to what you do. If you do well, you get freedom. When you do bad, then your freedom is taken away. It all depends upon you.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Wow. That's a lot to think about.

MRS. SHELBY

It's really not that difficult. What kind of puppy do you have?

CONNOR

A Border Collie.

MRS. SHELBY

Those are sheep dogs, aren't they?

CONNOR

Yea. Uncle Jonathan is going to help me train him to herd sheep.

MRS. SHELBY

I'd love to see him some day.

CONNOR

Why don't you come out? They won't mind. I could also show you my horse, Skippy.

MRS. SHELBY

You have a horse, too?

CONNOR

Actually, he's just the one I ride. Look, I have to go now. I'll talk to you later.

MRS. SHELBY

Bye.

Connor hangs up.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Everyone sits eating around the table.

JONATHAN

(To Connor)

Did you put Taylor in his pen?

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

And you cleaned all the paint off him?

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

JONATHAN

I'm sorry I yelled at you. You're right, you were doing what we asked you to do, and I know it's hard keeping an eye on a pup. They tend to gravitate towards trouble.

CONNOR

Like boys?

Pause

JONATHAN

Yes, just like boys.

CONNOR

I'm sorry, too. You told me to keep an eye on him and I didn't.

Pause

JONATHAN

Sheila, will you check his forehead and make sure he's not sick. Better yet, see if this is the same kid I picked up from the airport.

Connor smiles.

JONATHAN

How old is Taylor now?

SHEILA

Seven months.

JONATHAN

Old enough to start learning the basics. Connor, are you ready to start training your dog?

CONNOR

I don't know. I've never trained a dog before. What do I have to do?

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

Nothing hard to begin with. Just put him on his leash and lead him around for a while. He needs to get used to being led and staying with you. Think you can do that?

CONNOR

Sounds simple enough.

SHEILA

If he's reluctant to go with you, don't drag him. Just act like you're walking away and call him.

CONNOR

Okay.

JONATHAN

You can start tomorrow after your chores.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connor opens Taylor's pen. He clips the leash on his collar.

CONNOR

Follow me, Taylor. You just need to go where I go.

Connor walks away, but Taylor stops, uncertain.

CONNOR

Come on, Taylor. Here, boy.

Taylor comes up to him. Connor pets him.

CONNOR

Good boy. Okay, come on.

Taylor hesitates again.

CONNOR

It's okay. Come on.

Taylor follows, and they leave the barn.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - MOMENTS LATER

Scenes of Connor and Taylor walking around; sometimes they get it right, sometimes they don't. At one time Taylor sees a ground squirrel and drags Connor several feet.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

Scenes of Jonathan showing Connor how to teach Taylor to sit and stay.

Frank backs up a trailer to a small round pen. He unloads four ewes.

INT. BARN - DAY

Jonathan walks in. Connor has finished cleaning the stalls.

JONATHAN  
Connor, get Taylor.

Connor puts up the wheel barrel, grabs the leash and brings Taylor out. He follows Jonathan outside.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan leads them to the round pen with the ewes.

JONATHAN  
Now, keep him on his leash and take him slowly up to the sheep.

Connor does what he says. Taylor is curious and excited. He inspects the ewes.

JONATHAN  
Okay, let him loose.

Connor unsnaps the lead. Immediately, Taylor circles the pen.

JONATHAN  
That's good. He's interested. Now tell him, 'That'll do.'

CONNOR  
Taylor, that'll do.

Taylor does not want to stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR  
Taylor, that'll do.

Taylor returns and lays beside Connor.

JONATHAN  
Perfect. Now, put him back on  
lead. We're going to show him what  
it's all about.

Connor snaps his lead back on.

JONATHAN  
Take him to the side out of the  
way.

He does. Jonathan opens the pen and lets out the  
sheep. After a few seconds, he signals Ready and Bridget to  
go after them. A whistle sends them around to the left and  
behind the sheep.

Whistle - they drop to the ground.

Whistle - they slowly drive the sheep back to the pen.

Taylor is watching, eager to join them.

Jonathan expertly guides the dogs to bring the sheep back  
into the pen. He closes the gate.

CONNOR  
That was incredible. Will Taylor  
be able to do that?

JONATHAN  
That's the idea. But that's enough  
for today. Put him back in his pen  
and let him think it over.

CONNOR  
Can we do this again tomorrow?

JONATHAN  
We'll work with him a little every  
day. Not too much, though.

Connor leaves with Taylor.



INT RANCH OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

Sheila works on the computer. Jonathan walks in.

SHEILA

So, how did it go?

JONATHAN

Pretty good. The pup has good instincts, and Connor is starting to take an interest. I think seeing the dogs actually working the sheep allowed him to see what it's about.

SHEILA

Maybe he'll start to see that being here isn't so horrible after all.

JONATHAN

I won't go that far, but it's definitely a start.

SHEILA

Well, I think you've done a pretty good job with him.

JONATHAN

Thanks, I need all the encouragement I can get. I just can't help doubting myself. It's as if I'm watching to make sure I'm being good more than the boy.

SHEILA

Jon, the Bible says we're to evaluate ourselves - that's healthy and good. Where things go wrong is when you become so obsessed with it that it starts hindering your judgment.

JONATHAN

And how do I know where the line is?

SHEILA

When it becomes more of a struggle than you can handle. You can't heal or change yourself. Some things you just have to leave up to God. Or, you can ask me.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN  
That you can count on.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Snow has fallen on the high mountains. Two men and three dogs bring the sheep down from their pasture.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

A school bus stops before the ranch driveway. Connor gets on and it leaves.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Connor closes his locker in a busy hallway. Hunter walks up with SARA DUNLAP.

HUNTER  
Hey, Connor, I wanted you to meet Sara.

Connor juggles books to put out his hand. They shake.

CONNOR  
Nice to meet you. Haven't I seen you in math class?

SARA  
Yea, I'm a few seats ahead and to your right.

HUNTER  
She's the one who knows every answer to every question. It's embarrassing to even be seen with her.

Sara slugs him on the arm.

SARA  
You want to talk about embarrassing? How about how you snort when you laugh? Or how you spit when you say your "p"'s. I swear, sometimes I want to pretend you aren't even with me.

Hunter wags his finger at her.

(CONTINUED)

HUNTER  
Swearing is for court.  
(To Connor)  
I just can't take her anywhere.

Connor laughs.

SARA  
Why do I put up with you? I can  
have a dozen guys if I want.

HUNTER  
True, but none are as good looking  
as I am.

SARA  
You wish.  
(To Connor)  
So, I hear you just moved here from  
Los Angeles. I would love to see  
the ocean.

CONNOR  
Yea, it's pretty amazing. I was  
learning how to surf when I had to  
move here.

SARA  
Sorry about your parents. That  
must be really hard.

CONNOR  
Yea. Sometimes it just doesn't  
seem real. My uncle is okay, but  
it's not the same as having my  
dad.

The bell rings.

HUNTER  
We'll see you around, Connor.

CONNOR  
You, too.

Hunter and Sara leave. Connor heads to class.

INT. GEOGRAPHY CLASS - DAY

Connor sits at his desk, doodling and not paying attention. His TEACHER, Ms. Richards, talks in the background. Then:

MS. RICHARDS

Connor.

Connor jerks up.

CONNOR

Yes, maam?

MS. RICHARDS

The Pacific Ocean. What are some of the ways it affects the coast?

Connor hesitates. He's aware that all eyes are on him.

CONNOR

Well, for one, the breeze comes in a lot and cools everything down. Then you have the storms. You can see them coming miles away. The breakers get huge. One bad storm took out the Santa Monica pier.

Ms. Richards smiles.

MS. RICHARDS

And what kind of wildlife do you see?

CONNOR

A lot. Seals, otters, sharks. Sometimes the jellyfish come in so bad they have to close the beaches. My parents took me out in a boat during the whale migration. . .

He stops.

MS. RICHARDS

Thank you, Connor.

(To class)

If any of you want extra credit, you can talk with Connor about what he knows about the ocean and then add it to your papers.

the bell rings.

(CONTINUED)

MS. RICHARDS  
See you tomorrow.

Connor is the last to leave. He stops by Ms. Richards' desk.

CONNOR  
Thanks for trying to help.

MS. RICHARDS  
You're welcome. I know what it's like to be a fish out of water so to speak. It's hard, but if you hang in there, it'll get easier.

CONNOR  
It just seems as though the pain will never go away.

MS. RICHARDS  
It will, in time. God will heal the hurts and give you a new life.

CONNOR  
But I just want my old life back.

Ms. Richards holds him while he cries.

MS. RICHARDS  
(Praying)  
Father, heal his hurts and be his comfort.

The second bell rings.

CONNOR  
I'm late for class.

MS. RICHARDS  
Don't worry about it, I'll give you a note.

She writes a brief note and gives it to Connor.

MS. RICHARDS  
Here. Take your time. And, I'll talk to your teacher if you need me to.

CONNOR  
Thanks, Ms. Richards. I'll see you tomorrow.

MS. RICHARDS  
Bye, Connor.

Connor leaves.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Snow is falling.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connor cleans a stall. His uncle comes to the door.

JONATHAN  
Hunter just called. He wanted to know if you would like to go horse snow sledding after church tomorrow.

CONNOR  
Horse snow sledding. What's that?

JONATHAN  
You mean you've never been horse snow sledding?

CONNOR  
Not many horses in Los Angeles or snow for that matter.

JONATHAN  
Make sure you take a warm coat and strong gloves.

EXT. ROLLING J RANCH - DAY

Connor is being pulled on a fast moving sled. He holds onto a rope attached to Hunter's galloping horse. He's having the time of his life. Ty hollers as he passes by.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The ice on a creek is melting and breaking up. Green leaves are on the trees. Spring has arrived.

A newborn foal walks beside its mother.

Jonathan and Connor ride the horses. They stop while Jonathan points out several newborn calves.

INT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Jonathan stands at the bottom of the stairs looking up.

JONATHAN  
Connor.

CONNOR (O.C.)  
Yes, sir.

JONATHAN  
Come down a moment. We need to talk.

Minutes later, Connor trots down the stairs.

CONNOR  
Yes, sir?

JONATHAN  
Into my office.

CONNOR  
Am I in trouble?

As Jonathan walks away:

JONATHAN  
I'll let you know in a minute.

OFFICE

Connor walks in to find Jonathan behind his desk.

JONATHAN  
Have a seat.

He does.

JONATHAN  
I've been talking to your teachers.

CONNOR  
What about? I've haven't done anything.

JONATHAN  
I'll be the judge of that.

CONNOR  
I swear, I haven't done anything wrong. This is so unfair.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

Whoa. Don't get yourself worked up. I'm sorry, I was just trying to play with you. Truth is, I was seeing if I could get you some work assignments for the week you won't be in school.

CONNOR

Now I'm really confused.

JONATHAN

Late spring is shearing time for the sheep. We try to do it just before the lambs are born. The weather has been mellow, so Roberto and I figure this would be a good time. So, do you want to come?

CONNOR

Do you have to ask? I mean, that one is a duh in the question department.

JONATHAN

I'm warning you now, this is really hard work. You'll be working your butt off during the day then doing your school work at night. Think you can handle that?

CONNOR

Oh, yea. I'm strong as an ox.

JONATHAN

Okay. We'll be leaving in two days. I have some men coming to help. Make sure you get your assignments from your each of your teachers.

CONNOR

Cool. Can Taylor come?

JONATHAN

Oh, no no no. It's going to be hard enough without worrying about a pup in the process. Frank will watch him.

CONNOR

Okay. Is that it? I want to go and tell Aunt Sheila.

(CONTINUED)



JONATHAN

Yep.

Connor leaps up and runs out the door.

EXT. BARN - DAY

The truck and trailer await out front. Several men are in the back and cab. Jonathan, Sheila and Connor come out of the house.

JONATHAN

(To Sheila)

Enjoy the peace and quiet while you can. We'll see you in a week.

SHEILA

Oh, I intend you. I have my vegetable planting, shopping, cleaning, laundry, the chicken coop needs cleaning and an orphaned calf to feed. I'll be kicked back with my feet up.

JONATHAN

Have I ever mentioned how much I love you.

SHEILA

Not near enough. You can make up for it when you get back.

JONATHAN

Deal.

CONNOR

Can I go and say good-bye to Taylor?

JONATHAN

Make it quick.

They watch Connor run into the barn.

SHEILA

I'm glad to see he's grown fond of the dog.

JONATHAN

Boys and dogs are God's natural companions. It had to happen.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

Still, I was worried for a little while. This has been a lot for him to get used to.

JONATHAN

I know. He's doing good, though.

SHEILA

Just like you.

JONATHAN

That remains to be seen.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connor enters Taylor's pen.

CONNOR

Don't worry, we'll be back before you know it. A week isn't too long. Be a good boy while I'm gone and stay out of trouble. I love you, Taylor.

He hugs him and leaves the pen.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Jonathan and Connor get into the truck.

JONATHAN

See you in about a week, hon.

SHEILA

Take care. Say hi to Roberto for me.

INT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sheila picks up plates from dinner. Frank takes the last swigs of his coffee. The cell phone rings.

SHEILA

It's Jonathan.

(Into phone)

Hey, hon. How's it going? That's great. I'll have dinner ready for everyone when you get here. Okay. See you then. Bye.

(CONTINUED)

She turns it off.

SHEILA

They're finished with the shearing and are coming home tonight. Which means I've got to have dinner ready for seven men and a boy in an hour.

FRANK

Need any help?

SHEILA

If you really don't mind. I could you some help peeling potatoes.

FRANK

Just show me what to do.

EXT. RANCH = NIGHT

The truck drives up and men jump out.

JONATHAN

Those who want to can bunk in the barn for the night. Sheila should have dinner ready. Come on in when you're ready.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jonathan and Connor eat dinner while Sheila enjoys a cup of coffee.

SHEILA

So, Connor, how did you like the shearing?

CONNOR

I've never worked so hard in my life, but it was neat working with all the guys. I didn't realize sheep smelled so much.

JONATHAN

It's part of having livestock. That's why they stay outside.

SHEILA

What did you do?

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Mainly kept the floor swept. Things have to be really clean to keep the wool from becoming con..con..

JONATHAN

Contaminated.

CONNOR

Yea, that. It means to keep it from getting dirty.

SHEILA

I can understand that could be a problem.

CONNOR

Then, I picked up the wool from the belly and rolled it up to be packed. You have to be careful to roll it the right way.

SHEILA

So, there's a lot more to it than just shaving a sheep.

CONNOR

Oh, yea. A lot more. One thing is for sure, I've never seen so many naked females in one place in my entire life.

JONATHAN

Connor!

Sheila cracks up.

EXT. PORCH - EARLY MORNING

Sheila and Connor watch the day arrive.

SHEILA

I love this time of day. Everything is still at peace before the day crashes in.

CONNOR

I would love it more if I was still in bed.

Jonathan walks out.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

We're getting a small flock of sheep today that Roberto says he just has to have.

SHEILA

What's so different about these sheep?

JONATHAN

They have a coat that Roberto says is more desirable to buyers. While ours have a better meat quality. He wants to see how the two strains will produce when bred together.

CONNOR

Can I go with you when you take them up?

JONATHAN

Not this time. You've lost enough school. However, you can go up with me during your break when I check on the lambing.

CONNOR

Awesome, thanks.

SHEILA

So, have you changed your mind about this being a prison work camp?

CONNOR

A little. I mean, the work is hard, but there is some fun.

SHEILA

Good.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

A stock truck backs up to the loading shoot. Jonathan opens the back and the sheep are unloaded.

MOMENTS LATER

Jonathan, Frank and Sheila are at the fence looking them over.

FRANK

I don't see much difference in them than any other sheep.

JONATHAN

Roberto swears there is. He'd better be right because for what they cost me, I could have rebuilt the barn.

FRANK

Or purchased that new hay tractor we needed.

JONATHAN

That, too.

SHEILA

Are they all lambing?

JONATHAN

It was in the purchase contract. So, basically, we're getting twice the sheep you see and probably a few rams in a year or so.

SHEILA

When will you join them with the others?

JONATHAN

I'll take it slow. We'll give them a couple of days to settle down. And make sure Connor keeps Taylor away. Last thing we need is for that pup to spook them.

FRANK

Yes, boss.

They leave.

INT. BARN - DAY

Taylor, a year old now, is trying to find a way out. He hears the sheep bleating and wants to get to them. When he can't open the gate, he jumps over and runs out of the barn.

EXT. SHEEP PEN - MOMENTS LATER

He's at the pen where the new sheep are being kept. He runs back and forth, whining. The sheep bleat and run around the pen. He crawls underneath the fence and begins running them.

Franks hears the frightened sheep. He runs to view the pen and sees Taylor chasing them around. He runs to find Jonathan.

He finds him at the foal pasture.

FRANK

Jon, Taylor's with the sheep!

JONATHAN

Darn it! Ready, Bridget, come on.

They run for the sheep pen.

EXT. SHEEP PEN

The sheep pen is chaos. Taylor runs them mercilessly.

JONATHAN

Ready, stop him.

Ready runs through the boards and drives Taylor out. Jonathan climbs the fence.

JONATHAN

Bridget, come by.

Bridget, slowly trots around the sheep, herding them into a tight group.

JONATHAN

That'll do.

She returns to Jonathan and lays beside him. The sheep begin to calm down.

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

Frank.

FRANK

Yes, sir?

JONATHAN

Get them some hay and see if it  
will settle them.

Franks runs for the barn. Jonathan crawls out of the pen followed by Bridget. Ready comes running up.

JONATHAN

Good job, you two. Now let's see  
if we can find that idiot  
pup. Ready, where's Taylor?

Ready trots to the barn. Jonathan follows.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

As Jonathan walks in, Frank passes carrying a bale of hay. Jonathan finds Taylor in the back next to his pen gate. The pup cowers and trembles. Jonathan hesitates.

JONATHAN

Ready, Bridget, go on now.

The two dogs leave. Jonathan approaches Taylor slowly and sits on the ground beside him. Taylor puts his head on Jonathan's leg. Jonathan gently pets him.

JONATHAN

It's okay, boy. You were only  
trying to do what you were born to  
do. It's not your fault you're  
still young and don't know what you  
are doing.

Jonathan takes Taylor's head in his hands and looks him in the eyes.

JONATHAN

Taylor, it's your job to be a  
puppy. It's my job to make sure  
you become the dog I need you to  
be.

Jonathan stops, thinking. He lets go of Taylor's head and pets him again. He looks to heaven.

(CONTINUED)



JONATHAN

Lord, is that what you've been trying to tell me? It's my job to just do the best I can, but it's your job to make sure I become the man you want me to be? And, it's your job to make sure Connor becomes who you want him to be? Okay, I give us both to you, Father. I open my hands and let go. Just give me the grace to do what you give me to do.

Jonathan wipes his eyes and gives Taylor another rub. He opens the pen and puts Taylor back in. Frank walks up.

JONATHAN

It looks like he jumped the fence.

FRANK

Yea, it does. And knowing pups, once he knows he can do it, he'll do it again.

JONATHAN

Put him in one of the stalls for now. Once I get those sheep away from here, he should settle down. However, as old as he is, maybe it's time to teach him to behave himself outside his pen.

FRANK

If you think so. I'll make sure he's on the other side of the barn from Hershey. Also, it'll free up this pen for any orphans we may get.

JONATHAN

I'll be taking Hershey with me, but you have a good point. I'll head out the day after tomorrow.

FRANK

Sure thing. I'll make sure they're ready first thing in the morning.

JONATHAN

Thanks.

Jonathan leaves.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH, DAY

Frank comes from the barn leading Hershey and another horse. He meets Jonathan saying good-bye to Sheila.

JONATHAN

I'll need to take it slow, so don't expect me back for a few days. I'll call you if anything happens. You may need to bring the truck up and pick up some mothers and lambs.

SHEILA

I'll be ready, but I hope it doesn't come to that. All that bouncing wouldn't be good for them.

JONATHAN

I agree.

They kiss.

SHEILA

I packed Roberto some extra cookies and a beef roast. That should make him happy.

JONATHAN

You're the best. I forgot to tell you I had a God moment the day Taylor got into the sheep. I'll tell you about it when I get back.

SHEILA

I'll look forward to it.

JONATHAN

Say good-bye to Connor. When I return, I'm going to have a talk with him about his pup.

SHEILA

Is this a good thing or a bad thing.

JONATHAN

Mostly a good thing, but he'll probably think differently when he sees how much more work it's going to be.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

How about I don't say anything. You can blindsides him when you get back.

JONATHAN

That'll work.

Jonathan mounts Hershey and whistles for the dogs.

JONATHAN

See you in a few days.

Sheila waves as he rides away.

EXT. SHEEP PEN

Frank opens the sheep pen gate. Ready and Bridget run inside. They round up the sheep and start them out of the pen. They head up the mountain.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Connor walks in pulling his school backpack from his shoulder. Sheila sits at the table, reading a magazine. She's eating from a plate of cookies in front of her.

SHEILA

Have a cookie.

CONNOR

Thanks. Has Uncle Jonathan gone up with the sheep?

SHEILA

He left this morning. It'll take several days because he has to travel so slow.

CONNOR

I hope Taylor didn't hurt any of them.

SHEILA

I doubt it. If he had, we would have seen it by now.

CONNOR

Good. What are you reading?

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

Farm stuff. Gardening, hand raising babies, that sort of stuff. What do you want for dinner?

CONNOR

I get to choose?

SHEILA

You're the one I'm cooking for. You might as well.

CONNOR

What I wouldn't give for a pizza.

SHEILA

That, I may have to pass by. I don't have the ingredients. However, I do have sausage and garlic pasta sauce. I could try French bread pizzas. It won't be as good, but who knows. .

Connor is dubious.

CONNOR

Okay.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Connor and Frank sit at the table. Sheila pulls trays from the oven. On them are slices of bread with pizza toppings. Neither Connor nor Frank are excited. Sheila transfers the slices to a large platter and bring it to the table.

FRANK

What is it?

SHEILA

Ranch pizza. Try it.

Frank and Connor take one. They take a bite, look at each other and then Sheila.

FRANK

This is good.

CONNOR

Yea.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

Eat up, boys.

They do.

INT. ROBERTO'S CABIN - DAY

The door opens and Jonathan and Roberto walk in.

ROBERTO

I'll let them settle in the pen before I put them with the herd. I also want to look them over to see if they're everything they were advertised to be.

JONATHAN

They'd better be. For what I paid for them you think they grew golden fleeces.

ROBERTO

If they are, you'll get your money back and then some.

JONATHAN

Hope you're right. I was half afraid some of the ewes would drop on the trail. Connor's pup, Taylor, got in the pen with them a few days ago and ran them pretty badly.

ROBERTO

Nature watches out for the young and stupid, however its usually to make a meal of them.

JONATHAN

Think they'll drop soon?

ROBERTO

From what I saw, it could be any day. Several in the herd have already lambed. I admit I'm not getting much sleep of a night.

JONATHAN

You're earning that huge salary I pay you.

(CONTINUED)

ROBERTO

Which is half of what I could get  
teaching at a university.

JONATHAN

So you say. Anyway, I'll take watch  
tonight so you can get all the  
beauty rest you need.

ROBERTO

Thanks.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

A ewe has separated itself from the flock. She lays down  
within some brush. A few minutes later, Bridget comes and  
sees her. She leaves. Jonathan comes just as the lamb is  
born. He rubs it down with a towel. The sheep follows when  
he takes it back to the flock. He places the lamb beside  
its mother and it begins feeding.

EXT. MONTANA STATE - DAY

Dark clouds are moving over the mountains. A late blizzard  
is being birthed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Connor and Sheila watch television.

SHEILA

Do you mind if I check on the  
weather? We like to keep watch  
during the spring because of the  
babies.

CONNOR

Sure, I don't mind.

Sheila flips the channel. It shows a storm front that has  
come in off the Pacific and has mixed with a cold front from  
the north. A storm is coming. Sheila sits on the edge of  
her seat.

SHEILA

Oh, no. This isn't good.

She reaches over a grabs her cell phone. She pushes some  
buttons.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

Jon, a strong storm is coming in. It looks like a late blizzard. What do we need to do?

INT. ROBERTO'S CABIN - DAY

JONATHAN

When does it say it will hit?

INT. LIVING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Sheila watches the TV a moment.

SHEILA

It's over Idaho right now. We don't have much time.

INT. ROBERTO'S CABIN - SIMULTANEOUS

JONATHAN

Have Frank bring in the foals and get the ranch ready. He knows what to do. I need you and Connor to bring the truck up with the trailer. We need to get these sheep down. We can put the ewes with lambs into the trailer. While you and Roberto do that, I'm going to the calf pasture and look for newborns.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

SHEILA

We'll be there in a few hours.

Sheila turns the phone off.

SHEILA

Connor, get Frank. We need him, now.

Connor runs out the door.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - LATER

Sheila and Connor are walking to the truck.

FRANK

I've put extra blankets in the back seat along with some coffee and a heavy jacket for Jon.

SHEILA

Thanks, Frank. We should be back within four hours. If not, keep a light burning.

FRANK

Will do. Be careful.

Sheila and Connor get in. Sheila drives away.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER.

Frank leads a mare with a newborn foal. He opens one of the stall doors. Taylor runs out and out of the barn.

FRANK

Dang it, Taylor. Get back here.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - MOMENTS LATER

Taylor runs into the yard. He picks up Connor's scent. He follows the truck into the countryside.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Jonathan saddles his horse, Roberto watches him.

JONATHAN

It's time like this I wish I had a whole crew to work with. Finding those calves is going to be like finding a needle in a haystack.

ROBERTO

Take one of the dogs with you. Ready can do the work of two.

JONATHAN

You're right. I'll take Ready. He's a little more aggressive with the cattle, and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



JONATHAN (cont'd)  
they can be mean when they have  
calves. Sheila should be up soon.

Jonathan looks over his shoulder

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Dark clouds spill over the mountains.

EXT. CABIN - SIMULTANEOUSLY

JONATHAN  
We don't have much time. I can't  
wait. Watch out for Connor. Don't  
let him get into trouble.

ROBERTO  
Will do, boss. You need to go.

Jonathan whistles for Ready and Bridget. They run up.

JONATHAN  
Bridget stay here. Ready come on.

Jonathan wheels his horse and gallops away, Ready at his  
heels. Bridget whines.

ROBERTO  
It's okay, girl. We have work to  
do. Come on.

Roberto and Bridget head for the sheep pasture.

LATER

The truck drives up to the cabin. Roberto already has the  
sheep penned next to the cabin. Not far away, black clouds  
warn that the storm is almost there.

Roberto comes out of the cabin. Sheila rolls down her  
window.

ROBERTO  
Can you back it up to the gate?

SHEILA  
I think I can. Jon's the expert,  
but I believe I can do it.

(CONTINUED)

Sheila turns the truck around and backs the trailer to the gate entrance. She and Connor get out. The first snow flakes begin to fall.

ROBERTO

I have about two dozen ewes with lambs. It's going to be tricky, but we'll need to separate them from the herd and drive them into the trailer.

Sheila nods. Roberto opens the gate.

ROBERTO

Connor, see that small gap between the trailer and gate? Your job is to make certain no sheep go through there.

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

Connor takes his post. Roberto whistles his commands to the dogs. With his staff, he points out the sheep he wants. The dogs work in perfect unity to separate it and drive it into the trailer. Sheila is opening and closing an inside gate. The wind begins to whip around them.

Connor watches closely. Hearing a dog bark behind him, he turns and sees Taylor.

CONNOR

Oh, no. Taylor, what are you doing here?

(To Sheila)

Aunt Sheila, Taylor's here.

SHEILA

How? It doesn't matter, now. Try to keep him away from the sheep if you can.

Connor slaps his leg.

CONNOR

Come here, boy.

Taylor walks over and Connor takes him by the collar. He kneels on the ground, holding him while watching the pen. The snow is falling so hard, they can no longer see the country around them. When the sheep are aboard, Roberto closes the trailer.

(CONTINUED)

ROBERTO

Take these down and I'll come with  
the rest of the herd.

SHEILA

If we have a white-out, how will  
you find your way down?

ROBERTO

The dogs will know.

SHEILA

Roberto, these sheep are not worth  
your life.

ROBERTO

I'll be okay. This isn't the first  
storm I've been through.

CONNOR

I can stay with him and help him  
take them down.

SHEILA

Oh, no. You've never been in a  
storm like this. Get in the  
truck. Taylor can ride in the back  
seat.

CONNOR

Come on, Taylor.

Connor opens the back door, but Taylor has stopped. He's  
listening into the distance.

CONNOR

Come on, boy. Get in.

Taylor whines. Without warning, he runs away into the  
storm.

CONNOR

Taylor, get back here.

Connor runs after him. He disappears into the swirling  
snow.

SHEILA

Connor! Leave him, we need to go.

(To Roberto)

We have to find him.

(CONTINUED)

ROBERTO

Go on down. The dogs and I will find him.

SHEILA

I can't leave him.

ROBERTO

You have to. These lambs will die. I promise, we'll find him. He'll be all right.

SHEILA

I don't like this, but okay.

Sheila crawls into the truck. She drives away.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Connor is blind and lost; the snow, a white wall around him. He calls out as he goes.

CONNOR

Taylor. Taylor.

In the distance, he hears barking.

CONNOR

Taylor. Come here, boy.

He follows the sound. The barking is the only thing giving him direction.

CONNOR

Taylor.

Taylor emerges out of the snow. He barks, turns and disappears again. Connor follows, stumbling blindly. Suddenly he falls, sliding several feet into a ravine before coming to a stop in some brush. Taylor barks only a few feet away. Connor gropes his way through brush and rocks until he finds Taylor.

CONNOR

What are you doing here?

Taylor nuzzles something on the ground. Connor bends down to find a newborn lamb curled up against the bitter cold. A movement to the side reveals its mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Oh, my gosh. Taylor, you found them. Come on, let's get them back.

Connor picks up the lamb and walks up the slope. He slides a couple of times, but finally makes it. The mother follows, bleating for her lamb. Connor stops at the top. He's blind and has no idea where to go.

CONNOR

Oh, God. Help me find my way home.

Taylor nudges his leg.

CONNOR

Taylor, can you find Bridget? Find Bridget, boy.

Taylor trots away.

CONNOR

Taylor, wait.

Connor runs to catch up. The ewe follows.

Taylor leads Connor through the blinding snow. It seems forever until Taylor stops and barks. A bark in the distance answers him. They follow the sound. Bridget emerges from the storm, excited. She's followed by Roberto.

ROBERTO

Where did you go?

CONNOR

Taylor found a mother and her lamb. He led me to them.

Connor gives the lamb to the shepherd who places it inside his coat with him.

ROBERTO

Good job. It would have died out here. Come on, we need to get the herd down the mountain.

The snow is letting up. The dogs work hard herding the sheep through the snow. Taylor follows Bridget's and Jacob's example, helping with the work.

(CONTINUED)

The ranch comes into view. Frank comes out of the barn and opens the holding pen gate while the sheep are herded in. Sheila comes running from the house wrapping Connor in a big hug.

SHEILA

Lord, I was so scared for you.

CONNOR

Sorry, Aunt Sheila. Taylor found a lost ewe and her lamb. He led me right to her. We saved them.

SHEILA

I'm just glad to see you back safe. Go in the house and warm up.

ROBERTO

Is Jonathan back yet?

SHEILA

He got back about fifteen minutes ago. He's throwing hay to the ones he brought in. Our load is in the barn. Frank has already given them hay.

ROBERTO

Then I'll see if Jon needs any help.

FRANK

I'll come too.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The men and Connor sit around the table while Sheila pours coffee.

SHEILA

More hot chocolate, Connor?

CONNOR

Please.

Sheila puts down the coffee pot and refills Connor's mug from a pot on the stove.

SHEILA

Is anyone hungry?

(CONTINUED)

JONATHAN

Sheila, sit down and rest a moment. You can worry about food later.

Sheila sits down sipping her own coffee.

JONATHAN

Connor, I heard you disobeyed your Aunt Sheila and almost got yourself lost in the storm.

CONNOR

I went after Taylor. He ran away.

Roberto starts to say something, but Jonathan stops him.

JONATHAN

I'm not angry with you. In fact, I also heard you saved a lamb and ewe.

CONNOR

Actually, it was Taylor who did it. He led me to them.

JONATHAN

I want you to know that I'm proud of you for taking responsibility for Taylor. However, what you did was also foolish. As much as we love them, no animal is worth a human life. We would have been devastated if we had lost you.

CONNOR

You care?

Jonathan gets up and kneels before Connor. He embraces him.

JONATHAN

When I heard we almost lost you, I thought my heart was going to rip in two. I may not be your real father, but I love you as though you were my own.

He kisses the top of Connor's head then ruffles his hair.

JONATHAN

And if you do anything that crazy again, you'll be grounded until you're thirty.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

You can always have him sleep in the barn with Taylor.

JONATHAN

Actually, I've been thinking of allowing Taylor to come inside with Ready and Bridget. He's old enough now, and I believe he's earned the right.

CONNOR

May I go get him?

FRANK

No need. He's already laying next to the fire. The barn is full of sheep. There was no way I was going to give that pup that much temptation.

CONNOR

Thanks.

EXT. FIVE SPRINGS RANCH - DAYS LATER

It is a bright, sunny day. Most of the snow has melted. Jonathan and Connor come out of the house with the dogs. They meet Roberto and Jacob coming from the sheep pen.

JONATHAN

Are they ready to move?

ROBERTO

Sure. We had eight new lambs over the last few days. We'll take it real slow.

JONATHAN

(To Connor)

Remember, stay behind the herd and watch for any that are falling behind.

CONNOR

Yes, sir.

JONATHAN

We won't expect you until tomorrow. Spend the night with Roberto.

(CONTINUED)



CONNOR  
I know. I got it.

JONATHAN  
Just making sure. Don't want you  
getting lost.

CONNOR  
I'll have Taylor and Bridget.

JONATHAN  
Bridget, I trust.  
(To Roberto)  
We need to get the sheep out of the  
barn so Connor can saddle his  
horse.

ROBERTO  
Yes, boss.

Roberto opens the barn doors to reveal a small herd of sheep  
and lambs. He whistles. All the dogs run in and begin  
herding them out - including Taylor.

ROBERTO  
That pup learns fast.

JONATHAN  
It's about time.

MOMENTS LATER

Connor walks out leading Skippy.

JONATHAN  
(To Roberto)  
Sure you don't want a  
horse? Connor can bring it back.

ROBERTO  
No, thanks. They just get in the  
way. The sheep are used to seeing  
me on the ground.

Jonathan gives Connor a hug.

JONATHAN  
See you when you get home, son.

Connor gives him an impish smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOR

Okay, dad.

Connor mounts. Frank opens the sheep pen gate and the dogs start the herd up the mountain.

FADE OUT

THE END