

ROOSTER

A Screenplay based on the novel, *Rooster, A Field Trial Fable* by Edward Pontacoloni ©2016, adapted by Edward Pontacoloni © 2025 Utilizing ChatGPT® for formatting and chapter synergy.

Theme Song: *Get Along Little Doggie*, Lyrics by Edward Pontacoloni ©2016

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If there's a little fantasy in it – that's what hopes and dreams are made of.

ACT ONE

AERIAL SHOT - EXT. WESTERN KENTUCKY GRASSLANDS - LATE AFTERNOON

A vast sea of golden-yellow prairie stretches to the horizon, bathed in amber light. The camera soars over rolling hills that create gentle waves in the landscape.

TRACKING SHOT

Two POINTING DOGS course through the tall grass. The first, an ENGLISH SETTER with a white coat speckled with black, moves with fluid grace. The second, a BLACK AND WHITE POINTER, follows at a respectful distance.

Behind them, a GALLERY of HORSEBACK RIDERS follows, their silhouettes dramatic against the late afternoon sun. The lead rider wears a wide-brimmed hat and sits tall atop a chestnut Tennessee Walker.

SINGER (V.O.)

(softly)

Get along little doggie, get along
little doggie It's a long, long
trail and we ride to the end...

The English Setter suddenly freezes in a classic pointing stance - one front leg raised, body stretched forward, tail extended straight as an arrow. The Pointer halts in honor, acknowledging the other dog's find.

A HANDLER dismounts from a palomino horse and approaches carefully. As he nears the Setter, a covey of QUAIL bursts skyward from the grass in a flurry of golden wings. The dogs remain perfectly still as the handler fires a shot from a blank pistol.

SINGER (V.O.)

Get along little doggie, when the
trail is over We'll be riding
again...

NORMAL SPEED

The dogs resume their hunt, disappearing into the tall grass. As the last trailing rider vanishes off screen, a BLUE BUTTERFLY flits up from the field. Not an ordinary butterfly, but a woodland sprite, a tomboyish blue faery with a gleam of something ancient and knowing. Its outsized wings are a twilight sapphire that seems

to glow against the golden landscape. Beneath its cocked cap its eyes hold a spark of tomboyish mischief. It hovers for a moment, impishly smiles at the camera, then streaks away.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

A group of Children at an overnight summer camp sit around a crackling fire, their faces illuminated by the dancing flames. Before them sits a Man (fiftyish) with a guitar. In the dark we see only the shadow of his face and the twinkling of his storyteller eyes in the campfire light.

MAN

(singing)

Get along little doggie,
the trail we're riding
Is made of hopes and dreams.

He sets the guitar aside. He pauses, listening to the crickets. Then he leans forward, and his eyes brighten to reflect the firelight.

MAN (CONT'D)

That is a cowboy song. Our story may not be about cowboys, children. It is about an unusual dog that wanted to compete among the best of the best in the sport of horseback field trials, a kind of cowboy game.

An old, orange coated dog with floppy ears comes and sits by the MAN's side. He pats the dog's head and beckons the children to come closer.

MAN

(eyes smiling leaning closer)

Let me tell you about that unusual dog named Rooster, and about a boy, a girl, an old trainer that never gave up on his hopes and dreams, and about the magical blue butterfly that brought them all together.

In the flickering light of the fire, a BLUE BUTTERFLY flits shimmering into the evening sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STOREY HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING - EARLY 2000s

Suburban colonial home. EDWARD STOREY (40s), thoughtful and steady, looks out the kitchen window, where he sees the ghostly image of a black and white dog running across the backyard in the shadows of the trees.

EDWARD

I think it might be time to get another dog.

His wife JAN (40s), practical but warm-hearted, and teenage son MIKE (15), enthusiastic and earnest, sit at the dinner table. SPARKY, a small black and white Havanese with shaggy fur, perks up his ears at the mention of a dog.

JAN

What's wrong with Sparky?

CLOSE ON SPARKY

She reaches down to pet Sparky, who preens under her attention.

MIKE

I'd like to get a hunting dog, Dad. I was looking through this book and saw the neatest dog. They call it a versatile dog because it does a variety of things, like point game, and retrieve, and even swim. Want to see it?

Mike gets up from the table.

EDWARD

They're a lot of work, Mike. You have to exercise them a lot. You'll be turning sixteen and will be going to college soon. Who's going to take care of it?

Edward glances at Jan who shakes her head disapprovingly.

JAN

I don't think that we need another dog. Mike.

EDWARD

Besides, such dogs are meant for the woods and fields and for doing the things nature meant for them to do. It wouldn't be right to get such a dog and then keep it cooped up in the house and yard.

Mike returns with a large book.

MIKE

Here, look at this dog. Ain't he neat looking? Orange with yellow eyes and floppy ears.

He shows a picture of an unusual looking dog with orange, wiry fur, floppy ears, yellow eyes and a bearded face.

JAN

(taking the book)

Let me see. I still don't see what's wrong with Sparky.

MIKE

He doesn't hunt. And, besides, he's your dog.

JAN

No, he's not, he's the family dog.

MIKE

(teasing)

If you can call him a dog.

Sparky puts his front paws up on Jan's lap, looking up with soulful eyes. She pets his head while examining the book.

JAN

It is adorable looking, but big. Is it really orange?

MIKE

Orange with yellow eyes.

JAN

I don't know... another dog is a big commitment.

EDWARD

(to Mike)

Let's find someone who has one and go see it before we decide.

Mike's face lights up with hope.

EXT. BREEDER'S HOUSE - DAY

A modest country home with a fenced yard. Edward and Mike approach the front door. MRS. MANN (50s), friendly and talkative, greets them, followed by LUCY, a large, friendly orange and cream dog.

MRS. MANN

Come on in, I'll be right with you.
Lucy will show you her pup. She's a
good dog.

Lucy leads them through the house, but the puppy isn't in the nursery area.

EXT. BREEDER'S BACKYARD - DAY

Lucy leads them outside and stops, as if pointing. In the flower garden, a PUPPY with orange, wiry fur lies on its back, pawing at a hovering BLUE BUTTERFLY. The butterfly's wings are an impossible, vibrant blue that seems to glow with an inner light. The Blue Butterfly hovers just out of reach as the puppy playfully swats at it.

MIKE

(down on one knee)

Here pup... here pup. Come on, boy.

(to his father)

If this dog could do more than look
funny...maybe he could be something
special.

The BLUE BUTTERFLY flutters away. The puppy sits up, goes to Mike. He tilts his head in seeming acquaintance. He sniffs at Mike's offered hand. Finding no treat, he lazily returns to the flower bed and the waiting butterfly.

MR. MANN (50s) emerges from the house wearing carpenter's coveralls.

MR. MANN

Hello... hello.

Lucy goes to his side. Edward and Mike introduce themselves.

MR. MANN (CONT'D)

So, I see that you've met Lucy and
seen the pup. What do you think?

Cute little fella, isn't he? He's the last one. We call him 'Squirt, but you can call him whatever you want, of course.

(calling)

Here, Squirt. Come on boy. Here, Squirt.

Mr. Mann squeaks a whistle. The pup just sits among the daisies and rolls on his back. The Blue Butterfly returns and hovers over the puppy's head.

CLOSE ON PUPPY AND BLUE BUTTERFLY

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Who are they?

CAMPER (O.V.)

Wait, butterflies and dogs can talk to each other?

MAN (O.V.)

Oh, certainly they do. All living things talk to each other. With your imagination you can hear them right at the moment when you imagine that they may have something to say. Listen now.

SQUIRT

I don't know.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

They gonna take you?

SQUIRT

Nobody wants a runt of the litter.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

I'll go listen.

The Blue Butterfly flies over to and flutters around the humans. Mr. Mann scruffs Lucy's neck.

MR. MANN

What's wrong with that pup of yours, girl? Well, you know, Ed, right? Squirt there was the runt of the litter, the last one, so he's a bit shy.

MIKE

Look at that butterfly, Dad. It's blue and larger than any I've ever seen before.

EDWARD

Well, you know, Mr. Mann, we want to make sure we get a sound dog. He does seem to be a bit timid. It would be good if we were to see some energy out of him, some spirit.

The blue butterfly flutters away back toward the pup lighting on its nose.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(to puppy)

"Tag, you're it."

Then the Blue Butterfly flies across the yard to a daisy bed. The pup suddenly springs to life, rolling up off the ground and darting across the yard. Reaching the daisy, the dog stops, cranes its neck, crooks its right paw, extends its stubby tail, and holds a perfect puppy point for a moment before pouncing. Then spreading and shredding daisies, the pup chases the Blue Butterfly around the yard with evident excitement and zest.

Mike and Edward exchange surprised looks.

EDWARD

I guess he'll be all right. We'll take 'im...right, Mike?

MIKE

Sure.

EXT. BREEDER'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Edward and Mike are going to their car, the puppy on a leash at Mike's feet. Unobserved, the Blue Butterfly flutters around the puppy.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(to puppy)

You goin' with them?

SQUIRT

I guess so.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

I'm coming.

The blue butterfly flies inside the vehicle just as it's starting to drive away.

MIKE

Hey Dad, look, that blue butterfly flew into the car.

EDWARD

Roll down the window, and it'll fly out again.

MIKE

I've never seen such a blue butterfly before.

Unseen, the blue butterfly remains in the car and hides beneath one of the puppy's floppy ears.

INT. CAR - DAY

The puppy licks Mike affectionately, then puts his head on Mike's lap, falling asleep. Edward glances at his son, seeing his excitement. He reaches over and squeezes Mike's shoulder. Mike looks down at the sleeping puppy, suddenly aware of the connection he's beginning to feel.

EXT. STOREY HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY

As Mike and Ed exit the car, the Blue Butterfly flits away from under the dog's ear.

INT. STOREY HOME - DAY

In the house, Jan and Sparky wait at the door. Jan immediately takes the puppy from Mike's arms and cuddles it. She puts the puppy on the floor. Sparky jealously erupts into frantic barking and jumping.

JAN

(to the puppy)

It's okay, little one.

Jan brings the puppy into the kitchen and gives him water. The puppy explores his surroundings, finding one of Sparky's toys and pouncing on it. Sparky immediately reclaims it with a growl.

The puppy suddenly lets out a peculiar sound: "Wroooo, wrrroooo, wroooo." Everyone laughs.

MIKE

(excited)

Wroo...wroo...Rooster! That'll be his name! Rooster.

EDWARD

Good name for a bird dog, heh.

Jan kneels down to pet Rooster, who immediately rolls over for a belly rub. Jan obliges, already falling for the puppy.

JAN

(to Edward)

I suppose we can manage two dogs.

Edward and Mike exchange victorious glances.

MONTAGE - ROOSTER GROWING UP

- Rooster playing with Sparky in the yard, getting bigger
- Mike training Rooster with basic commands
- Mike looking frustrated as Rooster shows little hunting instinct

INT. STOREY HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Edward reads a magazine. Mike, now 17 years old, enters, looking discouraged.

MIKE

Dad, I don't know what to do with Rooster. He's supposed to be a hunting dog, but he just doesn't seem interested in birds. He's two years old now. I've tried everything. Strangest thing though. Remember the blue butterfly at the breeders? One just like that comes around the yard now and then, and Rooster chases after it.

EDWARD

(thoughtfully)

Oh, I remember. That is odd. Could it be a Pooka?

MIKE AND JAN
(simultaneously)

A what?

EDWARD
(reflecting)

Oh, nothing. Just an old Irish myth
that's come to mind.

DISSOLVE

EXT. IRISH FORESTS

In a magical, emerald green forest pixies and leprechauns frolic and play. A large tree crashes down. Then a second falls to the ground with a boom. Then a third. The leprechauns vanish in midair. The pixies panic and run. Suddenly they magically transform and take flight as sapphire blue butterflies trailing crystal motes of light into an azure sky.

INT. STOREY HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Maybe Rooster needs professional training. I heard there's a trainer over at Crooked Branch. An old Irishman. Tom Quinn, I think his name is. Him and his brother, Liam. They're supposed to be good with pointing dogs. Maybe he even knows something about blue butterflies.

MIKE

Really? Can we go see him? There's a girl name Quinn in my high school.

EDWARD

Why don't you take Rooster over there this weekend? See what this Quinn fellow has to say.

JAN

(entering the room)

What are you two plotting now?

EDWARD

Just talking about getting some help with Rooster's training.

EXT. STOREY HOME BACKYARD - DAY

Rooster sits by a tree when the Blue Butterfly approaches.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Hey Roo. You look pensive. What's up.

ROOSTER

Mike is taking me to some dog trainer today over at a Wildlife Management Area.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Oh. Crooked Branch? There are open fields with new spring blooms of liverleaf and Virginia Blue Bells. Yummy. I'm coming.

EXT. STOREY HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY

As Mike loads Rooster into the Jeep, the Blue Butterfly sneaks in to hide beneath Rooster's floppy ear.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA - DAY

A beautiful expanse of rolling fields bordered by woodlands displaying early spring colors. The trees are still mostly bare, but there's a hint of green beginning to emerge. Mike's Jeep drives along a dirt road.

MIKE'S POV

Through the windshield, he spots an old gray pickup truck with a horse trailer. An Old Man in a red flannel shirt sits on the tailgate. Several DOGS are chained in a line nearby, and two riders are returning with another dog on a long lead.

BACK TO SCENE

Mike parks and approaches the old man. Rooster still gangly with orange wiry fur and long floppy ears, remains in the Jeep, the stowaway blue butterfly asleep beneath an ear.

MIKE

Hi... I'm Mike.

TOM QUINN

(with Irish lilt)

Hello, Mike.

Tom, late 60s, his face weathered but his hazel eyes still twinkling with life. Mike watches as AMY (16), pretty with green eyes and her auburn hair in a ponytail under a blue ballcap, dismounts from her horse and tends to a pointer. She glances at Mike curiously with slight recognition.

MIKE

(to Tom)

Are you guys dog trainers?

TOM

We're a kennel. We train dogs.

MIKE

Pretty neat...with horses and all?
I've just got a dog for bird
hunting that I brought up here to
run a bit, except, I don't know
much about what I'm doing. Training
a dog and all. It's my first
hunting dog. Mind if I watch? Maybe
I can learn somethin'?

TOM

You're welcome to watch. What kina
dog do you have, Mike?

MIKE

I'll get him.

Mike goes to get Rooster from the Jeep and returns to Tom.

MIKE (Cont'd)

This is Rooster.

When Tom sees Rooster, his eyes widen slightly. Liam Quinn (late 50s), and Amy exchange glances. Amy twists and tries to hide a smile.

LIAM

(laughing)

What the heck is that? He hunts?

Amy accidentally releases the quail she's holding, and it flies off, causing the other dogs to bark excitedly.

TOM
(approaching Rooster)
Friendly fella, huh?

Rooster immediately rolls over for a belly rub. Tom obliges, his weathered hands gentle.

TOM (CONT'D)
(to Mike)
Well, Mike, you seem like a good kid. I don't know about that mongrel dog of yours; but I'll tell you what, why don't we see what he's got? We're going to run Queen next, but you go and put your dog on that string with the other dogs there, and we'll let you both watch. Then we'll see what your Rooster does. How's that sound?

MIKE
Sure, thanks. That's great.

Mike leads Rooster to the string of dogs and attaches him next to POKEY, a young tri-colored setter female.

CLOSE ON STRING OF DOGS

POKEY
(to Rooster)
Hi. I'm Pokey. It's short for Pocahontas... Star Chief's Pocahontas... that's my name. Star Chief's my dad. Queen's my mom. That's Queen there with Liam. She's going out now.

ROOSTER
Oh, I'm Roo.

CAMPER (VO)
The dogs are speaking to each other. I can hear them with my imagination.

MAN (VO)

Oh, yes. Listen children. The voices that you hear with your imagination speak to you of hopes and dreams.

POKEY

Roo what? Don't you have more of a name than that? Who's your dad?

ROOSTER

My full name is Rooster... just Rooster.

POKEY

My dad was a champion. My mom's going to be a champion, too. Me too, someday... Mr. Quinn says so.

ROOSTER

What's a champion?

POKEY

A field trial champion... That's what we do. We run in field trials. We're here training with Mr. Quinn. That's Mr. Quinn there sitting on the truck. Mr. Quinn is the best. I'm going to be a champion when he finishes training me.

ROOSTER

Me too.

POKEY

You can't be a champion.

ROOSTER

Why not?

A pointer, CHET, sitting on the other side of Pokey rises up abruptly and turns to her, while glancing sideways and menacingly at Rooster.

CHET

(to Pokey)

What are you talking to him for? He ain't one of us.

(turning to Rooster)

What are you doing here, yeller eyes?

POKEY

(to Chet)

Shush Chet!

(to Rooster)

Don't mind him. That's Chet. He's just rude. You don't look like any champion I've ever seen. I mean, where's your muscles? You've got to have muscles to be a champion... and heart. To be a champion you've got to be strong and fast and have lots of desire.

(proudly)

That's what I've got... lots of desire. Mr. Quinn says I've got wings on my heart.

BACK TO SCENE

Mike returns to stand near Tom by the truck. Liam, still grinning, slowly shaking his head, wondering at Tom's intentions, takes Queen, an English Setter, from the string on a long lead. Amy rides off to plant the quail. Queen is released by Liam. She breaks away fast and strong, running with fluid grace across the field.

TOM

(to Mike)

That's a good dog there, Mike. See how she takes to the task? Now, we don't expect as much from that, that ah... what do you call that dog?

MIKE

Rooster.

TOM

Well now, you see, that's a mongrel breed, Mike. We wouldn't expect such performance from a dog like that. I'm sure he's a good dog, Mike. Just, he ain't a dog like Queen there, nor like these pointers and setters we got. See? But... Oh there... see now, Queen has gone on point. Watch this.

TRACKING SHOT

Queen stands in a perfect point - one front leg raised, body stretched forward, tail extended straight as an arrow. After Liam's flush and shot, she continues

hunting and finds another bird, again pointing beautifully.

TOM

You see? Like an oil painting, huh?
A setter on point is perhaps the
most often painted of all game
dogs. Beautiful, isn't she?

Mike nods impressed but also a bit discouraged.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well, after Liam puts Queen back on
the string, I'll have him plant a
bird for your dog. You say that he
hunts. Have you seen him hunt
anything?

MIKE

Well, honestly, no. But I have
watched him chase and point a blue
butterfly. Funniest thing.

TOM

(with heightened interest)
Oh, does he now? A blue butterfly,
you say. Can you ride a horse,
Mike? You can go out with Amy, and
we'll see what this dog of yours
does.

MIKE

I've been horseback riding. I guess
I can ride well enough.

TOM

These are Tennessee Walking Horses,
Mike, so you should be alright. I
don't expect that dog of yours will
give you any reason to gallop for
gosh sakes.

(calling)

Amy, you handle Mike's dog... show
'im a bird before he goes out.

Amy grabs a quail from the bird box and walks with Mike to Rooster. She presents the squawking quail to Rooster, who shows no interest while the other dogs bark excitedly.

AMY

(To Mike)

You go to West High School, right?
Your dog doesn't seem interested in
birds at all.

MIKE

(nodding)

I thought that you looked familiar.
Yeah, I know. That's why I'm here.

CHET

(mockingly)

You see that! Like I said, he's not
one of us. You shouldn't talk to
him.

MIKE

Come on, Rooster. Come on,
you've got to have desire, if
you want to be a hunting dog. I
know ya can do it.

Liam, shaking his head, hands Mike a long orange lead.

LIAM

(To Mike)

Well, just take him up to the line
on this here lead, and we'll see if
he's more interested when he
encounters a bird in the field.

EXT. STARTING LINE - MOMENTS LATER

At the starting line, Mike hands the lead to Liam, who
sets up Rooster for release. Mike awkwardly mounts the
gelding and wiggles into the saddle. Amy waits astride her
mare, brushing hair from her eyes and pulling down her
cap.

MIKE

Ready!

Liam unleashes Rooster and slaps the back of his
head.

LIAM

Hie on!

To everyone's surprise, Rooster takes off faster than
expected, galumphing across the field in bounding
leaps. Amy smiles at Mike, whose mouth is wide open in
surprise. Tom slaps his knee with a hoot.

CLOSE ON ROOSTER

Rooster slows and begins to meander about in the tall spring grasses, often lost from sight. As Amy and Mike approach on horseback, Rooster takes off again running mostly straight with no obvious purpose. He suddenly becomes curious about an area. He circles, nose held high, then begins to creep slowly. He stops stone still, except for his tail, which wags excitedly.

RETURN TO SCENE

Amy and Mike arrive at Rooster's point. Amy dismounts and approaches Rooster cautiously, softly "whoaing" Rooster, who turns to watch her approach.

AMY

(To Rooster)

Where is it boy? Is there a bird here?
Show me.

Suddenly a quail flushes. Rooster watches it fly. Amy looks at Mike, and they exchange smiles. Amy walks back toward Rooster, draws her blank gun and fires. The crack of the gun awakens the stowaway Blue Butterfly, which zips out from under Rooster's ear. Rooster breaks point and dashes off after the butterfly with surprising speed.

AMY (CONT'D)

(To Mike)

Where's he goin'?

MIKE

Don't know, Amy. Should I call him?

AMY

No...no. Let's see what he's up to.
Did you see that butterfly?

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Rooster follows the Blue Butterfly into the leafless woodland, his orange coat standing out against the early spring colors.

ROOSTER

Where are you going? Where are you?

BUTTERFLY

Over here.

Rooster follows the voice and finds the Blue Butterfly perched on some miterwort flowers. Suddenly, something in the woody air commands Rooster's attention. He sniffs

deeply, circles, and then comes to a rigidly stout stance, his tail extended taut and unflagging. A small covey of five quail mills about in the brush before him.

EXT. WOODS - NEARBY - DAY

Amy and Mike hobble their horses and enter the woods on foot.

MIKE
(calling)
Rooster!

AMY
Hey dog, where are you?

MIKE
(spotting Rooster)
Look!

AMY
Easy, Mike. Your dog's on point. I couldn't tell for sure the first time, but there's no question about it now. Wait. Let me approach him.

Amy cautiously moves toward Rooster, who stands firm but for a quick glance over his shoulder. As she nears, Amy sees the quail milling about. She quickly moves ahead of the dog and noisily sweeps her foot across the ground. The birds burst into flight, mottled brown against the spring sky. Amy draws and fires her blank gun. Rooster stands steady.

FOCUS ON BLUE BUTTERFLY

The Blue Butterfly trails the quail as if a tardy member of their covey, out above the still bare treetops, into an afternoon April sky. With each beat of its wings, tiny flecks of blue light drift down.

BLUE BUTTERFLY
I'm coming!

The Blue Butterfly turns to look back at Rooster with a smile.

RETURN TO SCENE

Rooster watches the Blue Butterfly but holds staunch and steady, allowing himself to be collared away. Mike watches Amy with newfound admiration for her and his dog. He is unsure of what has happened and of the new feelings that he has as Amy mounts her horse.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - LATE AFTERNOON

The group returns to Tom's truck. Rooster is exhausted, panting heavily.

AMY

(amused)

That dog went into the woods following a butterfly and found a covey, then stood staunch when I flushed and shot.

TOM

(impressed)

Did he now? Well, I'll be. That dog found birds that Queen missed.

LIAM

Appears he's got a good nose.

AMY

(to Mike)

He was amazing out there for a young dog.

MIKE

Thanks. I believed he had it in him.

Mike takes Rooster and places him on the string of dogs and waters him. Pokey leaps playfully at Rooster, licking at him, but Rooster is too tired to respond. He collapses on the ground, panting.

TOM

(to Mike on return)

You know, son, you're welcome to bring him back. Train with us. No charge, so long as you help out with the other dogs.

Mike glances at Amy for encouragement. She smiles invitingly before turning demurely away.

MIKE

Really? That would be great! Thanks, Mr. Quinn.

INT. STOREY HOME - NIGHT

Enthused by Rooster's performance, Mike tells his parents about the day, while Rooster lies exhausted in a corner. Sparky tries to get him to play.

MIKE

You should've seen it, Dad. It was really something. At first they all laughed at Rooster, and said he was a mongrel and stuff, and then he showed 'em. He found all the birds. Even the ones that Queen didn't find.

JAN

Who's Queen?

MIKE

She's one of Mr. Quinn's dogs. He's got a whole string of dogs, pointers and setters that he trains, and Queen's a setter and a field trial winner, and she's supposed to have this great nose, see, but Rooster was the one that found the birds.

Sparky goes to Rooster in the corner.

SPARKY

(to Rooster)

Hey, what's the matter with you? Where's all spunk they are talking about?

ROOSTER

(groaning)

Ooooooooooh. Not now Sparky.

SPARKY

That bad, huh.

Sparky curls up next to Rooster protectively.

SPARKY

(quietly)

Mike says you did real good today.

ROOSTER

(Peeking from beneath his paw)
Really?

SPARKY

Really. Rest up, big guy. You'll be at it again soon.

Mike paces about the room.

MIKE

(turning between Ed and Jan)
He found five of 'em... a covey
it's called... in the woods. You
could hardly see them among the
brown leaves and sticks of the
forest floor. Then they burst up
into the air when Amy flushed with
her boot. It was really neat.

JAN

Who's this Amy girl?

MIKE

Oh, she's Mr. Quinn's niece. She goes
to my school. She helps with the dogs.
Mr. Quinn says that I can bring Roo
to train with him and Amy, if I
want. And so long as I help out
with the other dogs and stuff, he
won't charge me. Can I do it?

EDWARD

I suppose so.

JAN

I want you to go with him, Ed, and
see what this is all about. Who are
these people, anyway? And I don't
know about this horse business,
either.

She goes to Rooster and strokes his back.

JAN (CONT'D)

(to Edward)

And, who's that Amy girl?

Mike looks away, trying to hide his interest. Then he
turns to Edward.

MIKE

What do you say, Dad?

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DAY - A WEEK LATER

Edward stands with Mike and Tom by the side of Tom's truck and watches as Liam and Amy take Queen on a run. Queen suddenly freezes in a perfect point, one leg raised, her feathered tail rigid and parallel with the ground.

TOM

(To Edward)

See that? That's style. Can't teach it.

(Pointing to his nose)

And a dog's nose? That's God-given. Either she's got it or she ain't. But in the end it takes heart.

(tapping his chest)

The kind that comes from here.

EDWARD

Well, what about Rooster?

TOM

Well, Ed, compared to the pointers and setters in horseback field trials, that dog's a mongrel breed, you know? But I give him one thing, he's got a good nose, and he's good mannered. And your boy's a good kid. It's a pleasure having them both here. We'll see if we can't make a field trialer out of one of 'em.

EDWARD

With the horses and all, this field trialing is a cowboy kind of game. How did a fellow from Massachusetts come to get involved in it, Tom?

TOM

(turning to bring Mike into the conversation)

Well Ed, Mike, my uncle Will did some trialing when he was younger and living in Tennessee. He told me some stories. I was attracted to the idea of wearing leather chaps and following on horseback braces of pointing dogs across western

grasslands. When I was not too much older than Mike, Uncle Will put me in touch with a champion trainer who had a camp in North Dakota. The next thing ya know, I'm on a bus.

ACT TWO

DISSOLVE

EXT. NORTH DAKOTA HIGHWAY - DAY (1950S)

A Peter Pan bus rolls down a lonely highway cutting through the vast Drift Fields of North Dakota. On the back of the bus, the painted figure of Peter Pan seems to fly over the landscape.

INT. PETER PAN BUS - DAY

YOUNG TOM QUINN, 19, sits by a window, his earnest face reflecting both hope and uncertainty. His eyes hold a dreamer's gaze as he watches the endless prairie roll by, a sea of green and gold under a forget-me-not blue sky.

The Blue Butterfly briefly appears outside the window, keeping pace with the bus for a moment before darting away.

PETER PAN BUS DRIVER

(over his shoulder)

Hey. Did you see that. A twinkling blue butterfly. Reminded me of the sprite Tinker Bell from Peter Pan.

Tom blinks, unsure if he saw it.

EXT. BUS DEPOT - NORTH DAKOTA - DAY

The bus pulls into a dusty roadside station. Air brakes hiss. Dust swirls. Bus door opens. Tom steps off with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder, squinting in the bright sunlight.

Waiting for him is DUKE ARNESS (50s), weathered but dignified, standing beside a red Ford pickup truck. In the passenger seat is BUCK ARNESS (20s), sandy-haired with a permanent smirk. Leaning against the truck bed is TALL CHARLIE HINKLE (20s), lanky and rough-looking. Tom approaches Duke and extends his hand.

YOUNG TOM

Mr. Arness. I'm Tom Quinn. Uncle Will sends his regards with his thanks for giving me this opportunity.

DUKE

Think nothing of it.
(turning to Buck)
We can always use the help, can't we Buck?

BUCK

(snidely)

Sure.

Buck exchanges a mocking glance with Charlie, who grins with gapped teeth.

DUKE

(aside to Tom)

Don't let Buck size you up. He'll test you soon enough.

Tom displays confident indifference, tosses his duffle into the back of the truck and climbs in. Tall Charlie follows.

EXT. NORTH DAKOTA ROAD - DAY

The red pickup truck drives through the vast landscape. The Drift Plains of North Dakota unfold in summertime shades of green and gold. Flocks of clouds pasture in the blue sky.

Tom sits in the truck bed with Charlie, taking in the surroundings with wonder. The BLUE BUTTERFLY briefly appears again, flying alongside the truck at a distance before disappearing into the prairie.

EXT. DUKE'S CAMP - DAY

The truck pulls up to a weathered bunkhouse, kennels and horse corral. Outside stands FUZZ CONKLIN (60s). He holds a black-eared pointer pup in the crook of his arm while several other black and white pointers scamper around his feet.

DUKE

This here is Fuzz.

Fuzz nods at Tom. The black-eared pointer pup escapes from Fuzz and darts away. Buck hops into the pickup truck and drives after it. Coming along side, Buck opens his door, reaches down, and with one motion grabs the pup by the scruff of its neck, and with a foul grin hurls it roughly into the truck bed.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - DAY

The two-room bunkhouse is simple - bunks, a coal black cook stove, a rough wooden table with chairs, and an old Frigidaire ice box. On a shelf sits a tarnished bronze trophy of a dog on point.

DUKE

(Taking the trophy off the shelf)

This is from my first Invitational.
I've got others back home, but the
first one is my constant
inspiration.

(Turning the trophy in his hands)

This sport can be dang fool
frustratin' at times.

Buck swaggers into the bunk house. Charlie shuffles in behind him and snuffles. Each is met with a disapproving stare from Duke, rising to his full height.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Buck, you and Charlie know I don't
like you running down dogs from the
truck. That dog could've run 'neath
a tire, or ya could've hurt its leg
or somethin' when you threw 'im
inta the bed like that.

BUCK

Aw Pah, we're probably gonna cull
that pup anyhow; it don't have no
manners, and its style ain't
nothin' special no how. He'll never
earn no prize money, that's fer
sure.

DUKE

That's no never mind. I don't like
it, and that's reason enough for
you boys.

EXT. DUKE'S CAMP - TRAINING FIELD - MORNING

The sun breaks far away on the horizon casting golden shadows upon the field. Duke walks alongside Tom as they watch a pointer at work coursing the grasses, seemingly drawn by its nose like iron to a magnet.

DUKE

Field trialing ain't like regular bird hunting, boy. We're looking for three things - nose, style, and stamina.

The pointer suddenly freezes in a perfect point, one leg raised, tail rigid.

DUKE (CONT'D)

See that? That's style. Can't teach it.

MONTAGE - TOM'S SUMMER TRAINING

- Tom learning to handle dogs on horseback
- Tom watches as Duke demonstrates training
- Buck and Charlie using harsh methods with the dogs.
- Tom working with the black-eared pup.

EXT. DUKE'S CAMP - NIGHT

Tom sits with Duke and Fuzz around a small campfire. Above them, the North Dakota sky is vast and filled with stars. The dogs are settled in their kennels for the night.

DUKE

Field trialing is not merely a sport. It's a culture unto itself. The personages, by which I mean to include the dogs, even the horses, are like the characters in old story books.

FUZZ

Or a Western dime novel.

DUKE

(to Tom)

Keep in mind, boy, this is not an easy game. It is a hard competition, and there are those few, sufferin' of greed or otherwise ornery, who would not compete fairly, or would use trickery, and you've got to be wary of them.

YOUNG TOM

How do you spot them?

DUKE

You'll know them 'cause their ways take a toll on their features, so that they look like the rascals that they truly are.

FUZZ

In all my years, I've seen the good and the bad in both men and dogs. This sport'll teach you life's ways more so than much else in the world.

DUKE

Men have the free will God supposedly give 'em, and that's said to explain their misbehavior on occasion. I can accept that, so long as I don't have to tolerate no misconduct towards me or mine.

FUZZ

Dogs, though... they're just free animals, period, until you put controls on 'em.

DUKE

That said, I do recall hearing of one dog that you'd swear was being mischievous by intention. This dog would deliberately intimidate a brace mate on point so as to cause a blink or a break.

FUZZ

That was that old red patch-eyed dog. He could make a scowl to scare a coyote.

DUKE

Just how that dog got that way is a puzzlement, but you can be sure a man was involved.

FUZZ

We kept away from fire-headed dogs for a reason. Not just the orange spotted dog, like you mostly finds among the pointers, mind you, but a fire red, like the devil was bred in it. You say man, I say devil.

DUKE

There're devils among men, and I say the man would be the fault of a bad dog, red markings or black. That's my conclusion.

Tom looks up at the stars, taking in Duke's words. A shooting star crosses the purple North Dakota night.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Tom has the black-eared pup out on its braided lead. The pup slips its collar and bolts to freedom. Tom runs to his horse and quickly mounts, but the dog has gone from sight, cresting a small hill. Tom spurs his mare and atop the rise sees the pup. As he closes, the dog suddenly stops. A point!

CLOSE ON PUP

Tom dismounts to approach the dog on foot. The pup shows a staunchness and intensity that it had not exhibited when at the end of a training lead. It turns its head only slightly, in acknowledgement of Tom's presence. It does not flinch or show any inclination to creep.

YOUNG TOM

Whoa boy, easy boy...

A Ringneck pheasant struts in scrub. It takes wing with a screech. The pup does not chase but stands firm, studying the bird's flight, even when Tom makes shot from his blank gun. More surprisingly, the dog remains still as Tom reaches to slip on its collar. Tom hugs the pup and praises it.

YOUNG TOM (CONT'D)

Good dog, good, good dog.

Tom mounts his horse with the pup under his right arm and rides back with the pup across the mare's saddle.

A short distance from the dog's point, purple spikes of dotted lazy star liatris pierce through the yellowing prairie grasses. The Blue Butterfly flutters among the flowers. As Tom and the dog leave, the butterfly watches them go.

As Tom nears the camp he sees Buck Arness mistreating a dog.

BUCK

(Beating the dog with the free end of its lead)
Damn cur! You'll be culled you fer sure.

The dog cowers and struggles to escape but can't get free while still on lead. Mike dismounts, putting the black-eared pup down with its lead wrapped around the saddle horn. He charges Buck, shoving him and taking the lead from him and threatening Buck with it.

TOM

Don't treat a dog that way, Buck.
There's no call for it. You heard
Duke, a bad man will make a bad
dog.

Buck glares to challenge Tom.

BUCK

Don't tell me how a man's supposed
to train a dog.

But despite his threat, Buck stomps off. Tom takes Buck's dog on its lead. With the black-eared pup on its lead, and taking the horse's rein, he walks to the cabin in the late afternoon.

EXT. MUSTIES SALOON - NIGHT

On the dusty streets of the small town, an old Western-style saloon, with bare wooden tables and a rough clientele.

INT. MUSTIES SALOON - NIGHT

Tom sits alone at a table eating stew. Buck and Charlie huddle with two rough-looking locals at the bar,

occasionally glancing at Tom. Buck whispers something, and the locals nod. Tom finishes his stew and heads to the men's room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - MUSTIES SALOON - NIGHT

As Tom stands at the urinal, the locals enter. One roughly shoulders Tom, and the other shoves Tom.

FIRST LOCAL

Hear you're from the east. Ain't enough room in these parts for eastern dudes.

SECOND LOCAL

No room, dude.

Tom apologizes to excuse himself and turns to leave, but both men bar his way. The First Local crosses his arms over his chest. The Second Local wears a challenging smirk.

QUICK CUTS

Tom suddenly brings a strong right fist to the First Local's head, causing him to fall. Before the Second Local can react, Tom delivers a left to his midsection, doubling him over, followed by a right to the top of his head. Both men down, Tom calmly walks out without a word.

INT. MUSTIES SALOON - NIGHT

Tom emerges from the men's room to find Buck and Charlie at the bar. He grabs Buck's arm.

YOUNG TOM

We should go, now.

Buck starts to protest but seeing the two locals stumble out of the men's room, he understands.

BUCK

Let's go.

EXT. NORTH DAKOTA ROAD - NIGHT

The pickup truck drives back to camp. Tom rides silently in the truck bed. Buck and Charlie exchange glances in the cab, confusion evident in their expressions. Buck shrugs.

CHARLIE

You ought not have instigated those boys, Buck.

BUCK

I don't like Quinn. My dad likes him too much for my way of thinkin'. I'd just as soon be rid of him. And I will.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

Tom sits at the table discussing his future plans with Duke. Buck and Charlie enter, brushing dirt off their jeans.

DUKE

That ditch dug?

BUCK

Yes sir.

Duke reaches up to remove his rim-fire rifle from its rack on the wall. He slides the gun across the table to Tom. The mood in the room shifts dramatically.

DUKE

Tom. This here is a hard and difficult sport, hard and difficult; all the more so with the dog breeding and all. It just ain't easy on either the body or the spirit, and it requires some things that cut against the grain of what we might otherwise prefer as good and compassionate men.

Tom looks down at the gun with dawning realization.

DUKE (CONT'D)

We can't keep all of them pups we got with us, Tom. Some of them pups just ain't field trial material, and that's just the facts of life, Tom. We gotta cull that litter...keep only the two dogs that we figure got potential.

YOUNG TOM

Mr. Arness, I just can't do that, sir. It's not something I've come here prepared for...not something I anticipated at all. I appreciate all that you've done for me, Mr.

Arness, I really do, and I hope that I can repay you someday; but, sir, I need you not to make me do what you ask.

Duke looks toward Fuzz, who slowly shakes his head.

DUKE
All right, boy, I understand.
(to Buck)
You and Charlie go tend to it. Go on.

Buck, sneering at Tom, picks the rifle up from the table, then turns, slaps Charlie on the back, and they shuffle toward the door. They hesitate when Tom speaks.

YOUNG TOM
Wait. Mr. Arness, that black-eared pup... is he among the culls?

DUKE
He is, Tom.

YOUNG TOM
Mr. Arness, I'd like to keep that pup, sir. I'll pay you a fair price for 'im, if I can send you the money when I get home. I've taken to that dog. I can work 'im and maybe he'll do all right, at least by me.

Duke puts his hand on Tom's shoulder and searches his eyes. He looks to Fuzz, who nods.

DUKE
(to Buck)
Save that black-eared dog for Tom, here.

But Buck pays Duke no mind and he and Charlie, sneering, go outside, letting the wood framed screen door slam behind them.

EXT. OUTSIDE BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

BUCK
(to Charlie, waving the rifle)
That Quinn moves me wrong. I'd cull him and that black-eared pup

both. He'll be gone soon and best stay out of my way hereafter.

Duke, too, goes outside. Soon loud rifle shots are heard...two in rapid succession, then a third a moment later.

EXT. BUS DEPOT - DAY

Tom boards a Peter Pan bus, the black-eared pup in the crook of his arm. As the bus pulls away, the Blue Butterfly follows briefly, then veers off into the prairie sky, trailing tiny sparkles of blue light. Again, we see the rear of the bus with its trademark Peter Pan taking flight.

DISSOLVE

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DAY

TOM

(To Edward)

I came home with the black-eared pup, and I called him Pete. Pete didn't turn out to be the star I hoped he'd be, but he gave me what I needed - experience, opportunities to compete, and a foundation for Quinn's Kennel. More than that, Pete taught me that when a man and his dog are together, there's room for the fancies of fortune to play a part.

EDWARD

That's a fine story, Tom. Your ambitions sure have taken you far. But you didn't tell me. Did you ever realize your dream of a championship?

TOM

Well, now, that is a story for another time, Ed. No. But I have never really given up on my hopes and dreams. There is always the luck of the Irish, you know.

EDWARD

When it comes to Rooster, I think that Mike may be a bit like you in that way. He's the kind of kid who won't give up on a dream and he has this connection with Rooster.

TOM

(nodding)

Some folks are just born to it. Your boy's got a natural way with his dog. They communicate well.

EDWARD

(to Mike)

Mike, you mind your manners, and you work hard with Mr. Quinn.

MIKE

So, I can stay and train then, Dad?

Mike looks from Edward to Amy, who shyly turns away.

EDWARD

Sure. Who knows, maybe someday you might run Rooster in a field trial.

EXT. - CROOKED BRANCH - DAYS

DYNAMIC MONTAGE - TRAINING PROGRESSION

- EARLY TRAINING: Coming to Rooster on point, Mike kneels beside his dog, who's trembling with excitement at the scent of a bird.

MIKE

Whoa...steady...

The bird flushes and Rooster breaks, chasing wildly. Mike's shoulders slump in disappointment. Tom places a reassuring hand on Mike's shoulder, when he returns.

DYNAMIC MONTAGE - TRAINING PROGRESSION

EARLY FAILURES: Rooster stands firm as a bird flushes but breaks at the sound of the blank gun. Progress, but not enough.

DETERMINATION:

DAWN - Mike runs alongside Rooster through dewy fields.

RAIN: Mike and Rooster train despite the downpour, both soaked but determined.

DUSK - Mike brushes down his horse while Amy brushes Rooster.

AMY

(pulling hair from the brush)

You've picked up a lot of burrs,
Roo.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - WEEKS LATER

Tom watches as Rooster completes a run. Mike approaches, eager for feedback.

TOM

Everything appears in good order, except for that darn flagging tail.

MIKE

Yeah, I know it's judged a fault.

TOM

He's young and excited. He'll settle down once he understands that this is a business. I think maybe we can run him braced with another dog. Maybe he'll learn something by example. What do you say?

MIKE

Well, sure, I'm all for it.

(turning to Liam)

Liam?

LIAM

Sure.

DYNAMIC MONTAGE - TRAINING PROGRESSION

- TEAMWORK: Rooster braced with Queen, who seems to teach him, running parallel patterns, the elegant

setter and the shaggy orange dog finding rhythm together.

- BREAKTHROUGH: Rooster standing steady through both flush and shot, Tom nodding approval. Mike beaming.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DAY - LATER

Tom sits on his tailgate with Amy, studying Rooster's run. Mike returns with Rooster tired and panting. Mike puts Rooster on the string of dogs and goes to Tom.

TOM

(to Mike)

He's a might too slow, that Rooster. He'll never be able to compete against pointers and setters in horseback field trials. A dog's got to run fast, strong and long.

MIKE

Isn't there anything that I can do?

TOM

I don't hold too much hope, but you could try roading him, getting him some exercise to strengthen him and build his race. But I don't know. He's a mongrel breed, like I told you. Back when I was your age, they would cull a dog like that.

MIKE

I'll think of something. I'll think of something.

Troubled but determined, without further words Mike collars Rooster, goes to his Jeep, looks over his shoulder at Amy, and drives away. Disheartened, Amy gives Tom a look of concern. She turns and leads her horse to the barn.

MAN (VO)

This is going to be a challenge for Mike. Tom said long ago that a good dog needs stamina. Heart, he called it. Same is true of a handler. Stick with it stamina. All else being equal, heart will win out.

CAMPER (VO)

Mike will stick with it. I know.
He'll think of something.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Mike stands at his locker, a thin dog training book hidden inside his history textbook. JASON (17), athletic and confident, approaches with two FRIENDS.

JASON

(mockingly)

Hey, it's the dog whisperer! How's your mutant hunting dog?

FRIEND #1 (laughing)

Probably chasing butterflies instead of birds.

Mike closes his locker without responding. As the boys walk away laughing, English Teacher (50s) approaches.

ENGLISH TEACHER

Mike, I read your essay on field trials. Fascinating stuff.

MIKE

(surprised)

Really? Most people think it's weird.

ENGLISH TEACHER

People fear what they don't understand. But passion? That's something rare.

She hands him his paper - an A minus with "Excellent voice!" written at the top.

ENGLISH TEACHER (CONT'D)

You've found something that speaks to you. Something that you are passionate about. That's worth more than fitting in.

As she walks away, Mike looks at his paper, then at Jason and his friends down the hall. He doesn't envy them.

MIKE

(to himself)
Worth more than fitting in.

EXT. STOREY HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

Rooster lies on his belly under the shade of a large oak.
The blue butterfly appears and lands near his ear

BLUE BUTTERFLY
What're you doing?

ROOSTER
(exhausted)
Hiding so I can get some rest.

BLUE BUTTERFLY
Why are you so tired?

ROOSTER
Because of Mike, he makes me road
the whole day long and do repeat
fetches up hills and other
exercises. He doesn't give me any
time to just sit, except at
bedtime.

(curious)
And where have you been lately, by
the by?

BLUE BUTTERFLY
(fluttering around him)
Oh, I've been hanging around with
some quail. You know? The ones I
met that day at Crooked Branch.
Nice folks... for birds. Downright
humorous at times... had a good
time.

The butterfly examines Rooster from different angles.

BLUE BUTTERFLY
(CONT'D)
You've gotten pretty big these last
couple of months there, Rooster.
All that exercising must be
working. What are you exercising
for, anyhow?

ROOSTER
You've been with quail? That's what
I've been doing. Mike is training me

for field trials, which involves finding quail...funny that I haven't seen you around.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

I've heard about those field trials from the quail. Fun and games, they say. How've you been doing? I've heard some pretty funny stories about some dogs.

ROOSTER

(drowsily)

All right, I reckon. Matter of fact, Mike says that I might be entered in a championship someday.

Sparky comes strutting over, curious about the conversation.

SPARKY

Who are you talking to, Roo?

ROOSTER

That Blue Butterfly there. She's special - been staying with quail and learned field trialing secrets.

Rooster sits up and the butterfly takes wing to fly alongside Rooster.

SPARKY

Oh... well, hey, we could use some secrets, huh, Roo?

(to the butterfly)

I'm Sparky. So, tell me, what secrets do you know?

The Blue Butterfly lands on top of Rooster's head.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Oh, I've heard some things. Those quail know the game pretty well. It's kind of like hide-n-seek with teams. The quail can be mischievous, though. They know how to bamboozle the dogs, if they want.

Sparky sits, captivated by the butterfly's tales.

BLUE BUTTERFLY (CONT'D)

Like, if the dog scents a quail and goes on point, the quail can sneak off and burrow deep in the grasses. When the handler arrives, he gets frustrated unable to find the bird.

The butterfly takes wing to hover over Sparky and continues her stories.

BLUE BUTTERFLY (CONT'D)

The quail can even shut off their scent as the dog gets nearby. When handler comes into flush, the quail fly right up under the dog's nose, causing it to startle and break point.

(whirling about)

I even heard a story about how a quail flushed and then it flew back down and pecked the pointing dog on its nose. They're a funny bunch, those quail though... enough to make you laugh.

SPARKY

Well, I'll be. Did you know that about quail, Roo?

ROOSTER

(sleepily)

Can't say that I did, although I don't doubt it.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Oh, it's true, but the quail know the rules of the game. They pretty much will play fair most of the time, unless they don't like a dog.

SPARKY

I think maybe we should talk with them quail, Roo.

But Rooster had fallen asleep. Sparky lies down on his belly beside him, his chin across his outstretched left front leg. The Blue Butterfly flutters off to the flower garden.

INT. QUINN HOME - NIGHT

Mike, Tom, and Amy sit at the dinner table. Amy's acceptance letter to the college pre-veterinary program sits prominently on the table.

TOM

Well, Amy, soon you'll be heading off to Tufts, the First Quinn to go to college.

(to Mike)

Mike, you'll have to take over her responsibilities at the kennels.

MIKE

(casually)

I can handle it.

AMY

(conflicted)

I've been thinking...maybe I could defer for a year.

TOM

(firmly)

Absolutely not. You've wanted this too long and worked too hard for this.

AMY

But Rooster's chances for the Invitational. Mike...Rooster needs me.

TOM

(interrupting)

It will happen with or without you. Dogs come and go, but education is forever.

Amy looks at Mike, who forces a smile despite his sadness.

MIKE

Tom's right. This is your dream.

AMY

(quietly)

Not my only one.

She turns from them. She glances at the kennel visible through the window, then back at Mike. She looks away, unable to meet his eyes.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DAY

MONTAGE - MIKE TAKING OVER AMY'S DUTIES

- EXT. QUINN KENNELS - DAY: Mike feeding dogs, cleaning kennels
- EXT. FIELD - DAY: Mike scouting for Liam at trials, becoming more confident
- EXT. FIELD - DAY: Tom showing Mike how to handle different dog.

Tom rests a hand on Mike's shoulder as they walk to the truck.

TOM

Doing just fine, Mike.

MIKE

Do you think...do you think Rooster could ever compete in a stakes?

TOM

He's got heart, that dog. Sometimes that counts for more than breeding. We'll see him in the next stake; the Robert Hollow Cup is coming up soon. We'll see.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD - DAY - RAIN

Heavy rain falls as Mike and Rooster train. Rooster struggles through mud, clearly exhausted. He stops, refusing to continue despite Mike's encouragement.

MIKE

Come on, Roo. Just a little more. Rooster lies down, panting heavily. Mike looks to Tom, who watches from beneath a tree, sheltered by a rain slicker.

TOM

Some days you just have to know when to quit.

MIKE

(frustrated)

The Robert Hollow Cup trials are next week. We can't quit.

TOM

You push him too hard now, you
might not have a dog to run at
all.

Mike kneels beside Rooster in the mud, rain streaming
down his face.

MIKE
(quietly to Rooster)
I'm sorry, boy. I'm asking
too much.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike sits on his bed, staring at a field trial
pamphlet. Sparky jumps up beside him as Edward appears
in the doorway.

EDWARD
Rough day?

MIKE
(sighing)
Tom thinks Rooster's hit his
limit. Maybe everyone was right -
he's just not built for this.

EDWARD
You know what Tom told me about
sporting dogs. The best ones
aren't always the fastest or the
strongest.

MIKE
What are they?

EDWARD
The ones that won't quit. The
ones that keep trying when it
makes no sense to try.

Mike looks at Rooster, who's curled up at the foot of
his bed. Edward leaves. Mike slides off the bed and
sits next to Rooster, who lifts his head.

MIKE

We're not quitting, are we? I know Amy wouldn't let us, if she were here.

Rooster licks Mike's hand. Mike smiles, determination returning to his eyes.

DISSOLVE

INT COLLEGE CAMPUS STUDENT UNION
CAFETERIA

A large banner reading Welcome Freshman hangs on a wall. Students seated and milling about. Amy winds her way in the queue along the student cafeteria counter. Another freshman girl walking beside her introduces herself.

GIRL

(Extending a hand)

Hi. I'm Julia.

AMY

(Taking the hand)

Hi, Julia...Amy.

The girls reach the registers, pay and exit carrying their lunch trays. They search the large room for a table. Amy gestures to one, inviting Julia to join her. They walk to the table together, then sit across from each other, smiling amiably.

JULIA

(After a small bite of her salad)

What are you studying, Amy?

AMY

(Opening a small milk bottle)

Well, I plan to go to veterinary school, so this year I'm taking freshman science courses. Biology, chemistry. How about you?

JULIA

A veterinarian, huh? Cool. I'm not too sure what I want to do yet. Maybe English. You like animals then? I have a dog. Well, it's the

family dog. Skipper. How about you?

AMY

Yeah. Actually, I have a lot of dogs. Or my Uncle Tom does. He has a kennel and raises pointing dogs that compete in horseback field trials.

JULIA

Really, horseback? Do you have horses, too? I love horses.

AMY

Uncle Tom does. Well, Uncle Tom says that one of the horses is mine. At least that's how he makes me responsible for it. I'm responsible for the dogs, too. Feeding them and stuff. It's a job. Well not really, because I don't get paid. But it's what I love to do. If things go as planned, someday I'll have field trial dogs and horses of my own.

JULIE

Who's taking care of the dogs and your horse while you're here in school?

AMY

This boy, Mike. He showed up one day a year or so ago while we were training dogs, and Uncle Tom liked him enough to let him stay and train his dog, too. He's pretty cool, but his dog is kind of unusual. They're a pair.

JULIA

What's unusual about his dog?

AMY

Well, we train sporting dogs, English Pointers and English Setters. They are athletes, sleek,

muscular and fast afield. They can run for hours. That's why we follow them on horseback. Mike's dog doesn't fit the mold. He's not like the sporting dogs at all. But he impressed my Uncle Tom with his heart, and so Uncle Tom decided to give him try, and to let Mike stay and train with us.

JULIA

So, they are a pair, huh, Mike and his dog?

AMY

Yeah. A team really. It's a sport. They both are kind of a work in progress, you know. I try to help. Help 'em both. Mike has as much heart as his dog, I guess. He's not just all about himself, like a lot of other boys. I like that.

Reflecting on Mike and Rooster, Amy smiles.

AMY (CONT.'D)

Dogs have a way of bringing people together, you know? Even when they don't seem to fit the mold.

She finishes her lunch and gets up from the table with her lunch tray. Julia, still sitting, looks up at her and smiles. They part with friendly waves goodbye.

CROOKED BRANCH - DAY

Mike, Tom and Liam are readying tack and horses and dogs, Queen, Rooster and two derby dogs, to travel to the horseback fields in Connecticut and the Robert Hollow Cup trials.

TOM

Well, Mike, Liam and I think that you and Rooster are about as ready as you are going to be to compete in your first big horseback stake.

MIKE

I sure wish that I had your confidence. But I sure am looking forward to going to this competition with you and Liam. Watching Queen run.

LIAM

There's always nerves, Mike, no matter how many times you've competed. You never know what your dog will do, and you never know who your competition will be.

TOM

No matter, Mike. Liam's scouting for you. Just trust your abilities and trust your dog. He'll be there with the two of you.

EXT. ROBERT HOLLOW CUP STAKES - OPEN FIELDS - DAY

In the staging area of the field grounds, Tom stands with Rooster beside his pickup and camper when another CONTESTANT approaches.

FIRST CONTESTANT

What're ya bringing a mongrel dog like that to these stakes for, Tom?

Tom doesn't respond, just tips his cap.

A SECOND CONTESTANT joins them.

SECOND CONTESTANT

(to first contestant)

You haven't heard enough about that orange mongrel dog?

FIRST CONTESTANT

Can't say that I have.

SECOND CONTESTANT

He and that boy handler of his have been the talk of Quinn's Kennel.

FIRST CONTESTANT

What's Old Tom Quinn doing? Trying
to ruin our sport with a mongrel
breed?

EXT. HOLLOW CUP STAKES - STARTING LINE

Mike stands nervously with Rooster at the line. The dog seems transformed - muscular, focused, ready. Liam rides as Mike's scout.

JUDGE

Handlers ready?

Mike nods, swallowing hard. The other handler waves a hand.

JUDGE

Let 'em go

MIKE

(Releasing Rooster)

Hie On

DYNAMIC MONTAGE - ROOSTER'S HOLLOW CUP
STAKES RUN

- Rooster breaking from the line with surprising speed
- Veering along a piney tree line, disappearing, then reappearing
- Crossing a trail and vanishing around a corner tree line
- Reappearing on a crest, honoring the other dog's point
- Released from his honor, he rushes to the lead
- Finding birds with the other dog honoring
- Finishing hard with breath and energy to spare when time is called
- Submitting to the collar leading horse and rider on the return

EXT. HOLLOW CUP STAKES - DUSK

Rooster and Mike being awarded a first-place ribbon by a JUDGE while Tom AND Liam watch proudly among the gathered spectators.

JUDGE

(To the assembly)

Rooster, an orange dog of rare breeding, run out of the Quinn Kennel and handled by Michael Storey, was brought to the line looking completely out of place among the pointers and setters gathered for the stake. Upon release the dog did not look back. He was ever lost from judgment and took high scores before an appreciative gallery.

Apart from the crowd, the Blue Butterfly flies off into the early evening sky, its sapphire wings catching the rays of the setting sun.

DISSOLVE

INT. STOREY HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Mike recounts the race to Ed and Jan, Beaming with pride as Rooster lies at his feet.

EDWARD

You did good, son. Both of you.

MIKE

(petting Rooster)

We're just getting started, aren't we, boy?

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DAY

As Mike arrives for training, to his surprise, Amy comes cheerfully out of the barn to greet him.

AMY

Hi Mike.

MIKE

Amy, what are you doing here?

AMY

(taking Mike's hand)

I came home for the weekend. I wanted to congratulate you for your win in the Hollow Cup stakes. Congratulations.

MIKE

You sound surprised.

AMY

Maybe a little. You've had to work hard. A lot of people give up when things get hard.

MIKE

This is the first thing that has ever felt right for me. You know?

AMY

Finding your own path, huh. Field trialing isn't just about dogs finding birds. It's about discovering what you can do when you have a teammate, a companion. When you put your mind to it, you're not just doing things for yourself. You're doing them for the two of you. The dog is your companion, your teammate.

MIKE

That's why I've connected with Rooster. Nobody expected much from either of us. Well, except Tom. You've supported me and you taught me and you helped train Rooster. You're right. I didn't do it for myself.

Amy smiles knowingly and they walk into the barn together, Rooster trailing.

DISSOLVE

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The MAN adjusts his seat, the firelight dancing across his face.

MAN

You know, children, there is something special about dogs that can point birds.

YOUNG CAMPER

What makes them special?

MAN

They can see what others can't.
They can sense what is hidden.

(leaning forward)

And the truly special ones, the ones that don't fit the mold, they find their own way of doing things.

SECOND CAMPER

Like Rooster?

MAN

(smiling)

Like Rooster and like the boy who believed in him. And a blue butterfly that brought these strange companions together. There is more magic in the world than books do tell of. If you believe.

ANOTHER CAMPER

And Mr. Quinn, too.

MAN

Oh yes, and Mr. Quinn, too. That Blue Butterfly sure travelled a long way over a long time to bring everyone together.

EXT. STOREY HOME - DAY - JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Snow covers the ground. A pickup truck pulls into the driveway. TOM QUINN steps out, followed by POKEY, the young tri-colored setter.

INT. STOREY HOME - DAY

Jan answers the door.

TOM

Hello, I'm Tom Quinn. Is Mike home?

Edward comes to the door.

EDWARD

Tom! Come in, come in. Your dog can
come in too, it's all right.

(calling)

Hey Mike, Tom's here to see you.

Mike comes downstairs.

MIKE

Hey, Tom! Merry Christmas.

TOM

Merry Christmas, Mike. I brought a
present for Rooster.

He hands Mike a small, wrapped gift. Mike unwraps it to
reveal a new, brown leather collar with a small brass
plate affixed below the "D" ring. Mike reads the
inscription aloud.

MIKE

"Rooster Robert Hollow Cup
Champion." Wow! That's just
great... thanks Tom... that's
really, really nice... really... I
really appreciate it. Where's Roo?

EDWARD

He's out back.

Mike goes to call Rooster. Jan examines the collar.

JAN

That's very nice of you, Tom. Thank
you very much. Mike is really proud.

TOM

That was a memorable day. I still
can't believe that dog. Neither can
most folks in the sport. It's like
he's got some spirit in him that
isn't apparent on the surface, he
being pretty much a galoot by
comparison with the pointers and
setters he's staked against. Liam
and I get a kick just seeing the

faces on some people, although I guess we weren't much different when we first seen him.

Rooster comes hurrying into the house, excited to see Tom. He goes right to him, tail wagging wildly. Tom bends over to give him a hearty scruff behind the ears. Pokey and Sparky join in the commotion.

MIKE

Come here, Roo. Tom brought you this new collar.

Mike removes the old collar and puts on the new one.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Pretty cool, huh? It says you're a champ.

Rooster has no notion of the collar's significance and just runs back to Tom for more petting.

TOM

(taking a sip of coffee)
Winning that Hollow championship was no small feat, Mike. No sir, it was a big deal, Mike. Liam and I were talking, and we think Rooster's got what it takes... well he showed it... and we were thinking maybe to run him in some qualifying stakes for next year's championship. He'd only have to win or even be runner-up just to qualify.

Tom pauses, looking at Edward and Jan.

TOM (CONT'D)

Liam and I, we're thinking of going south for the winter. We got a friend in North Carolina with training grounds, and we're thinking of taking a couple of dogs down to get them ready for the spring stakes. We'd take Queeny and maybe one or two others. We were thinking maybe Rooster could come along.

EDWARD & JAN
(simultaneously)

Rooster?

TOM

Well, Ed, Rooster has got what it takes to be a national champion. Liam and I want to take him south for the winter, work him hard, get him ready for the spring stakes.

EDWARD

(hesitant)

You'd take Roo? Well, gee... I don't know. Jan? Mike?

TOM

I can understand. You don't have to decide today. Liam and I won't be leaving until after the holidays. He'd be gone for a while... couple of months... be back round the end of March. I know that you probably would miss Rooster, but that dog's got something and it sure would be something to see him do it. You don't have to decide today... think about it awhile.

EDWARD

Well...

TOM

You know, Ed, I've been at this sport all my life. Trained and competed with a lot of dogs... never got to win an Invitational... might have once, years ago, before I fell and busted my hip. Maybe I'm being a bit selfish by asking you, but that Rooster... well, maybe Mike would let me come along with him, if Rooster can qualify. I know that I'll put my heart into training him. I believe... me and Liam... that he may just be able to do it.

EDWARD

(Leaning Back)

You know Tom, I've been watching you with Mike and Rooster...and there's something in you that goes beyond just training dogs. I get a feeling that there is a story that

I haven't heard yet. That missed Invitational, maybe?

TOM

Fair enough, Ed. I told you about my first dog, Pete. Well, years passed, and from Pete came generations of pointers. One in particular, Deputy, showed the promise I had always hoped for. He was Pete's great-grandson, with the same black ear and the same heart. Deputy's April win as a four-year-old in the Georgia Open qualified him for the Invitational to be held that November in Alabama.

EXT. FIELD TRIAL COURSE - ALABAMA - NOVEMBER DAY - LATE 1970s

Open upon a scene of campers, RVs and milling men and women in caps, denim and tin cloth. Horse trailers with horses hitched or hobbled nearby. And strings of pointing dogs, some sitting or lying still, some dancing and yipping against their leads.

EXT. ALABAMA INVITATIONAL - CAMPSITE - EVENING

Tom (early 40s) and his brother LIAM (mid 30s) sit outside their camper. Buck Arness and Tall Charlie Hinkle, now in their 40s but looking older and rougher, approach. Buck walks with the swagger of someone who believes he owns the ground beneath his feet. Charlie follows like a shadow.

BUCK

Long time, Tom. Hear you've got yourself a special dog. Deputy, is it? Heard of him, we have. Good dog, huh? How've ya been?
Buck and Charlie extend their hands. Tom shakes them reluctantly.

TOM

Liam, this here is Buck Arness and Charlie Hinkle... Tall Charlie. I spent a summer in North Dakota training with them.

LIAM
 (nodding warily)
 Evening.

BUCK
 Been what, twenty years?

TOM
 How's Duke?

BUCK
 He's just fine, but he's retired.
 I'm running the dogs now. Here with
 my Bandit. Ya heard've 'im?

He studies Tom, looking for a reaction.

TOM
 Can't say that I recall at the
 moment.

An awkward silence hangs between them, heavy with
 unspoken history.

BUCK
 Well, hey, we got some other folks
 to look up on. We'll catch ya later
 on. Maybe we'll get braced in the
 call back.

Buck and Charlie walk away. Liam watches them go with
 suspicion.

LIAM
 (to Tom)
 They look pretty rascally to me. Are
 they good folks? They Look like
 trouble.

TOM
 They had a rough way with dogs that
 I didn't much care for. This is a
 hard and difficult sport, Liam.
 I guess it can change some folks
 over time.

EXT. ALABAMA INVITATIONAL - CAMPSITE - NIGHT

When the finals are announced. Buck's Bandit is
 braced with Tom's Deputy in the first brace. Buck
 and Charlie scheme around their campfire.

BUCK

No dog of Tom Quinn's gonna beat
me, if'n I can help it.

CLOSE ON BUCK SINISTERLY LIT BY CAMPFIRE

Buck

(fingering the blade
of a knife)

You'll see. I told you long ago
that I would've culled him. I think
I'll be rid of him for good this
time.

The campgrounds are quiet, eerily lit by the dying
campfires. A shadowy figure moves between the campers,
stopping at Tom's. A knife glints in the moonlight as
the figure works on a saddle hung over a rail near Tom's
horse trailer.

CLOSE ON HANDS

The blade slices partway through a saddle cinch strap,
weakening it but leaving it intact enough to hold
temporarily.

EXT. ALABAMA INVITATIONAL - STARTING LINE - MORNING

A gallery of spectators on horseback has gathered. Tom
and Buck approach the line with their dogs, Deputy and
Bandit. The dogs are held by the scouts, Liam and
Charlie respectively.

JUDGE

Handlers ready?

Tom and Buck nod.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Let 'em go, boys!

The dogs are released and bolt away, Deputy to the left
and Bandit to the right. They leap across a creek and
continue their race.

MONTAGE - DEPUTY'S RACE

- Deputy disappearing into piney woods
- Liam calling "point" from the woods

- Deputy standing staunch on point as Tom and a judge arrive
- Deputy honoring Bandit's point in an open field
- Both dogs running hard across the landscape

EXT. ALABAMA INVITATIONAL - FIELD - DAY

Both dogs are seen racing toward what appears to be a shared point in the distance. Buck looks to a judge, who nods. Buck spurs his horse to a faster pace. Tom follows.

As they ride over the rutted ground, Tom's saddle suddenly slips sideways. Tom tumbles hard to the ground with a cry of pain. Liam and several spectators rush to Tom's side. Buck doesn't even look back, continuing toward his dog. Charlie, grinning, rides past without stopping.

LIAM
(riding to Tom)
Tom! Are you all right?

CLOSE ON TOM

Tom grimaces in pain, unable to stand.

TOM
My hip... I think it's broken.

Rain begins to fall as Liam examines Tom's saddle, finding the cinch strap with an unusual tear, as if sliced by a blade.

EXT. ALABAMA INVITATIONAL - FIELD - DAY

Tom is loaded into the back of a red 70s Ford pickup truck. As the truck leaves the field, the Blue Butterfly rises from the tall grasses at a distance. She watches the slow truck go. With arms crossed, she looks back at the staging area to see Tall Charlie with his arm over Buck's shoulder, walking through a gathered crowd that parts and turns away as they pass. The Blue Butterfly flits off into graying sky.

Charlie
Well, pardner, looks like you're
rid of Tom Quinn for good now, heh.

Too bad that Bandit was
disqualified for a non-productive.

Buck

Yeah, we're rid of Quinn. I'm
gonna be rid of that damn Bandit,
too. Lost me the championship.
Gonna find me a red-marked dog
like my dad and old Fuzz used to
warn about. We're two of a kind,
me and red eyed dogs.

DISSOLVE

INT. STOREY HOME - DAY

TOM

That day changed everything. My hip
never healed properly, and I would
never again ride in a major
competition. But the fire in me
didn't die - it just changed form.
Unable to compete, I took solely to
breeding and training pointing
dogs.

EDWARD

That's quite a story, Tom. But
still...

MIKE

(interrupting)

He's my dog, Dad. I'm not all that
sure either. But, you know, I've
really come to enjoy this sport,
and I've seen what Roo can do...
puts his mind to it. Like Tom says,
that was really something to see at
that stake...him up on that
hillside standing tall in honor. It
was like he had a spirit in him or
something. I don't know. I want to
think about it. Imagine going to an
Invitational... with Rooster...I
don't know.

EDWARD

Tom, we'll talk it over. I appreciate your thoughts. I understand. We'll talk. Jan, Mike, we don't have to make up our minds right now. Tom's not leaving for a while yet. We can think it over and let him know later.

INT. BUCK'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MISSOURI

Charlie tosses a copy of National Field Magazine with Rooster's photo on the sofa. Buck picks it up, scowling.

CHARLIE

Did you read that there 'bout Tom Quinn and the Robert Hollow Cup?

BUCK

(sneering)

Yeah, I read it. Looks like old Tom has got himself a new breed of dog. Leave it to him. Couldn't succeed with a real dog, I reckon.

Buck takes a gulp of beer from a can.

CHARLIE

An orange mongrel, to boot. Imagine that, huh. What kinda dog is that? Must have some kinda papers... they let it compete. I've got to get a look myself, before I believe what they writ there. Beat pointers and setters! That's bull, you ask me.

BUCK

Well, who'd it beat, anyhow? I only recognize a couple of the dogs in that stake...must be eastern dogs mostly...don't see much talent there...probably a fluke.

CHARLIE

(pacing)

You remember that Gun Smoke dog, don't ya? Red Eyes run against him in Ohio a while back, remember? Wasn't a bad dog, especially? Red Eyes smoked him though.

Remember how we laughed, 'Gun Smoke got smoked.' Har, har!

BUCK

(exchanging a Knowing look)
Funny how dogs have nonproductives
when runnin' 'gainst Red Eyes,
especially when you're scouting...
huh, Charlie?

Charlie smiles back a gapped-toothed grin.

BUCK

My daddy always said there are two
kinds of men in this sport - those
who win and those who make excuses.
I ain't never been one for excuses.

CHARLIE

Dogs been fed?

BUCK

Yeah, I fed 'em. That Red Eyes is a
strange dog, I'll tell ya. The
other dogs is all curled up in
their houses when I went out there.
Not Red Eyes. He just paces back
and forth in his kennel. It's like
he never rests or sleeps... just
like a machine that's always
churning. He ain't normal, that
dog... all strung out and high
wired.

CHARLIE

He's a darn good dog. He'll get you
that there championship is my bet.
Still, I'd take a long ride to see
an orange dog. Can't see how a
mongrel gets such 'knowledgement in
our game.

BUCK

Who knows, you may get to see that
dog, if what's writ is fer truth.
Maybe Ol' Tom will bring it round
these parts. It'd be nice to see
Tom Quinn agin... ask 'bout his
hip. Heh?

Buck stares at Rooster's photo on the magazine cover. His hand tightens, crumpling the edge of the page. He tosses the magazine aside and moves to the window, looking out at Red Eyes in his kennel.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Tomm Quinn! I thought I was rid of
him in Alabama. We'll see if we
meet up again.

Buck drains his beer and crushes the can.

ACT FOUR

EXT. STOREY HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY - JANUARY

Tom's truck is parked in the driveway. Rooster sits in a crate in the back. The family stands saying goodbye.

TOM
We'll take good care of him, I promise.

MIKE
(to Rooster)
You be good for Mr. Quinn, okay?
Work hard. I'll see you in the
spring.

Mike pets Rooster through the crate door. Tom gets in the truck and starts the engine. As the truck pulls away, Rooster's face appears in the crate window, watching Mike until they turn the corner.

JAN
(putting her arm around Mike)
He'll be back before you know it.

MIKE
(quietly)
Yeah.

MONTAGE - WINTER ARRIVES

- Snow falling heavily on the Storey home
- Mike shoveling the driveway
- Christmas decorations coming down
- Mike walking alone through snowy Crooked Branch fields

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling. Sparky jumps up beside him. He turns and looks at the empty dog bed in the corner of his room.

MIKE
(to himself)
What if we're wrong? What if
Rooster's not championship
material?

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DAY

A bustling winter carnival is underway on a large frozen lake. Colorful tents and booths line the shore. People skate on a cleared section of ice. Others ride snowmobiles and ATVs farther out. A large bonfire burns near the shore. Mike, in green winter parka, walks alone through the carnival, ice skates slung over his shoulder. He stops to watch some skaters, a wistful look on his face.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mike?

Mike turns to see AMY standing with two girlfriends. She's bundled in a red winter coat, her auburn hair peeking out from under a knitted cap.

MIKE
Amy! I didn't know you'd be here.

AMY
Home for vacation. My aunt brought us. She loves these winter carnivals.
(gesturing to her friends)
This is Jen and Kara.

The girls wave. Mike nods hello.

AMY (CONT'D)
(noticing his skates)
You're skating today?

MIKE
Yeah, thought I'd give it a try. Do you skate?

AMY

I do, but I didn't bring my skates today. We're just checking things out.

MIKE

Maybe tomorrow?

Before Amy can answer, a snowmobile roars up to them. The driver, JASON from High School, athletic and confident, removes his helmet.

JASON

Hey, Amy! Want to go for a ride? He holds out a spare helmet. Amy hesitates, looking between Jason and Mike.

AMY

(to Mike)

I should go. But... maybe tomorrow?

She takes the helmet from Jason and climbs onto the snowmobile behind him. As they speed away across the ice, she looks back at Mike.

JEN

(to Kara, but loud enough
for Mike to hear)

Jason's been trying to get Amy to go out with him since before she went to college.

Mike watches the snowmobile disappear across the lake, his expression falling.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - NEXT DAY

Mike approaches the lake, skates in hand. He scans the crowd, trying not to look too eager. Then he spots Amy sitting alone on a bench, already lacing up her skates.

MIKE

(approaching)

You came.

AMY

(smiling warmly)

I said, maybe tomorrow.

Mike sits beside her and begins putting on his skates.

MIKE

I wasn't sure after... you know.

AMY

Jason? He's just a friend from high school.

(changing the subject)

Have you heard from Tom? How's Rooster doing?

MIKE

(brightening)

Tom called yesterday. Rooster's getting stronger. He's running with some champion pointers now, keeping up with them.

AMY

That's great! I knew he had it in him.

They finish lacing their skates and stand.

MIKE

(offering his hand)

Shall we?

Amy takes his hand, and they step onto the ice together.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - ICE SKATING AREA - DAY

Mike and Amy skate hand in hand. At first, Mike is wobbly, and Amy helps steady him. Soon they're gliding smoothly together.

AMY

(laughing)

You're a natural!

MIKE

I'm just following your lead.

They skate past Jason and his friends. Jason watches them, frowning.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - THIN ICE AREA - DAY

Mike and Amy have skated away from the main area. The ice here is marked with warning signs that they don't notice.

AMY
(spinning around)
I love being out here. It feels like
flying.

MIKE
(watching her)
Yeah, it does.

Suddenly, there's a CRACK. Amy freezes, looking down.
The ice beneath her is splintering.

AMY
(frightened)
Mike...

MIKE
Don't move.

Mike carefully moves toward her, testing each step.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Give me your hand. Slowly.

Amy reaches out. Their fingertips almost touch when the
ice gives way beneath her. She plunges into the freezing
water with a scream.

MIKE
Amy!

Mike drops to his stomach, spreading his weight on the
ice. He reaches into the water and grabs Amy's arm,
pulling her up. She gasps for air, terrified.

MIKE
I've got you. Hold on.

With tremendous effort, Mike pulls Amy from the water,
and they crawl together to thicker ice. Amy shivers
violently.

MIKE
We need to get you warm.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - BONFIRE - EARLY EVENING

Mike and Amy sit close to the roaring bonfire. Amy is
wrapped in blankets, her wet clothes replaced with dry
ones. She holds a steaming cup of hot chocolate.

AMY

Thank you. For saving me.

MIKE

Anyone would have done the same.

AMY

No, they wouldn't have.

(looking at him)

You know what's funny? When I fell in, I thought about Rooster.

MIKE

Rooster?

AMY

It made me think... sometimes things come into our lives for reasons we don't understand. Like they're guiding us somewhere.

MIKE

Tom would say dogs can do that to people.

AMY

Maybe that's it.

The firelight dances across their faces. Amy shivers and Mike hesitantly put his arm around Amy's shoulders. She leans into him.

AMY (CONT'D)

I miss him too, you know. Rooster.

MIKE

He'll be back soon.

AMY

And then we show everyone what he can do. You and me.

Above them, unseen, the blue butterfly flutters away shimmering in the firelight.

MONTAGE - WINTER PASSES

- Snow beginning to melt
- First signs of spring appearing
- Mike walking through Crooked Branch as the trees begin to bud

EXT. STOREY HOME - BACK YARD - DAY - EARLY SPRING

The snow has melted. First crocuses are pushing through the soil. Sparky lies in a patch of sunlight. He hears the back door open and looks up. Rooster stands on the deck, transformed. He's muscular and proud, standing tall and confident. Sparky jumps up and races toward him. Rooster bounds down from the deck, and they collide in joyful reunion. The blue butterfly flutters around them, examining Rooster from tail to muzzle.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

My, my... how you've changed. What have they been feeding you, Rooster!? Look at him, Sparky! He looks...how you call it... really fit... not like the pokey dog I remember...kinda like...I don't know...

ROOSTER

I missed you guys.

Edward and Mike watch from the porch.

MIKE

Tom believes Rooster can now compete with the best of the shooting dogs, or so he says. He's entered us in a stake next week, in New York. I may have to miss a day of school. That's okay, right?

EDWARD

Ask your mom.

INT. STOREY HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

The family sits at dinner. Jan watches as Rooster and Sparky play in the yard through the window.

JAN

He certainly looks different. More... confident.

EDWARD

Tom did a good job with him.

MIKE

Mom, Tom says Rooster is ready for the big leagues now. We're going to try to qualify for the Invitational.

JAN

That sounds serious. How much time will that take?

MIKE

Well... we'd need to compete in a few qualifying stakes. Maybe miss a few days of school.

EDWARD

(to Jan)

It's important to him, Jan. And he's keeping his grades up.

JAN

And what about that Amy girl? Will she be at these... stakes?

Mike blushes and focuses intently on his food.

MIKE

Maybe. But she's away at college now.

Jan and Edward exchange knowing glances.

EXT. NEW YORK MIXED BREED FIELD TRIAL - DAY

Rooster and Mike at the starting line. The dog looks powerful and confident. Because it is a mixed breed trial, there are other pedigree dogs besides English pointers and setters, such as German Shorthaired Pointers, Irish Setters and Griffons, and we see the variety around the campgrounds and staging area. Mike brings Rooster to the starting line for his brace against a big, red Irish Setter.

JUDGE

Handlers ready?

Mike nods. The judge signals to release.

MIKE

Hie on

Rooster breaks away with surprising speed and power, running with purpose and style that wasn't there before.

MONTAGE - ROOSTER'S QUALIFYING WIN

- Rooster pointing birds with perfect form
- Mike handling flushes confidently
- Judges nodding with approval
- Ribbons being awarded
- Tom and Liam celebrating with Mike

TOM

You know Mike, that win qualifies Rooster for an upcoming All-Age State Championship stake. Think that you are ready?

MIKE

If Rooster is ready, then I'm too. I won't let him down. I won't let you down either, Tom.

TOM

Let's put him in an All-Age stake.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA OPEN ALL-AGE CHAMPIONSHIP - DAY

A large gallery of spectators on horseback. The morning is misty, the air crisp with early spring chill. Queen and Tom have already run. Mike and Rooster are at the line for the final brace of the championship. Liam is Mike's scout.

ANNOUNCER

The last brace brings Quinn Kennel's Rooster, handled by Michael Storey, with Liam Quinn at scout. The brace mate is Ike Copeland's Rebel Run, a big all white pointer out of Clyde's Rebel and Copeland's Whisper of Wind, a championship breeding.

The dogs are released. Rebel Run outpaces Rooster at the break and is soon gone from sight, but Rooster has an unexpected speed to his run and is not far behind.

MONTAGE - PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL BRACE

- Rooster making an early point along a river
- Mike quickly flushing and releasing Rooster

- Rooster finding a second bird within minutes
- Rooster taking his own course, separate from Rebel Run
- Rooster making his third and final find, Rebel Run in honor
- The gallery watching with growing respect

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA OPEN - AWARDS CEREMONY - EVENING

The CHIEF JUDGE stands with ribbons and trophies.

CHIEF JUDGE
And the 2009 Pennsylvania Open All-Age Champion is Quinn's Queen, handled by Tom Quinn.

Tom steps forward to accept the trophy, his face beaming with pride.

CHIEF JUDGE (CONT'D)
Runner-up goes to Quinn's Rooster, handled by Michael Storey.

Mike steps forward, stunned but elated. He accepts the ribbon as Tom claps him on the back.

TOM
You did it, boy. You both did it.

MIKE
We qualified for the Invitational, didn't we?

TOM
That you did. That you did.

EXT. BUCK'S CABIN - ARNESS KENNELS - MISSOURI - DUSK

Halfway across the country, in Missouri, at dusk, two pointers are engaged in a ferocious fight while chained to a line. The camera zooms in upon the one dog with a mask of red fur around its eyes. Buck approaches and grabs each dog by its collar, pulling them apart and roughly putting each into a separate 4' x 5' chain-link kennels. Buck enters his cabin, stamping his shoes at the doorstep. His left shirt sleeve hangs loose with a ragged tear.

INT. BUCK'S CABIN DIMLY LIT

TALL CHARLIE
 (unaware of the dog fight)
 Did you see that?

BUCK
 (snarling)
 See what?

TALL CHARLIE
 Two of Tom Quinn's dogs took
 placements in the Pennsylvania All
 Age Championship...says so here in
 National Field... March 25. That
 orange dog took second. Dang! What
 d'ya thinks of them apples? That
 was a qualifying stake for the
 Invitational. heh.

BUCK
 (in a foul mood)
 Didn't see it. You know I was out
 with the dogs. Don't say it matters
 all that much. Good for Tom Quinn.
 Like I care. Red Eyes' last stake
 in that rag, too?

TALL CHARLIE
 Nope, must not have been submitted
 in time. You know that Dick
 Chaffee. He's a good reporter, all
 right, but he don't get his reports
 done none too quick... maybe next
 week.

Charlie paces with the newspaper in his hand,
 waving it up and down with the rise and fall of
 his arm.

BUCK
 No never mind. Red Eyes got a
 qualifier, too. Who knows, maybe
 we're heading for a showdown with
 Tom Quinn and his orange dog. We'll
 see. I'll not be bested by the
 likes of them, I tell you now.
 There beer in the fridge?

Buck pulls his knife from the sheath on his
 belt and fingers the blade.

TALL CHARLIE
 Yeah, there's a couple. I'll have to make
 a run later.

Tall Charlie swats a fly against the window with the paper. Buck returns from the kitchen tapping the top of a beer can with his right index finger. He keeps tapping as he walks to look out of the front window. The sun is beginning to set. It is orange on a gray sky. He turns to Tall Charlie, who had walked up behind him.

BUCK

Red Eyes got in a tangle with Clanton again.

(beat)

Red Eyes is mean like a junk yard dog. I had to pull 'em apart and got bit on my arm... damn cur.

(looks at his torn sleeve)

I let him have it but good. He don't give a damn. What a dog. If he weren't winnin' I'd get rid of him.

He takes a gulp of beer and wipes his mouth on his torn sleeve, the knife still in his hand as it crosses his face.

TALL CHARLIE

No place you could put 'im Buck. Your dad warned you long ago about red marked dogs...dogs with a red mask like Red Eyes. Fuzz, too. Said they had the devil in 'em. You got a devil dog, Buck.

Tall Charlie puts the paper on the edge of an end table. It unfurls and falls to the floor.

BUCK

I just want that trophy 'fore I go. He'll get it for me.

(he tightens his grip on the knife)

Me and Red Eyes is gonna to show Tom Quinn how a real man trains a dog to win a field trial. A devil dog.

EXT. BUCK'S KENNELS - NIGHT

An indifferent Red Eyes prowls his kennel like a zoo tiger.

EXT. QUINN FARM - BARN - SUMMER - DAY

Mike and Amy are in the old, faded red barn with its floor of scattered yellow hay. They're playing with a litter of puppies.

AMY

That's really great that you get to compete in the Invitational, Mike.

MIKE

Yeah, pretty good, huh? Rooster going to the Invitational, no one would have thought that... especially me. You helped a lot. You know? You really did.

AMY

Well, it's great. I imagine it will be a long time before I'll ever get to the Invitational, what with school and all. Who knows, though, by the time this puppy is of age, he might just be the one to take me there... if Tom doesn't sell him.

Amy picks up a puppy with one black ear.

MIKE

Which one is that?

AMY

This one is Pete. You can tell by the one black ear. Tom says it reminds him of his first dog. Tom has got all kinds of memories, but he talks about that first dog the most, even though it wasn't one of his best, that one and Deputy... the one that almost won him the National in Alabama... the day that Tom broke his hip.

She turns the puppy toward Mike.

AMY (CONT'D)

Did he ever tell you about the time that a quail flew back and pecked Deputy on the nose, and Deputy just stood there and held his point, stone still like a marble statue? Or was it Pete that did that? I'm

not sure, now, one of them. It was long ago. Some in the game still talk about it. Was it Deputy or Pete? I can't remember.

MIKE

No sir, really, that's hard to believe? Would a quail really do something like that? I've never seen them do anything except fly away in a brown flurry. You're kidding me, right?

AMY

Well, I guess you have to hear Tom tell it. Tom says that there are two sides to the business of training and running field trial dogs. There's the reality, which can be black and white, and sometimes even a dark gray like storm clouds, and then there's the fantasy. The fantasy isn't so much make-believe, as it is what you want to believe.

Amy puts the puppy down and it dashes off to play among its litter mates.

AMY (CONT'D)

See, Tom grew up hearing stories about leprechauns and forest sprites and pots of gold at the end of rainbows. Tom may have had some hard knocks along the way, but he has never really wanted not to believe. I think that Rooster has given Tom something to believe in, something that is far enough removed from reality to be fantasy... a big galoot of a loping, orange dog with floppy ears and yellow eyes, running against powerful pointers and stylish setters in field trials. Well, if you can believe that, then you can believe in leprechauns. And, if Rooster is real, then forest sprites are real, and Tom can be secure in his hopes and dreams, which is a good thing, for an old Irishman like Tom. It's what hopes and dreams are made of.

MIKE

Well... I guess we'll just have to see if we can't make Tom's dreams a reality.

AMY

I'm going to help, Mike. It'll be fun to help Tom realize his dream with a dog like Rooster. Really, it would be magical, just like magical world of Tom's stories.

They walk together from the barn, sharing stories of the months they've been apart. The Blue Butterfly pirouettes above and into the clouds.

MAN (VO)

There are two sides to field trialing - the reality and the fantasy. The reality is what everyone sees - the dogs, the birds, the points and flushes. But the fantasy is what makes it special. It's believing that there's something more out there... something magical.

CAMPER (VO)

Like Blue Butterflies?

MAN (VO)

If you can imagine something, then you can believe in it. And if you believe in it strongly enough, it becomes part of your reality.

EXT. QUINN FARM - TRAINING FIELD - DAY -
SUMMER

Tom sits in a chair under a shade tree, watching as Mike works with Rooster. The summer sun is high and hot.

TOM

This isn't just about following a dog around in the bird fields. If you want to win, you need to know what you are winning and why it is important... not only to you, but to the sport of the pointing dog.

Tom hands Mike a book on field trials.

TOM (CONT'D)

Read this. Learn it. Make it part of your reality.

MIKE

(taking the book)

Yes, sir.

TOM

(to both Mike and Amy)

The Invitational in Virginia might mean runs in the heat of a Southern day. We need to make sure that stamina won't be an issue for Rooster.

AMY

We'll make sure he's ready, Uncle Tom.

AERIAL SHOT - MONTAGE - SUMMER TRAINING

- Mike and Rooster running together at dawn, building endurance
- Tom demonstrating how to read a dog's body language:

TOM

You can't be caught with a nonproductive, Mike. You have to know how to read the dog's point.

- Liam teaching Mike advanced handling techniques.

LIAM

Never initially approach the dog from the front... always from the rear and to the side. Stir that ground with your boot, then come back towards the dog, sweeping the ground as you go.

- Rooster working with multiple birds in challenging terrain

TOM

You don't want to fail to produce a bird, Mike, and you don't want to waste a lot of time doing it. The judges won't be too tolerant if you don't produce the bird quickly.

- Mike practicing his horsemanship with Amy's guidance.

AMY

There's another trick you have to learn. You have to be able to sidestep your horse off course to get your dog away from trailing a faster brace mate... without the judges thinking that you're controlling the dog's natural run.

TOM

(watching from the fence)
I call it a caracole, although it ain't really.

Amy demonstrates, subtly shifting her weight and using her legs to guide the horse in a slight sideways motion.

AMY

See? It looks natural, but you're actually communicating with your dog through your position.

Mike tries it, awkwardly at first, then with growing confidence.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - EVENING

The training day is over. Mike and Amy prepare to go for an evening ride.

AMY

Come on. I want to show you something.

EXT. WOODED PATH - LATE AFTERNOON

Mike and Amy ride through a wooded path, canopied in the oak green fullness of summer. Amy leads, expertly guiding her horse around obstacles.

AMY

Keep your weight centered. Let the horse find its way through.

Mike follows, less gracefully but improving.

EXT. OPEN FIELDS - SUN LOW IN HORIZON

They emerge onto broad fields of tall grasses and wildflowers, purple with orchids, fireweed, loosestrife.

AMY

Ready to go a little faster?

MIKE

Sure.

They urge their horses to a faster pace, approaching a canter. Amy looks back frequently to check on Mike, always smiling encouragingly.

EXT. HILLTOP ABOVE RIVER - DUSK

They reach the crest of a hill above where the small river at Crooked Branch flows at its widest. They dismount and hobble the horses.

AMY

This is my favorite spot.

They walk to the edge where they can see the river below, sparkling in the evening light. They sit on a fallen log. Amy turns quickly to Mike then away again.

AMY

Look Mike. We've been good friends. I appreciate working Rooster with you. I really do. But I'm not sure you and I should get too involved, what with me away at school and all. Who knows?
(She shrugs her uncertainty and glances sideways at Mike, then away)

The sun begins to set, casting a golden glow over the landscape. A wood thrush warbles in the distance.

MIKE

Well...I think that I understand.
(Looking at the ground and pulling at some tall grasses)
But look. The Invitational is not much more than month away. Let's not give up on Rooster. Okay.

Amy nods.

They sit in uncomfortable silence, watching the sun sink lower, turning the clouds primrose pink. The Blue Butterfly appears above them unobserved and flies off as its sapphire hue bleeds into the sunset.

EXT. CROOKED BRANCH - DUSK

They ride back in the soft summer evening light, side by side now, occasionally stealing glances at each other against the reddening sky

EXT. QUINN FARM - HORSE Paddock - Dusk

Amy and Mike remove the horse saddles and stable the horses.

MIKE

Did you know that Rooster likes to swim. Every so often, I take him up to a large pond in the woods where my cousin has some property. It's pretty and isolated, quiet. My cousin leaves a canoe there. There's room for two in the canoe, and for Sparky, too. Would you like to go sometime.

AMY

Okay, Mike. That would be nice.

EXT. COUSIN'S PROPERTY - DAY - LATE AUGUST

Parking the Jeep. Mike and Amy hike through the woods. Rooster and Sparky run ahead of them. They reach a beautiful, secluded pond. Lily pads dot the surface. A faded orange canoe lies topside down near the shore.

AMY

It's really nice here, Mike, so quiet and private.

She inhales the woody air infused with hints of water lily and aquatic iris.

MIKE

Come on; help me turn the canoe over.

As Mike reaches down to lift the canoe, a black and yellow ribbon snake slithers quickly away, causing both kids to start and then smile at each other's timidity. They flip the canoe and push it to the pond's edge. Rooster watches curiously while Sparky yips and dances about on the shore. Amy enters the canoe and takes a seat at the bow. Mike hands Sparky to her, then removes his sneakers and shoves the canoe further into the water before climbing in at the stern. Rooster enters the water and begins swimming alongside the canoe.

AMY

He really swims! Look at his tail wag; it's spinning like a propeller. That's hilarious. He must really be enjoying himself.

MIKE

Oh, he'll swim all day. Hey, look over there. See them? The turtles, there, on that dead tree limb protruding from the water. They're sunning themselves.

As Rooster approaches the turtles, they slip into the water. Rooster swims in circles, playing a game of "Marco Polo" with them.

EXT. POND - FAR SIDE - DAY

They reach the far side of the pond. Amy lifts Sparky out of the boat as they beach the canoe. Rooster swims to shore and shakes vigorously.

MIKE

Come on, Amy, I want to show you something.

Mike leads her into the woods, clearing a path through laurels and brambles.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Look there, isn't it neat? It's mica. Ever see such a big stone of it? You can peel slices from it. Look.

Mike reaches down and pulls away a small sheet of the shiny mineral. He holds it up to his eye, then passes it to Amy.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You can almost see through it. I've heard that it was sometimes used for windows in the olden days, in colonial times.

AMY
(examining it)
That's really cool, Mike.

She holds the translucent slice before her eyes. She gazes up through the treetops that filter the light of the westward sun.

MIKE
Will you scout for me at the Invitational?

AMY
You're kidding?

MIKE
No, really, I mean, you know this game better than me. Liam has been my scout. I don't think that he would mind, since he gets to scout for Queen in the Invitational, if Tom handles her like he says that he's going to.

AMY
Wow, Mike that would really be great. But I don't know... not with school and all. I have to think about it, and the travel, too. But I would like to help you train Rooster. Then, we'll see. Who knows?

She lowers the mica slice. Mike looks into her eyes, and he leans toward her. Although Amy is hesitant, they kiss softly, nervously, but quickly separate.

AMY
We ought to go. It's school, Mike. Like I told you. I should get back soon. I have a paper due Monday.

MIKE
(disappointed)
Already? We just got here.

AMY
 (hesitant)
 College isn't like high school,
 Mike. The workload is...

MIKE
 (interrupting)
 I know, I know. School comes
 first.

Suddenly, their moment is broken by challenging growls and frantic barks, including Sparky's unmistakable yips and yaps.

MIKE & AMY
 (in unison)
 Where are the dogs!?

They race toward the commotion and find Rooster and Sparky confronting an ash gray coyote with bared fangs. Rooster stands courageously, firm-legged and stout. Sparky alternates between stepping forward with challenging barks and leaping back behind Rooster with high-pitched yelps. The coyote eyes Sparky hungrily. Mike yells for the dogs to come away, but they stand their ground. Amy quickly bends and picks up a fist-sized stone. She hurls it powerfully at the coyote, hitting it hard on its flank and knocking it to the ground with a yelp.

AMY
 Scat, varmint!

She picks up another stone as the coyote stumbles to its feet and runs off, casting a vengeful look over its shoulder. Amy throws another stone after it. Sparky starts to chase but stops at Mike's command. Rooster hasn't moved throughout the confrontation.

AMY
 (turning to Mike)
 We have to leave.

MIKE
 Where did you learn to throw like
 that?

AMY
 Third base, varsity softball.

She picks up Sparky, and they hurry back to the canoe. The day is darkening rapidly.

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - DUSK

Mike and Amy walk along the road to the Jeep, the day's last light fading. In the distance, a coyote howls.

INT. JEEP - DUSK

In the Jeep, they ride in silence for a while. Then, hesitantly, Mike reaches for Amy's hand. She takes his hand, and they drive home holding hands, both lost in thought. As they approach Amy's home, Amy releases Mike's hand and as the car comes to a stop, she turns to him.

AMY

Mike, there is someone else.

MIKE

Who, Jason?

AMY

No, someone at college. I have to go in now.

Amy leaves the Jeep. Mike watches her go, dejected.

INT. STORIE HOME - MORNING

Mike stands staring out of the kitchen window as the sun rises. Edward enters.

EDWARD

Mike, what are you doing still home? Don't you have to train today?

MIKE

I don't know, dad. I'm really not sure that I can continue with this sport anymore.

EDWARD

What? What do you mean? You can't continue? You can't not continue,

Mike. What is the matter with you?
What are you thinking.

MIKE

I just don't know, dad. Something
has come up.

EDWARD

Whatever it may be, Mike, I didn't
raise you to be a quitter. And
regardless, you can't quit on
Rooster, not after all that you've
done. This isn't about you anymore.
And what about Tom, he has put a lot
of effort in you and Rooster. You
can't just walk away. What is
troubling you? Did something happen
with Amy?

MIKE

(shaking his lowered head)
You're right dad. This is not about
me and I can't quit on Rooster. I'll
manage through it.

Mike calls to Rooster and they leave for Crooked Branch.

MAN (OV)

A young man and his dog have a bond
between them that goes beyond what
is ordinarily thought of as
companionship. There is trust and
faith and a mutual dependency unlike
what human companions might share.
When they are called to sport, as in
the case of field trialing, they are
teammates. Mike may be having a
problem with Amy, but he would not
quit his team.

CAMPER (OV)

But what about Amy? Isn't she a
member of the team?

MAN (OV)

Well, we have a boy and a dog, and a boy and a girl, and well, okay, a sprite of a blue butterfly. They are the oneness of this story, and I don't think that they are acting all on their own. When Rooster pointed that covey of quail and allowed himself to be collared away by Amy that first day at Crooked Branch, there was a magic in that moment. Let's see if the magic still works its spell.

EXT. QUINN FARM - TRAINING FIELD - DAY

Tom watches as Mike and Rooster complete a training run. Rooster has found and pointed five birds in perfect form. Mike's handling has been flawless. Mike has let Rooster run free and we see him in silhouette against the setting sun, for just a moment, the light catches his breath in the cool air, forming what appears to be wings extending from his chest.

TOM
(to Liam)
They're ready.

LIAM
As ready as they'll ever be.

TOM
(calling to Mike)
That's enough for today. Let's give him a rest. The Invitational's just a month away.

Mike walks over after calling Rooster to his side.

MIKE
Nervous about the Invitational?

TOM
You know Mike, I've spent fifty years in this sport. Seen a good many champions come and go.

MIKE

But you never got your
championship.

TOM

Not as a handler. But watching you
and Rooster...it's like seeing
something I always believed in but
could never prove.

MIKE

What's that?

TOM

(looking at Rooster)
You know, Mike, my first dog,
Pete, wasn't much to look at
either. Everyone said he'd
never amount to anything.

MIKE

But you kept him anyway.

TOM

(nodding)
Some dogs just have something you
can't explain. Something you can
feel.

(glancing at Mike)

Of course, I'll still be running
Queen in the championship.

MIKE

May the best dog win.

TOM

(with a small smile)
They usually do, one way or
another.

LIAM

(to Tom)

Do you think they've got a chance
against the likes of some of them
professional handlers? They likely
all will be entered. And what if
that Buck Arness shows up?

TOM

Every dog has its day, Liam. Every
dog has its day.

INT. QUINN HOME - NIGHT

Amy and Tom Quinn sit at the kitchen table after dinner.
Tom takes a sip from his coffee cup.

TOM

Amy, home from school mid-week?

AMY

(quietly)

Mike and I had a date this weekend.

TOM

Oh?

AMY

(smiles demurely)

Well, it wasn't really a date. We
went canoeing.

TOM

You don't say. And so, how did
the date that wasn't a date go?

AMY

Well, a coyote came and threatened
the dogs.

TOM

A coyote?

AMY

(brightening)

I shooed it off. With a stone.

TOM

Did you now? And that was the
date?

AMY

(brushing hair behind an ear)

We kissed.

(beat)

Just a peck. Then the coyote came.

TOM

Well lassie, that sure sounds like a fun date.

AMY

What do you think of Mike, Uncle Tom? He asked me to scout for him in the Invitational.

TOM

(smiling in recognition of his niece's new maturity)
Well now, that sounds serious. He's a good and hard-working boy. And so?

AMY

So, I'm going to do it, as long as you and Liam wouldn't mind.

TOM

Liam and I would be happy and proud of the two of you. Just keep your hearts where your feet are, lass.

ACT FIVE

EXT. STOREY HOME - BACK YARD - MORNING - LATE SEPTEMBER

The blue butterfly arrives and lands on a yellow late-summer garden rose. Sparky and Rooster are nearby.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Hey guys. What's all the hubbub out front? What's with the RV?

SPARKY

Hey. Where ya been? Family's getting ready for a trip to Virginia. That's why the RV.

(studying the butterfly)
Put on a little weight, huh?

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Been around. Yeah... those August blooms, hard to keep to my diet... especially the sneezeweed. I'll lose the weight flying south later this fall. What's in Virginia?

SPARKY

Roo's gonna be in a championship.
The whole family is going to watch
him run, me too.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(to Rooster)

S'that right, Roo? A field trial
championship? With quail? I've got
some good friends among the
Virginia quail. Virginia is a nice
place this time of year. Still,
plenty of blooms...love that
yellow loosestrife, um, um.

ROOSTER

Yup. Me n' Queen are in it. Mr.
Quinn and Liam and Amy are going
too.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Well, hey, mind if I come along.
Folks won't mind, will they?

ROOSTER

Can't see that they would.

SPARKY

(conspiratorially)

Sure, you come along. Besides, we
might need a friend among the
quail. You never know, huh, Roo?

EXT. STOREY HOME - DRIVEWAY - MORNING

The family is loading into the RV. Rooster and Sparky are
already inside.

INT. RV - MORNING

EDWARD

Everybody in?

As they're about to close the door, the blue butterfly
flies into the RV.

MIKE

Hey dad, did you see that? A blue
butterfly just flew into the RV.

JAN

What? Where?

EDWARD

Just leave a window open, Mike,
it'll fly out again.

JAN

I don't see it.

MIKE

Probably just flew back out
again, strangest thing, though,
that blue butterfly.

Unseen, the blue butterfly settles under one of
Rooster's ears.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The RV rolls down the road in the early day light. Sparky
stands on Jan's lap, looking out the passenger window.
Rooster curls up on the floor; the blue butterfly lies
comfortably beneath his floppy, orange ear and begins to
sing softly.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

Get along little doggie
The trail we're riding
Is made of hopes and dreams

ROOSTER

(drowsily)

Shhhhh.

AERIAL SHOT - MONTAGE - JOURNEY TO VIRGINIA

- The RV traveling down highways. Beautiful landscapes of
the Appalachian Mountains

EXT. JEFFERSON GORGE WILDLIFE REFUGE - VIRGINIA - EVENING

The RV arrives at the Invitational site in the
Shenandoah Valley. The landscape is breathtaking -
rolling hills covered in golden-brown grass under a
clear blue sky, with trees displaying vibrant autumn
colors along the edges. Dozens of campers, horse

trailers with strings of dogs and tethered horses fill the grounds. People in denim and tin cloth, hats, caps, boots and chaps, mill about or sit around small campfires.
Edward, Jan, and Mike walk Rooster and Sparky on leashes. Their appearance causes a stir, with voices picking up as they pass. A scraggly man approaches them.

CHARLIE

Well, looky here, an orange dog to beat all get out. What do ya call that there dog?
(calling over his shoulder)
Hey, come over here and take a look at this here orange dog.

BUCK ARNESS approaches, beverage can in hand. Buck is weathered and mean-spirited, with a permanent sneer. Charlie is wiry and sneering.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

This must be old Tom Quinn's orange dog, the one we've read about.
(extending his hand)
I'm Charley, and this here is my partner, Buck. Is that there Tom Quinn's dog?

Sparky begins to growl deeply, then bark aggressively.

BUCK

Sassy little dog, ain't he.

Jan picks Sparky up to quiet him, but even in her arms the Big Spark continues his inhospitable growl, making a real nuisance of himself and attracting attention from other camps.

EDWARD

(shaking hands)
No, this isn't Tom's dog. Rooster is our dog. Tom Quinn is his trainer, Tom and my son Mike, here. Mike is Roo's handler, too.

BUCK

(to Mike)
Good for you, boy. I like to see kids get involved in our sport.
(condescending)

You up to handling a dog in an Invitational, kid? I suppose that if you've worked with Tom Quinn, you should very well be. Charlie and me, we go way back with Tom. We taught him all he knows, ain't we Charlie?

CHARLIE
(grinning)
Yup, all he knows.

MIKE
I guess so.

Mike shifts from foot to foot, looking away from Buck towards Edward, then to Jan, who continues to fuss with Sparky.

EDWARD
Well, hey, have you seen Tom around? We just got here, and we want to connect with him.

CHARLIE
He's down the road a bit, him and Liam and his niece. We were just over there with him ourselves because we learned that we'll be braced with his dog tomorrow, first thing. Nice little setter he's got there. Queen, he said it was. Can't say we ever figured him for a setter guy. We're running our pointer, Red Eyes. You hear of Red Eyes? Might be you'll come up 'gainst him, should you qualify for the finals. We plan to be there, don't we, Buck?

BUCK
We first have to beat Tom's setter, Charlie.

Buck stares probingly at Mike, who shifts uncomfortably.

EDWARD
Well, hey, nice meeting you guys. We want to meet up with Tom before it gets too late. You

say they put out the running order?

Charlie nods.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Well, come on Mike. Let's go find Tom and see if he knows when Rooster's running.

They turn to leave, Mike looking back over his shoulder nervously. Jan puts Sparky down and commands him to heel. Sparky repeatedly turns around and snarls until they finally lose sight of Tall Charlie and Buck in the darkness.

EXT. TOM'S CAMPSITE - EVENING

They find Tom's camp where Amy spots them first.

AMY

Mike! We're over here! Mike, I've talked with Tom, and I'm going to scout for you, if you still want me to.

MIKE

Oh. Okay. How's school.

AMY

Nothing there anymore, Mike.

Amy takes Mike's hand. Others exchange greetings. Tom sits in a camp chair, shifting as his hip clearly bothering him.

EDWARD

We met Tall Charlie and Buck Arness along the dark road.

TOM

They were just here. We're braced with them in the first race tomorrow. Liam isn't too happy about it.

(with a glint in his eye)

But me, I'm looking forward to it.

MIKE

I don't like them.

AMY

Queen beats their Red Eyes, and we
won't have to worry about them,
Mike.

A crow takes cawing flight from a nearby pin oak. Amy
turns to pet Rooster.

LIAM

(to Mike)

Rooster won't be running until
Friday, in the third brace, paired
with a pointer by the name of
Sharp's Forester.

EXT. HILLTOP - NEXT MORNING

Edward has moved the RV to a hilltop with a good view of
the course. Jan goes atop to watch, while Edward will ride
in the gallery.

EXT. STARTING LINE - SAME TIME

A misty dawn. Liam collars Queen to the line as a gallery
of spectators on horseback watches. Charlie collars a
menacing RED EYES to the line. Queen stands proud and
regal, her feathered tail wisped by the morning breeze.
Red Eyes is muscular and intimidating, dribbling spittle,
his red mask giving him a demonic appearance.

JUDGE

Handlers ready?

Tom and Buck nod.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Let 'em go, boys!

The dogs are released. Red Eyes flashes forward with
incredible power and speed. Queen breaks fast too but
doesn't immediately try to overtake him.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

Red Eyes makes the first point not long into the race,
just after acres of sorghum in the open flat of browning
blue stem and wild rye grasses. Queen honors his point,
standing regally at a respectful distance. Buck
dismounts to flush. A covey of quail rises, and Buck fires
his blank gun. Both dogs remain steady.

CLOSE ON QUEEN

QUEEN
(only we hear)
He's fast, but I can match him.

BACK TO SCENE

When released, Queen takes the lead, running powerfully across the field. Red Eyes follows, rapidly closing the gap between them.

EXT. KNOLL - MORNING

Queen approaches a bend in the trail that takes her up over a knoll and beyond a stand of timber screened from the sight of the handlers and the gallery. The morning mist hovers horsehead high, creating an ethereal landscape.

CLOSE ON QUEEN

Queen catches scent and locks into a perfect point, her body taut like a drawn bow. She stands about ten yards from a good-sized covey. There is no breeze. She knows it will be a while before Tom or Liam arrives.

BACK TO SCENE

Red Eyes comes upon the scene. He slows to a prowl, then begins to steal forward, moving in front of Queen by several yards, putting her at a second honor.

CLOSE ON QUEEN AND RED EYES

QUEEN
(furious)
That's my point!

RED EYES
(sneering)
Not anymore.

YOUNG CAMPER (O.V.)
Hey. That's not fair.

MAN
Yes, youngin. Bad men can make bad dogs, Duke said. Buck Arness has a badness in him, to be sure.

Queen hears yodeling not far off and knows she dares not try to retake her point lest she be the one thought stealing. She stands her ground, her temper boiling, her panted breath like tea kettle steam as it rises to meet the ceiling of the morning mist.

BACK TO SCENE

Tom approaches with Judge York. Tom's face falls when he sees Queen honoring Red Eyes' point. Buck arrives, looking smug. The quail covey is flushed, flying in all directions. Buck makes his shot, and there's a murmured approval from the gallery.

TOM
(quietly to Queen)
Hie on, girl.

The tone of his voice is unlike anything Queen has heard before. She becomes angrily determined, vengeful, and runs fast and hard, but cannot get to the front of Red Eyes.

EXT. PASTURE - MORNING

The course spreads into a large pasture of tall, yellow-green grasses and flowering Virginia forbs. Queen searches diligently but finds no birds. A hawk screams overhead and circles above the forest. Queen watches it, knowing that where there's a hawk, there are often quail. She sees Red Eyes enter the woods and follows him, ignoring Tom's call.

TOM
(calling)
Aye yup, Queen, come around!

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

The mist is thick in the woods, with no path to follow. The terrain slopes steeply upward. Tall trees form a thick upper story of leafy green. Below is an understory of chinquapin, sweet bay and pawpaw. Queen runs hard up the rocky grade, slipping at times on loose stones.

CLOSE ON RED EYES

Queen finds Red Eyes standing at the top where the mist hangs thick as fog. She hears distant yodels from the

handlers behind them, and the sound of the scouts' horses cracking upon the slope stones.

BACK TO SCENE

Knowing she cannot be seen, Queen rushes forward to wrest the point from the thief in the red mask. In her rage and haste, she doesn't notice that Red Eyes is not on point at all. He has merely stopped at the ridge above the steep drop into the Jefferson Gorge. She runs past him. He watches her with a sinister gleam in his eye, making no move to warn her.

SLOW MOTION

Queen stumbles on loose stone, then falls hard and tumbles down the ravine. It's all a blur in the mist as she rolls, then slides on her belly, clawing the ground in an effort to stop or slow her plunge. She can see Red Eyes watching her fall, sneering, spittle glistening on his fang.

EXT. RAVINE BOTTOM - MORNING

NORMAL SPEED

Queen lies near the bottom of the ravine, against the trunk of a buckeye tree that stopped her fall. She's dazed and in pain. She tries to climb out, but her right foreleg won't hold her weight and she falls again, slipping further along the downhill pitch. She yelps in pain.

YOUNG CAMPER (O.V.)

(worried)

Is she alright!

SECOND CAMPER(O.V.)

Is Queen alright?

The MAN is silent.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

After Queen's fall, Red Eyes resumes his hunt lower down the slope. Tall Charlie finds him near the forest edge, on point beneath an aspen, where he marks a native grouse among some spicebush with bright red berries.

CHARLIE
(calling)

Point!

Charlie calls out for the handler, and Buck and Judge York follow the call. Liam continues to search for Queen as Buck makes his flush. When Red Eyes is released, Liam returns to Tom in the pasture.

LIAM

Did Queen come back out?

Tom shakes his head.

TOM

Nope. I imagine she is continuing on a run to the front, perhaps still in the woods.

He gives a holler.

TOM (CONT'D)

Come around, Queen!

Then he instructs Liam to remain just inside the wood line, as he himself will continue along the pasture course, within sight of the judges as the rules require.

TOM (CONT'D)

If she wasn't backing that other dog's point on that grouse, then she probably had scent of her own that she's following. You'll either find her on point further up, or she'll come back out. She knows how to run a course.

He gives another holler.

TOM (CONT'D)

Aye up, Queen, come around!

EXT. PASTURE - MORNING

Red Eyes returns to the pasture course. He ranges well to the front, hunting hard and fast. The course extends far to the horizon, dotted here and there with singular cedars and interrupted only by copses of alder, birch and oak. Although the yellowing pasture grasses are tall, they do not conceal the big pointer. Once again he is seen on point, and the party moves apace to cover the ground to the flush. But still, there is no sign of Queen.

FOCUS ON TOM

When the flush is completed all in order, Judge York turns to Tom.

JUDGE YORK
(to Tom Quinn)
Twenty minutes, handler.

That's all that needs saying. Tom turns his horse away, his face fallen. Without speaking to anyone, he rides towards the wood line and shouts loudly.

TOM
Twenty minutes, Liam! Twenty minutes...Liam.

There's a weakness in his voice that hasn't been there before.

Mike turns to Edward, who's riding in the gallery.

MIKE
(explaining)
If a dog is out of judgment for twenty minutes, Dad, then it's disqualified.

He turns towards Amy. Her eyes are tearing.

MIKE
Should we go?

Amy nods slowly.

MIKE (CONT'D)
(to Edward)
Dad, Amy and I are going to help find Queen. You just follow along with the gallery, and we'll meet you back at the RV.

They pull off and head towards Tom.

EXT. WOODS EDGE - MORNING
Liam comes out from the woods to meet Tom.

LIAM
No sign of her.

TOM

(desperately)
 I've got to believe that she's
 running to the front. That's the
 way she's been trained. These woods
 go on for a long time. They follow
 the gorge. Let's keep riding
 forward, but I've got to stay down
 off that rocky slope, my hip is
 bothering me enough already. You
 take the upper course, Liam.

He shakes his head despondently.

AMY
 (approaching with Mike)
 Tom... Mike and I will back track.
 I know Queen would always run to
 the front, but maybe she got turned
 in the dense undergrowth or in that
 mist. That could explain why she
 didn't come around for your call.
 She wouldn't run off. We will find
 her and catch up with you, or we'll
 meet you back at camp.

She turns her horse and Mike follows. There's concern in
 his eyes as they ride away.

EXT. RAVINE - LATER

Mike and Amy search the ravine area, calling for Queen.

MIKE
 (calling)
 Queen! Where are you, girl?

They hear her yelp. Amy gestures towards the ravine.

AMY
 Down there! But that slope
 looks dangerous, Mike.

MIKE
 I have to try. I'm coming, Queen.
 I'm coming, girl.

Dismounting, he gives the reins of his horse to Amy.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 If I'm not back in ten minutes, get help.

AMY

Be careful.

Mike carefully makes his way down the steep slope, slipping occasionally on the loose shale. He reaches Queen and gently examines her injured leg.

MIKE

It's okay, girl. We'll get you out of here.

He carefully lifts Queen, cradling her in his arms. With tremendous effort, he carries her up the slope, stumbling at times as his feet lose their hold on the broken slate. At the top, he hands Queen to Amy, who takes her across her saddle.

EXT. TOM'S CAMP - EVENING - AROUND THE CAMP FIRE

Queen lies with her leg in a cast. Tom on a camp chair strokes her head gently. The mood is somber. Liam is angry.

LIAM

I feared that no good would come from running with a red marked dog belonging to Buck Arness. There is badness in that man and in that Tall Charlie, too. I've always believed that they sabotaged your saddle that time when you broke your hip, Tom.

He crumbles a paper in his hands and throws it in the fire.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Whatever evil is in them is in their dog, too. I blame that Red Eyes for Queen's fall, just as if he pushed her off that ledge.

TOM

(sighing)

No sense regretting what's done, Liam. We didn't pick the brace mate. I wasn't going to not run Queen just on account of Buck Arness or Charlie Hinkle, dang them. Queen earned the right to be here. I don't attribute any malice to a brute animal. The way that pointer was running, Queen wasn't

likely to qualify anyway. There would've been too many honors. I'm just sorry she's injured.

Queen rises up and limps away from the fire to lie down. Rooster follows her and sits by her side.

ROOSTER

Are you okay, Queen?

QUEEN

That Red Eyes dog is a thief that stole my point and put me in honor. I wanted revenge and that was my mistake. If you face him, be careful.

EXT. ANNOUNCEMENT BOARD - NIGHT

A crowd has gathered around the announcement board where the finals braces are being posted. Mike pushes through to see, then turns back to the others with a mix of excitement and concern.

MIKE

Rooster made the finals!

Everyone cheers.

MIKE (CONT'D)

But...he's braced with Red Eyes in the last race of the day.

Liam's expression darkens immediately.

LIAM

Those folks are no good and their Red Eyes is no good, and I don't want another one of our dogs running with him or them.

Tom, however, seems strangely pleased by the news.

TOM

If we send them back to Missouri with a loss to a mongrel dog, Liam, old Duke Arness, bless his soul, will roll over in his grave and spite his boy for running a red marked dog. We can do it, Liam. Rooster can do it.

Tom's eyes take on a distant look, glistening with emotion.

TOM (CONT'D)

I saw a rainbow with an orange arc in a dream before we left. That orange, mongrel dog with the floppy ears and yellow eyes will be their comeuppance sure enough... and Deputy's redemption.

LIAM

We don't need another dog hurt.

EXT. HILLTOP - NEXT DAY

Tom and Jan are on the RV roof with camp chairs and a small cooler. Jan is holding Sparky on her lap, when suddenly the blue butterfly lands before them on the edge of the roof.

JAN

(whispering)

Do you see it, Tom? Do you see the blue butterfly?

TOM

(with wonder)

I do see it... a blue butterfly. Surely enough it's a pooka. I've not seen one since I was a child in Ireland.

JAN

What's a pooka? Ed had mentioned it once.

As Tom speaks we are taken to the Ireland of his description, the forests and leprechauns and woodland sprites recounted in a voice over tinged with reminiscence.

DISSOLVE

TOM

Long ago, Ireland had great forests of spruce, fir, and yew. There were blackthorn and oak, hawthorn, alder, and downy birch, all with an understory of buckthorn and goat willow, and shrubs of

silver queen with bright red berries in the winter, and red cascade with orange berries in autumn... forests not unlike those that rim this here course.

We return to the RV rooftop. Tom sweeps the horizon with his hand, then shaking his head.

TOM (CONT'D)

In those forests dwelt leprechauns and woodland sprites that were animal spirits incarnate. Then, the forests were hewed and timbered for the ships of England's navy... there are no more forests in Ireland today, you know... and the leprechauns and sprites had nowhere to live.

The leprechauns simply made themselves invisible. They still live among the Irish today, once in a while actually delivering a promised pot of gold as ransom to the child that catches one while dreaming.

But the sprites did not have the power of invisibility, or any pots of gold to pay their ransom. In order to conceal themselves from those who might capture and cage them, the sprites changed their form in the way of pookas, becoming blue butterflies.

Tom leans closer to the butterfly.

TOM (CONT'D)

So, what are you doing here, little pooka?

The blue butterfly flutters up and lands on Tom's knee. Tom smiles.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh, here to watch the race, are you? You must be from County Galway. Well then, let's watch the race together.

CAMPER (VO)

Wait, did the Blue Butterfly really talk to Tom?

MAN

No, no. Only in Tom's imagination.
Listen.

Sparky leaves Jan's lap and walks to the roof's edge, as if to obtain a better view. The butterfly joins him.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(to Sparky)

You're going to see something
special today.

SPARKY

What do you mean?

BLUE BUTTERFLY

I've been talking with the quail.
They know all about Red Eyes and what
he did to Queen. They don't like him
either.

SPARKY

What are they going to do?

BLUE BUTTERFLY

The quail have a plan. They have a
C team, a B team and an A team. Wait
until you see.

SPARKY

(grinning)

I hope that they show 'em! Show em
good.

Sparky's grin is very toothy as he watches the field below with new interest.

EXT. JEFFERSON GORGE WILDLIFE REFUGE - DAWN

The day breaks with a heavy drizzle, but the forecast is for clearing. A yellow-bellied woodpecker drums upon a black cherry tree, breaking the morning silence.

EXT. TOM'S CAMPSITE - MORNING

The group prepares for the championship brace. Amy brushes Rooster carefully.

AMY

It's relaxing. I expect it will
help Rooster relax, too. I want him

cool, calm and collected when facing that Red Eyes. You too, Mike.

MIKE

We'll be alright, Amy. You're our scout and you brought us here. We'll do it together.

Amy smiles thoughtfully as she continues brushing Rooster. Mike and Liam saddle the horses.

EXT. SORGHUM FIELDS - AFTERNOON - STARTING LINE - CHAMPIONSHIP BRACE

The gallery astride waits patiently. Mike is at the fore, atop Tom's gray gelding. Amy brings Rooster to the line. RED EYES, large and intimidating with his dark red mask, is already there with Tall Charlie. Buck approaches Liam sneering.

BUCK

Sending kids to do men's work, Liam? Where's Tom?

He spits tobacco juice over the side of his gelding.

LIAM

Tom's not well enough to ride. We're sending a dog to win a trophy. You needn't be concerned for none but yourself and your dog.

Liam leans toward Buck, his full-size imposing.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I don't much care for you, Arness. Anything goes wrong out there, anything at all, and I will come looking for you and Charlie.

Buck tips his cap disdainfully and rides away.

JUDGE TRIGGS

Handlers ready?

Both nod.

JUDGE TRIGGS
(CONT'D)

Release 'em

The dogs are released. Red Eyes flashes to the front with incredible speed. Rooster runs hard but can't match the pointer's pace. Just as the dogs enter the sorghum fields, Mike caracoles left towards the westerly tree line, hoping to pull Rooster off the pointer's trail. He gives a yodel, but Rooster won't veer. Red Eyes finds the first bird and points. Rooster comes up and honors the point.

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - DAY

Tom passes the binoculars to Jan without a word.

EXT. SORGHUM FIELDS - DAY

A spectator in a GREEN CAP watches with a smirk.

GREEN CAP

(To the Gallery generally)
That mongrel dog is no match for
that big pointer.

When the dogs are released after the flush, Red Eyes quickly puts distance between himself and Rooster. Mike tries again to call Rooster off the trail.

MIKE

Roo, aye up... around!

GREEN CAP

That orange dog will just tail that
pointer the whole race, might as
well just pick 'im up right now.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

At about 20 minutes into the race, Red Eyes finds a second bird in the pasture. Rooster again is compelled to honor. In the gallery Liam shakes his head slowly in disappointment. Buck is having a hard time making flush. Repeatedly he looks back towards his pointer, advances several steps, and sweeps new ground with his kicks. Nothing rises.

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - DAY

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(To Sparky)
That'll be the C team.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

JUDGE TRIGGS
(to Buck)
Time's running out handler.

BUCK
(frustrated)
There's a bird here, or else my
dog wouldn't be standing.

JUDGE TRIGGS
It is the finals. I will let you have
a bit more time, but I'm sending the
other dog on.

(to Mike)
You can pull your dog off the honor
and continue.

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - DAY

Tom looks to Jan with a glimmer of hope.

TOM
It appears they're allowing Buck
additional time to produce a bird.
They're freeing Rooster off his
back, though. That could be good
news.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Rooster breaks hard when released from his honor. Mike, Amy, and Judge York follow. The gallery and Judge Triggs remain behind Red Eyes' point so as not to interfere as Buck attempts to make flush. Breezes brush away the remnants of the morning's clouds, clearing the day and carrying along game scent from distant haunts. Rooster runs out of the fields and towards the westerly woods bordering the gorge. He weaves through the tree line.

MIKE
(calling)
Roo... come around... ahead...
aye up!

Amy looks over her shoulder to assess the progress of the brace mate.

EXT. PASTURE - WITH BUCK - DAY

In a short time, Buck finally flushes a single quail and makes shot. Red Eyes is released and breaks hard and fast to regain the course. He, too, soon leaves the grasses to take to the woodland edge, drawn by the same wind-carried scents and bent on overtaking his rival.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Rooster goes into the woods. Red Eyes follows, rapidly closing their gap. A group of yellow warblers burst from the treetops with whistled alarm. A crow caws. Within the woodland shadows, Rooster locks up on point, just slightly up the slope leading to the ridge above the gorge. There, quail are hidden in a thicket of faded green chinquapin surrounding two yellowing aspens. Red Eyes quickly comes upon Rooster.

CLOSE ON SCENE

Red Eyes slows to a prowl, almost like a big cat, like a tiger, and then he begins to steal forward, probing Rooster's guard. Rooster notes his presence but does not flinch from his mark. Seeing and hearing no challenge, Red Eyes steals the point. Rooster is unsure how to respond to such unabashed thievery. He tentatively extends one leg forward in a cautious attempt to reestablish his primacy.

CLOSE ON RED EYES AND ROOSTER

RED EYES

(growling)

Try it, yeller eyes, and I'll rip yer floppy ears right off of your head. You mongrels ain't got no business in this sport of mine. I'll tell ya now, no dang mongrel mutt is gonna deny me no prize, that is for sure. They should've culled you as a pup. Stand and be content with your honor, mutt.

There is fire in his eyes that glows all the brighter in the darkness of the forest shadows. Rooster stands frozen and uncertain. He timidly withdraws the leg that

he had put forward. He stands. He thinks of Queen. Something stirring within him swells into defiance. Boldly he begins to step forward, determined to fearlessly challenge the thief's threat with all of his strength and will.

MIKE

Aye up Roo. Yip up. Yip.

Rooster hears the approach of the horses, the crush of leaves, twigs and stones beneath their steel-shod hooves. He hears Mike's yodel and knows that he is near. Forlorn, Rooster stops, and he stands still in honor of Red Eyes' point, dispirited. Chest fallen, with a burning in his heart, its wings on fire, he stands.

CAMPER (V.O.)

Why doesn't Rooster do something?

MAN (V.O.)

He dares not be caught creeping and himself be thought a thief and disqualified. He fights not to let his anger or dismay show knowing that he remains under judgment, and that his honor must be as staunch as his point.

Rooster sees Tall Charlie approach and hears him yell down the slope, "Dog's on point." He hears Amy yell, "Dog's standing." He hears commotion as Mike, Buck, and the judges enter the woods. He stands his mark as they arrive.

MIKE

Easy Roo.

Rooster stands in proper honor of Red Eyes, not needing Mike's caution. He stands as Buck dismounts and moves to flush the quail from out of the yellowing chinquapin. He stands as several quail frantically make flight and Buck makes shot.

SLOW MOTION

And...he stands in surprise and disbelief, as did all in witness, as one of the quail soars straight up and then, like a hawk attacking prey, swiftly and directly swoops straight back down again, pecks Red Eyes on the top of his head, and then flies off over the ridge and across the gorge.

NORMAL SPEED

Unlike Tom's fabled dog of years gone by, Red Eyes does not stand his point upon the quail's attack. He breaks. He gives a growling and furious chase, and he is disqualified.

JUDGE TRIGGS

(sternly to Buck)

That's a disqualification, sir.

Buck throws his hat on the ground, kicks it, curses, picks up the hat, curses some more, then he mounts his horse, glares at Liam and he and Tall Charlie ride off to recover their wayward dog last seen a howling into the gorge. Mike and the two judges renew the stake, Rooster hie on without a brace mate.

MIKE

Find a bird Rooster! Go!

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - DAY

Tom watches through his binoculars.

TOM

Rooster has come out of the woods. Mikes come out, too... and the judges are with him... both of them. That's odd. There's Amy. I see her. But I don't see Buck's dog...or him...or Charlie.

Something's up. He hands the binoculars to Jan.

TOM (CONT'D)

If both judges are with Mike, then Buck's dog is out of judgment. The dog must have been picked up or it might have run off. Well, I'll be a son of a gun.

BLUE BUTTERFLY

(to Sparky)

That would've been the B Team.

JAN

Does that mean that Rooster wins?

TOM

(shaking his head)

No, no. There are still the other dogs that have run and been scored. And Rooster hasn't had a point or worked a bird of his own, yet...unless he did so in the woods. Just honoring Buck's dog won't get him a placement. If he doesn't work birds off his own point, then he's done for.

(checking his watch)

What time is it? There isn't much time left.

BUTTERFLY

(to Sparky)

Wait until you see the A Team.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

When Rooster comes out of the woods, he almost immediately is drawn across to the far side of the pasture, where it is separated by a slender tree line from an adjacent field of sweet sorghum, fallow in the early fall. He crosses the tree line, a course not taken in earlier competitions, and there, just on the other side, he comes hard on point.

AMY

There isn't time to be going off course.

They hurry their gait so as to quickly reach Rooster's mark. The judges show no favor with their own pace, and the gallery is marshaled at a walk. Liam glances at his watch nervously. Michael reaches Roo's point and quickly dismounts. Handing the reins to Amy, he hurriedly takes long strides to make the flush. A native grouse lifts. Mike makes shot and releases the dog. Rooster breaks like captured lightning freed from an uncorked bottle. He crosses the tree line back into the pasture.

LIAM

(to Ed)

There are no birds in this pasture, Ed. He's got to get down into the bottom fields. His time is running out. That last point was at around 80...there's little time left.

Rooster's run takes him in a pattern, like a backwards Z. His run would not take him straightaway to the bottom field, as Liam had wanted, nor did Mike think to direct him there as he might have done with a call to "get

ahead." If Liam was correct that there would not be any birds until the lower acres of switch grass and cedar groves, then time might expire before Rooster had another point.

Judge York draws back his shirt sleeve and looks at his wristwatch. He turns towards Judge Trigg.

GREEN CAP

(smugly)

That mongrel dog's all done.

Liam has a haggard look, like that of a dust covered cowboy after a long day in the saddle.

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - DAY

TOM

(mostly to himself)

Come on, dog. Come on, Rooster.

(then louder)

Come on, dang it, Roo. By the shamrocks of the Old Sod, come on you darn mongrel dog.

Janice stands up from her camp chair and grasps Tom's shoulder tightly with her left hand.

EXT. FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

Rooster comes fast off his sorghum field point, as if he understands that his time is short. He covers the upper pasture of greenish yellow grasses but is birdless. He crosses the slope of the breezy knoll overlooking the lower field and runs strong to mid-field. Just as the gallery crests the knoll, he suddenly slams hard on point, his course-haired, orange coat pulled so tight about his throbbing flesh that his ribs appear near to be breaking through.

AMY

(to Mike)

He's on birds, Mike. Let's hurry.

The young handler looks to the judges for approval, and then he urges his horse into a lope to reach the dog's mark under the gun. Reaching Rooster, Mike quickly dismounts, drops the horse's reins, looks to his dog, and perhaps even says a word or two that we cannot hear at our distance. Then he puts a dozen or more quail to flight with the single, broad sweep of his boot.

SLOW MOTION

The birds rise in unison - but instead of scattering, they begin to circle overhead in an impossible aerial dance. Their wings catch the golden afternoon light, creating halos around each bird. They swoop and spiral in perfect formation, creating a living crown above Rooster and Mike.

CLOSE ON MIKE'S FACE

Wonder and disbelief wash over Mike as he witnesses something beyond explanation.

CLOSE ON ROOSTER

The orange dog stands perfectly still, his yellow eyes reflecting the dancing birds above. For this moment, the light catches his breath in the cold air. He is transformed from an awkward outsider to majestic champion.

WIDER ANGLE

The birds spiral upward in perfect formation, creating a crown above Rooster and Mike. As they rise higher, they leave trails of golden light that linger in the air like brushstrokes. The gallery watches in stunned silence, unable to comprehend what they're seeing.

EXT. RV ON THE HILL - LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON TOM

Tears fill his eyes as he watches from the distance. He whispers something that might be a prayer or might be a thank you.

EXT. FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

As the gallery approaches, the birds disperse in all directions - all except one. This final quail swoops down toward Rooster as if to attack.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP - ROOSTER'S EYE

The reflection of the diving bird grows larger. Rooster doesn't flinch.

BACK TO SCENE

At the last moment, the bird pulls up, wings spread in salute, before flying away to join its covey. Rooster remains perfectly staunch. Amy dismounts and joins Mike. She holds his hand and together they watch the last bird fly away.

AMY

We did it. Rooster did it.

Then she turns to Mike, and they hug and kiss a tender but hurried kiss, not wanting to be embarrassed before the gallery. She rests her head briefly on his shoulder. The late afternoon September sun nestles softly on cumulus clouds lazing still high above the horizon.

PAN THE FIELD

In the distance, at the edge of the field, Buck stands alone, watching the celebration. His face is hard, jaw clenched. But as he watches Mike with Rooster, something shifts in his expression - not quite respect, but recognition. He turns away, shoulders slumped, suddenly looking older than his years.

EXT. STAGING AREA AWARDS CEREMONY - DUSK

A crowd has gathered. The CHIEF JUDGE stands with a trophy and ribbon.

CHIEF JUDGE

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to announce the winner of this year's National Field Trial Invitational Championship.

He pauses for dramatic effect.

CHIEF JUDGE (CONT'D)

Rooster, handled by Michael Storey!

The crowd erupts in applause. Mike steps forward with Rooster at his side.

CHIEF JUDGE (CONT'D)

(to Mike)

In all my years judging field trials, I've never seen anything like what we witnessed today. That was something special. Magical.

Mike beams with pride. He looks over to where Amy, Tom, Liam, Edward, and Jan stand watching.

CLOSE TO TOM

His weathered face transforms as decades of disappointment melt away. His eyes glass with tears. Tom watches as the judge hands Mike the Championship Ribbon.

TOM

(whispers, to himself)

We did it Pete. We did it Deputy.

Mike looks to Tom and holds the ribbon up to him in silent dedication.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The group celebrates around a campfire. Rooster lies contentedly at Mike's feet. Tom sits in his chair, looking at peace.

TOM

(raising a cup of coffee)

To Rooster - the most unlikely champion in field trial history.

LIAM

(to Tom)

You did it, brother. You finally got your championship.

TOM

(shaking his head)

No, Liam. We did it. All of us.
(looking at Mike and Amy)
Especially these two.

MIKE

(earnestly)

It was Rooster who did it. We just helped him along.

AMY

And maybe a little help from an Irish woodland sprite, hey Uncle Tom.

Tom chuckles knowingly.

TOM

Maybe so, lass. Maybe so.

Above them, the blue butterfly flies towards the sunset, leaving a trail of sapphire sparks.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Return to the MAN finishing his story to the Children.

CAMPER

Did all that really happen? With the quail pecking the dog and then flying in circles?

MAN

(with a twinkle in his eye)
To be sure, that day at the Jefferson Gorge Wildlife Refuge, a floppy-eared, orange, mongrel-breed of a dog named Rooster did, indeed, win the National Field Trial Invitational.

CAMPER

But how could a dog like that win against real champions.

MAN

(leaning forward)
Because sometimes, the thing that makes you different is the very thing that makes you special. Rooster didn't win by being like the other dogs - he won by being exactly who he was.

CHILD

What about the pooka? The blue butterfly?

MAN

(smiling)
Oh, she's probably flitting about here somewhere. Look around. If you see her, make a sound like a tree, whisper like an aspen leaf in a gentle breeze, and she may come to you. Some things are only real if you believe in them.

He picks up his guitar to strum lightly

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

(singing softly)

Over mountains and hills

Across rivers and streams

The trails you're riding

Are made of hopes and dreams

A Blue Butterfly flutters into view. A child reaches up toward with wonder. The blue butterfly hovers for a moment, its impossible blue wings glowing in the firelight, before flying off into the night sky.

THE END