

DARK HORSE

FADE IN:

Title Sequence

1 EXT. FOREBODING LANDSCAPE - ALMOST DAWN 1

Dawn fights inky clouds. We follow a rough track through a sweeping landscape, to a rickety five-bar gate.

2 EXT. ISOLATED FARM 2

INSERT SIGN: NAME OF FARM

Beyond the gate, a ramshackle farmhouse. A cluster of old farm buildings and machinery. A timber barn, it's huge doors crooked on their hinges.

INSERT - SIGN/NAME OF FARM

On the farmhouse porch, a pair of worn down high-top Converse beside muddy wellies. The door flies open. Tiny feet are stuffed into the high-tops as slender legs hop towards the gate. Off camera, the rattle of an engine. An old horse box lumbers into shot as it heads towards the gate.

3 INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS 3

Through the windscreen headlights pick out the high-tops running to open the gate. Collie dog MAX darts in the lights.

Behind the wheel, RUTH STEEL, a young-looking 40-something, gingerly lines the truck up. Tuts at the footwear of petite ALICE STEEL, a young-looking 15 with swinging pony tail.

4 EXT. ISOLATED FARM - CONTINUOUS 4

The truck edges slowly through the gateway.

Alice closes the gate, hurries for the passenger door. As she reaches up for the handle the truck edges forward a few feet. Stops. Alice paces after it. The truck moves again. Ruth grins. Alice opens the door. Max jumps in too.

RUTH STEEL  
(to collie)  
Max, get down - go home.

5 EXT. NARROW COUNTRY LANE - LATER 5

Daylight is breaking. A sign "BEWARE LANDSLIPS" ahead.

6 EXT. WIDER COUNTRY LANE - LATER 6

The truck rumbles up a ridge, the rain lighter as morning settles on a remote but beautiful landscape.

7 INT. TRUCK - LATER 7

Through the windscreen an array of smart stable buildings looms, a grand looking house. Alice sits forward in her seat, peers ahead excitedly as a sign comes into focus.

INSERT SIGN "CARNEGIE RACING YARD"

END TITLE SEQUENCE.

8 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD - CONTINUOUS 8

The truck pulls into the courtyard. Alice springs out to the hiss of air-brakes, spots MATT, 18, dismounting a motorbike. He points an iphone at Alice. She tugs a hairband from her ponytail, flicks it back coquettishly. The band snaps from her hand, blows out of the yard and catches in the hedgerow. Behind the wheel, Ruth frowns. Watches the flirting.

9 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD - MOMENTS LATER 9

Tall willowy Ruth follows Alice to the back of the truck.

ALICE

Can I have an iPhone, mum?

RUTH

We've no signal at the farm.

Teen angst from Alice.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We'll see when you're qualified.

Alice reaches up for the rope to pull the ramp down.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I can manage here. Go and grab any post from the office -

Alice heads across the yard towards the grand house.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
Check the last module of your  
course is there.

10 INT. BOOT ROOM, GRAND HOUSE, CARNEGIE RACING YARD - LATER 10

As Alice hurries into the empty room, Matt enters from the office. She tries to side-step. He does the same. They stop. He slips off his beanie hat, brushes her hair back from her face with it. Alice pulls back awkwardly, heads off.

11 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 11

Ruth leads three horses. Spooked by the gusty weather, they are flighty but she handles them skilfully.

12 INT. STABLES IN BARN, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 12

The internal stable building is awash with shelves of trophies and ribbons. Walls are hung with pictures of horse races and racing silks. Ruth opens a stable as JERRY, 55, enters, as well turned out as his yard and horses. He runs his hands down the front legs of one of the horses.

JERRY  
He looks to be in fine fettle.

RUTH  
Just race him on good to soft. For  
a few more weeks.

JERRY  
You've done a good job.

He nods towards a fiery looking black horse in a stall.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
Your next mission, should you  
decide to take it...  
Fine bloodline - sire of that  
little chestnut mare Alice's  
bringing on. But his tendons need  
your tough love, Ruth.

Ruth's eyes light up. She walks closer, impressed.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
If you can handle him, that is.

RUTH  
What's his name?

JERRY  
"The Dark Knight's Travels" - or  
Gulliver, as we call him.

Jerry nods towards a little chestnut mare.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
That two year old that won't make  
the cut - take him too. Nifty -  
just no top gear.

RUTH  
Might take to the stick.

JERRY  
Polo?

Ruth leads the little horse from its stable.

RUTH  
The little grey we retrained plays  
for an England player now.

JERRY  
Money-spinner, hmm?

RUTH  
I can't watch a good horse go for  
dog-meat.

JERRY  
And that's why you get all our  
rejects. If you can make a few bob -

RUTH  
You've got their passports ready?

13 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD

13

Jerry walks beside Ruth as she leads Gulliver and Bella.

JERRY  
Alice must have almost completed  
her course by now?

RUTH  
She's already working wonders on  
that cold-backed chestnut.

JERRY

We have accommodation here so when she's qualified maybe -

RUTH

Shall we start to load?

14 EXT. GRAND HOUSE, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 14

Alice hurries out of the boot room, post stuffed under one arm and an open book in her hand. She turns a corner, runs into Matt, drops the book - 'Fifty Shades of Grey'. Alice stoops, grabs the book as Matt bends down to help.

15 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 15

Ruth leads Gulliver to the bottom of the lorry ramp. Gulliver struts and prances.

JERRY

Load him last. When you're ready.

16 EXT. GRAND HOUSE, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 16

Alice and Matt are still kneeling, their faces close.

MATT GIBSON

I wanted to say goodbye.

Alice picks up the rest of the post.

MATT GIBSON (CONT'D)

I'll call you.

ALICE

I told you, I don't have a phone.

Matt hands her an older smart phone and charger. Ali smiles.

17 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD 17

Alice and Matt are out of Ruth's line of vision as she ties Gulliver to the side of the lorry. But Jerry sees them.

RUTH

Where's that daughter of mine.

JERRY

You know, she's going to want to spread her wings.

Ruth gives an uneasy shrug.

JERRY (CONT'D)

She's growing into a strong-willed young woman. I understand why you've always shielded her but -

RUTH

Shall we sort the money out?

Jerry hands her a document.

JERRY

It will be in your account tomorrow.

RUTH

Thank you. (checks watch, to herself) Come on, Ali.

18 EXT. GRAND HOUSE, CARNEGIE RACING YARD

18

Impulsively Matt leans forward, grasps Alice by the arms and presses his mouth against hers. A moment and Ali pulls back.

ALICE

I... I have to go.

MATT GIBSON

I'll come and see you -

Alice hurries away.

MATT GIBSON (O.C.) (CONT'D)

- on my bike. It's only a couple of hours or so (fades)

She doesn't look back. Unseen by Matt, she smiles.

19 EXT. COURTYARD, CARNEGIE RACING YARD

19

Ruth unties Gulliver, leads him to the ramp. He rears.

ALICE (O.C.)

(cartoon voice)

*You expect me to get in that?*

Ruth glances over her shoulder at Alice.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
 (cartoon voice)  
*I mean, you do know who I am, huh?*

Ruth cracks the rope on his belly. He loads with one stride.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
*Oh. Okay. Alright then.*

20 INT. TRUCK 20

The truck stops at the open gates to turn out on to the lane. Alice slips her hand into her pocket. Eases out the black beanie hat. In the left wing mirror she sees Matt watching.

21 EXT. COUNTRY LANE - CONTINUOUS 21

The racing yard sign is in the foreground as the lorry chugs away. The hairband has now gone. In the hedgerow, a pair of stylish, two-buckle men's boots. Dangling from his hand, a small poly bag with the hairband. From the yard, Matt frowns.

22 EXT. FARMYARD - DAY 22

Purpose built buildings sit cheek by jowl with old barns. A dark green metal container next to a ramshackle pole barn. Ruth leads a prancing Gulliver to a paddock. In the adjoining paddock Bodmin, a bay mare, paces the boundary, watches the battle of wits between Ruth and Gulliver.

ALICE  
 (male cartoon voice)  
*Lady you ain't got no chance.*

Gulliver spots the mare, pulls towards her as Ruth opens the gate. He flounces across to the mare.

ALICE (CONT'D)  
 (male cartoon voice)  
*Hey baby, haven't we met before?*  
 (female cartoon voice) *Daddy!*

Across the fence, Gulliver towers above the mare, snorts. Ruth closes the gate, watches the horses trot up and down.

RUTH  
 Same paces.

ALICE  
 And faces. Real family resemblance.  
 I could lunge him while -



RUTH

Finish your studying then we'll  
check his lordship out together.

Alice shrugs petulantly, heads inside. Ruth watches Gulliver's performance a little longer.

23 EXT. FARMYARD - TWO WEEKS LATER 23

A sudden downpour. Ruth and Alice make for the paddocks. Alice heads for Gulliver.

RUTH

No. Bring Bodmin - stay beside us.

Alice sucks her teeth. Catches Bodmin. As Ruth latches the lead-rope on to Gulliver's head collar, Alice jogs Bodmin towards the gate. Gulliver raises his head defiantly, charges to be close to the little mare. The rope begins to slip through Ruth's wet hands. He tugs her off her feet. But she holds firm and leads him out. As he catches up to Bodmin, he proudly snorts at his triumph. They lead the two horses out of the weather, into the barn.

24 EXT. FARMYARD - LATER 24

Drenched by rain, Ruth unlocks the metal tack-room as Alice lugs two saddles inside. We see walls flanked with saddle racks and tools. Alice runs across the yard. Ruth shuts and bolts the tack-room door. Runs for the farmhouse.

25 INT. FARMHOUSE, RUTH'S BEDROOM - LATER 25

Through the window, Ruth smiles as Alice hauls hay-nets to the barn. She picks up a brush, pulls it through her thick hair. The handle snaps.

26 INT. FARMHOUSE, ALICE'S BEDROOM 26

Ruth opens the drawers of Alice's dressing table, one at a time. No hairbrush. She sees an old biscuit tin half-hidden by clothes, opens it. Inside: a small doll in a lacy dress; a bald "My Little Pony"; a smooth pebble. Ruth smiles, picks up the doll - and sees the mobile phone charger. She sucks her teeth, thinks for a moment. Replaces the doll.

27 INT. FARMHOUSE, LIVING AREA - EVENING

27

Rain beats at the windows. A fire burns in the fireplace. Alice discreetly tucks *Fifty Shades* from view. Ruth enters, picks up Alice's sketch pad. A horse's anatomy.

ALICE

Mum, what's cunnilingus?

RUTH

It's... a form of sexual activity.

ALICE

So what is it exactly?

RUTH

I suppose you could describe it as making love to a woman's vagina.

By mouth.

Alice watches Max lick his private parts.

ALICE

Men do *that*?

RUTH

Some.

Alice goes to ask another question.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Just carry on with *Fifty Shades* and I'm sure all will become clear.

Outside, the wind is whipping up a fierce storm.

LATER -

Ruth reads on the sofa. A muffled cry from Alice's bedroom.

28 INT. ALICE'S BEDROOM

28

The room is dark. Alice moans quietly in her sleep. Ruth sits on the bedside, quietly calms her. From the living room, low growls. Suddenly Max barks. A huge clap of thunder followed by lightning sends Alice into Ruth's arms. Max barks again. Outside, horses whinny.

RUTH

It's just a storm, darling.

Ruth looks towards the window as she gently rocks Ali.

## THROUGH THE WINDOW

A sheet of lightening highlights the barn door as it slams back and forth in the gale.

29 INT. LIVING ROOM

29

Ruth grabs some baling twine, throws on boots and a waxed coat over her PJ's and tugs open the front door. A gust of wind spins around the room. Sparks from the dying fire whirl around the hearth. The dog growls furiously out of the door, hackles raised. Ruth looks at the shotgun hanging above the shelf. Takes it down and slips two cartridges into it from her pocket.

30 EXT. FARMYARD

30

Shoulders hunched against the weather, Ruth hurries to the barn. The broken shotgun rests on her arm. The barn door swings back and forth. Buckets clatter in the squally gusts. Perching the broken gun on her shoulder, Ruth grasps the barn door and begins to close it. Sheet lightening lights a narrow strip down the centre of the barn. Like an illuminated aisle. Where the light ends, there is something on the ground, under a blue horse rug. She steps cautiously inside. She stares at the rug. The rug moves. She raises the gun into her shoulder. She moves slowly towards the rug. Gulliver snorts furiously. Staring down the shotgun barrels, she reaches the rug. A gust blows the door open again. A flash of lightening sheds near daylight on the scene. On the ground is a young MAN, 28, soaked through. His face is bloodied, his coat ripped open. So is his right leg. He doesn't move, his eyes are closed.