

"STORMY, THE WILD MUSTANG"

treatment by

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For two hundred years, farmers and ranchers have eked out a meager living in the Alhambra Valley east of San Francisco. But in the past ten years, suburbanization has taken its toll.

Attracted by the clean air, rolling hills, and spacious lots; wealthy San Franciscans have begun buying ranches and turning them into country estates. Now the Alhambra Valley is a volatile mixture of dirt poor ranchers and the elite, wealthy members of high society.

HANK KUTTER takes a day off from his sheep ranch to take his thirteen year old daughter, WENDY, to the county rodeo. Hank, a widower, is dressed in his oft-mended Sunday bests. Wendy wears a dress she made herself.

When the Cowgirl's Barrel Race competition is announced, Wendy gets excited. Barrel Racing is a timed event, where teenaged girls race a triangular course around 50 gallon barrels filled with sand. Five laps. The winner receives a silver belt buckle and is eligible to compete on the Pro-Rodeo circuit, with prizes of twenty thousand dollars for best time.

We see the five girls compete, with the best time turned in by a rich girl named LORANNE SAUNDERS on her professionally trained horse, DUCHESS. Wendy writes the time for Loranne's five laps down on the back of the program: 84.07 seconds.

After the rodeo, Hank and Wendy find their beat up Chevy pickup in the parking lot, surrounded by Mercedes, BMWs, and Rolls Royces, and drive home.

WENDY stays up late that night, reading a copy of Western Horseman Magazine under the covers of her bed with a flashlight. One wall of her room is a cork board, covered with a collage of horse pictures. The Rodeo program is posted in the middle.

AT SCHOOL, Wendy is taunted by the rich girls for her home made clothes. She doesn't wear the latest shoes, or designer pants, and she BRINGS HER LUNCH in a man's metal lunch box handed down from her dad. The other girls buy their lunch, and eat in a group in the cafeteria.

Wendy's only friend is Alice Joadson, another poor ranch girl.

When school is over, three of the rich girls, HEATHER STERLING, BELINDA, and CATHERINE, taunt and ridicule Wendy as she walks home. Heather and the girls are waiting for their moms or drivers. Wendy continues walking, not wanting

to show vulnerability.

AT HOME, Hank is working hard, mending a broken fence on the edge of his property. Sweat covers his sinewy body, but he seems at peace in his environment. A pair of sheep nudge him from behind, and he pets them. One of the sheep, GORDON, has some unusual black markings. "Well, Gordon, this ought to keep you from escaping for a while." Gordon bleats a response.

Hank waves to his neighbor, TED JOADSON, and the two men talk. Joadson has decided to call it quits and sell his ranch. Hank doesn't understand. The property has been in the Joadson family since California was part of Mexico. "Hank, I know how you feel about this. But I had to look at the reality. I work twelve, thirteen hours a day; and still, the land is worth more to some rich guy than I could ever hope to make by ranching. It's time to sell out." Hank doesn't agree.

THAT NIGHT AT DINNER, Wendy tells Hank her dream of being a barrel racer. But she can't save enough money from her paper route to buy material for her clothes AND a horse.

Hank wishes his wife Peggy were still alive. Someone who could tell Wendy to hang onto her dreams. All of Hank's dreams have soured, and the best he can do is hug his daughter and tell her he loves her.

AFTER WENDY HAS GONE TO BED, Hank takes the cookie jar down from the kitchen cupboard and counts out his savings. The most he can spare is a hundred dollars. He writes 'Horse' on an envelope and puts the hundred dollars inside.

AT A HORSE AUCTION, Hank sits near the back, a hundred dollars in fives and tens clutched in his hands. But every horse seems out of his reach. Bidding usually starts at four hundred.

When the auction is over, Hank notices a few horses which were never bid on being loaded in the back of a trailer and talks to the driver. "Who'd want to bid 'em? Look at 'em: scrawny, sway backed." "Where they going?" "This is the glue truck, buddy, in another week, these horses will be dog food and glue." Hank makes a deal with the driver and buys the best looking horse off the truck for a hundred dollars.

WENDY LOVES HER HORSE, and names him "Old Blue". It's scrawny and old and run down, but to Wendy it's a dream come true. Her joy brings tears to Hank's eyes.

HEATHER, Belinda, and Catherine find out about Old Blue, and begin teasing Wendy about him. He's a scrawny old horse bought off the glue truck. Not like THEIR horses, which are pedigree quarter horses professionally trained. "Why didn't you name it Old GLUE? Or Alpo? That's what it

is, isn't it?"

Wendy ignores the teasing. She loves Old Blue, and believes he could be a champion barrel racer. She begins feeding him alfalfa cubes and a high protein powder bought with her paper route money.

AS THE WEEKS PASS, Old Blue begins to bulk up from his improved diet. Wendy takes good care of him, often spending the night in the barn to be close to Blue. She begins delivering her papers on horseback, and soon the girls can no longer tease her about Blue being scrawny. Blue is looking like a rodeo horse. Maybe even a champion.

Hank is proud of his daughter, amazed at her accomplishments. He seems to have renewed energy. His daughter has turned a glue horse into a contender.

WHEN the Joadson's move, Hank shakes hands with Ted, while Wendy says goodbye to Alice. Wendy will no longer have a friend at school, but at least she has Old Blue at home.

WENDY begins running Blue on a barrel course in the back yard. Timing his runs. At first he's slow, unable to break two minutes; but as she trains him Old Blue begins picking up speed.

One day, Heather and Loranne Saunders come out to watch Wendy, and what they see scares them. Blue has begun to

look like competition. Lorraine's stop watch has timed Blue at 88 seconds.

A week later, Wendy rubs Blue's nose, "Are you ready to match last year's time?" Old Blue snorts, making Wendy smile.

She climbs on Blue's back and clicks on the stop watch, running Blue through the barrel course. The first lap time is 16 seconds. Wendy gives Blue a caress as they spin around the barrels for the second lap. The stopwatch reads 33 seconds. They're going to BEAT last year's time! Halfway through the third lap, Blue stumbles and falls.

Blue begins going into convulsions.

Wendy yells for help, and Hank runs to the phone to call the vet. Wendy cradles Blue's head in her arms, rocking him as his convulsions subside. Continuing to rock him long after the horse is dead.

The vet, CAL HUTCHINS, a weathered old cowboy, arrives on the scene. But it's too late. Blue has died of a heart attack. It's common when old horses are pushed to their limits. Hutchins tries to console Wendy, "At least Blue's last months were happy ones. Everyone else had given up on him, but you gave an old horse joy and hope. Made him young again."

But Wendy is shattered. Her dreams have died. She

goes into her room and pulls all of the horse pictures off of her wall and throws them away.

She almost throws away the rodeo program, but decides to shove it in a bottom drawer instead.

THERE IS A FUNERAL FOR OLD BLUE in the Kutter's back yard. Hank, Wendy, and vet Hutchins stand around the grave as the town PREACHER gives a eulogy. The eulogy stresses how love for God's creatures is the first step towards learning to love each other.

Hank and Wendy are reminded of another funeral: Peggy, Wendy's mom.

When the eulogy is over, the Preacher presses a wooden cross into the grave site, and leaves. Wendy breaks down in tears, and Hank holds her close.

THAT NIGHT, Hank talks to the pictures of Peggy on his dresser. Trying to find the strength to keep going. Trying to find guidance. What should he tell Wendy? That life is cruel and unfair? That the more you try, the more you fail? What should he do? Hank breaks down.

AT SCHOOL: Heather, Belinda, and Catherine taunt Wendy with new fury. Blue was never anything more than a glue horse, and Wendy was stupid for even trying to run him on a barrel course.

Wendy holds back her tears, not wanting to show

vulnerability. But inside, she is devastated.

BACK AT THE RANCH, Hank has a run in with KEN STERLING, Heather's father. Gordon the sheep has jumped the fence and wandered onto the Sterling's lawn. Sterling had his driver kill the sheep and remove it. Now, Sterling is threatening legal action against Hank. Hank tries apologizing, but Sterling will have none of it. "I can SMELL your farm from my house. Animals are unclean, and have no right to be here." "We're all animals, Mr. Sterling." "Perhaps YOU are an animal, Mr. Kutter, but I, most certainly, am not." "My family's been raising sheep for almost two hundred years. Never had any problem before." "You're in an archaic, backwards, business. Now would be a good time to get out of it."

Sterling's last threat is to push the city council to rezone the Alhambra Valley to PROHIBIT the raising of livestock. With the wealthy becoming a majority in the valley, Hank is afraid Sterling could do it.

THAT NIGHT, both Wendy and Hank are in the dumps. Even her new copy of Western Horseman Magazine doesn't cheer her up. The blank cork board on her bedroom wall mirrors Wendy's hopes.

THE NEXT DAY, Wendy is flipping through the magazine and comes across an ad for "Save The Wild Mustangs".

Every four years, excess wild Mustangs from the government protected reserve are given, free of charge, to worthy recipients.

Wendy studies the ad for a long time, before filling out the application.

After mailing the application, Wendy posts the "Save The Wild Mustangs" ad on her cork board.

HANK continues his hard work on the ranch. Next door, a bulldozer arrives to tear down the Joadson house.

WHEN WENDY COMES HOME FROM SCHOOL one day, there's a letter from "Save The Wild Mustangs" in the mailbox. She races into her room, shuts the door, and carefully opens it.

She has been accepted by the program. She can pick up her wild Mustang any time during the next thirty days from the Montana reserve.

Wendy is screaming with joy, and runs out across the yard to find her father. Hank and Wendy embrace under the clear blue sky.

FINDING A DRIVER to pick up the wild Mustang is more difficult than Wendy thought it would be. No one wants to drive all the way to Montana for gas money alone. No one wants to haul a wild horse, which could damage their trailer. And NO ONE wants to get involved with the Kutter family. The Alhambra Valley is polarizing into Ranchers

verses Land Owners, and a new range war is on the horizon. But this one, will be fought in City Council Meetings.

Wendy has exhausted every other possibility when she stops by Cal Hutchins veterinary office.

The old cowboy seems receptive to the idea, but asks "What's in it for me?" Wendy charms him, "After I win the silver belt buckle at the rodeo, I'll let you wear it on week ends." Hutchins laughs and agrees to haul the horse.

WENDY AND HUTCHINS drive to the Montana Wild Mustang Reserve, singing songs along the way. It is an adventure.

AT THE RESERVE, fifty wild Mustangs are penned together, waiting to be chosen. Wendy presents her letter to the RANGER, who tells her she can pick out her horse in a minute. The Ranger and a pair of COWBOYS brief Hutchins on the dangers of transporting a wild horse. They kick, they bite, and they will beat a trailer to pieces while you're driving down the street. Before these horses are broken, they are DANGEROUS.

While Hutchins talks to the cowboys, Wendy looks through the fence at the wild horses. HUGE kicking and snorting beasts. She spots one horse on the far end of the pen with interesting markings, and decides she wants it.

Wendy hops over the fence into the pen of wild horses.

When the Ranger and the Cowboys notice that she's in

the pen with the DANGEROUS horses, they panic. The horses could kill her. Someone's going to have to go in after her, but neither one of the cowboys wants to. It scares them.

WENDY locks eyes with the Mustang she wants. She extends her hand towards him. As if by magic, the wild horses move out of her way. Ignoring Wendy as they would another horse.

As the Cowboys, the Ranger, and Hutchins watch in amazement, Wendy moves through the sea of horses without a scratch, and rubs the nose of the horse she wants.

She blows in the Mustang's nose while rubbing it. "Hi. How you doing? You want to be my horse?" The Mustang nuzzles her hand in response. "I'm going to call you STORMY."

Wendy leads Stormy to the chute, and the Ranger opens the gates for her. He's never seen a wild horse act so tame before. It's amazing.

STORMY takes one look at the claustrophobic trailer and goes crazy. Kicking, fighting, biting, snorting. The two Cowboys wedge themselves against the horse's flanks and try to press him up the ramp to the trailer, but Stormy wedges his feet, kicks one Cowboy away. The horse isn't getting into the trailer. "Can't get him in. This one's a stubborn one."

Wendy blows in Stormy's nose and gives it a rub. "Come on." She leads Stormy up the ramp into the trailer. The two Cowboys are amazed again.

ON THE LONG DRIVE HOME, Wendy looks out the back window of the pick up truck at Stormy, maintaining eye contact. The horse doesn't kick the trailer at all.

Hutchins glances over at Wendy, realizing that she already has a special relationship with this horse. "Guess I'll have to buy a new belt to go with that buckle."

WENDY HAS TO TEACH STORMY FROM SCRATCH. At first the rich girls tease her. Stormy doesn't want a rope around his neck, let alone a bit and bridle. He fights, and fights hard; often slamming Wendy to the ground.

But Wendy doesn't get mad. She never hits Stormy. She gets up, patiently, and tries again. When Stormy does something right, she rewards him with apples and carrots and love.

As time passes, Stormy allows the saddle. Wendy teaches Stormy some basic commands. Like STOP! and GO! Since horses don't speak English, everything takes time to learn. Whenever Stormy gets it right, Wendy rewards him.

A few months later, Stormy has been trained to follow hand commands. He can back up, go sideways, turn right or left, speed up, and slow down on command.

HEATHER STERLING watches, amazed, as Wendy rides the wild horse around the corral. "Can I try riding him?"

Wendy decides to try making peace with Heather, and maybe even making friends with the rich girl. "Sure."

Heather hops up on Stormy and rides him around the corral a few times. She jerks on the reins, and digs her heels into his sides roughly. Stormy doesn't respond well to Heather's master/slave attitude to horsemanship, and begins bucking every time she digs her heels into him. Heather responds by slamming Stormy in the ears and yelling at him.

Wendy is shocked and enraged. She orders Heather off her horse. Heather yells that Wendy has a stupid horse. "He doesn't know who's boss. Who owns him." Wendy shakes her head. "He owns himself. And if anything, HE'S boss. He's bigger than you are." Heather gets mad and slaps Stormy's nose HARD. Wendy gets mad and pushes Heather. The two girls get into a fight, and Heather runs home.

THAT NIGHT, Ken Sterling shows up on the Kutter's doorstep and has a talk with Hank. "If you can't control your daughter's violent outbursts, I will see that charges are brought against her." "Your kid started it, she hit Wendy's horse." "Hitting a horse is not the same as hitting a defenseless little girl." "Yeah. I guess a horse is less

likely to call the cops." "Pay careful attention, Mr. Kutter; If your daughter so much as raises a hand near my daughter, I guarantee she will be taken away from you and put in a juvenile detention center. Is that clear?" "Yeah." "You might also be interested in this," Sterling hands Hank a flier for the City Council Meeting at the end of the month. Main topic of discussion will be re-zoning to prohibit ranchers.

Hank looks down at the flier and feels the floor slipping out from under him. He's going to be forced out of his house by city hall. And he feels powerless to fight it.

WENDY'S CORK BOARD WALL is filled with photos of her and Stormy, surrounding last year's rodeo program.

She sets up the barrel course and gets out her stop watch. "Well, Stormy, you ready?" Stormy snorts and nuzzles Wendy's hand in response.

The first few times Stormy runs the course, he's slow. Over two minutes. But as Wendy continues to train him on the barrels, his speed picks up.

Stormy makes all five laps in 86 seconds.

Wendy rewards him.

Stormy gets it down to 85 seconds.

Wendy rewards him.

Stormy runs the course in just over 84 seconds,

matching last year's time.

Wendy goes wild with celebration. Cheering and jumping like crazy. She runs up and hugs Hank, who holds her close. Feeling deep pride in his daughter. Again she has overcome the obstacles.

"Wendy, if I only had some of your strength," Hank says as he looks down at the City Council flier on the kitchen table.

A CITY COUNCIL FLIER POSTED ON A WALL IS COVERED WITH A COUNTY RODEO POSTER.

AT THE RODEO, beneath the veneer of carnival is the pressure to win at all costs.

When the Barrel Race event is announced, the contestants and their parents assemble near the starting chute.

BELINDA'S PARENTS inspect her silk and silver cowgirl outfit as the TRAINER brings her horse. Belinda's Father goes over the costs of the horse, trainer, riding lessons, and clothing; and orders his daughter to win. "You were a loser last year. You made me look like a fool. That's not going to happen this year, is it Belinda?" "No, sir." "Good. Now go out there and win."

The ANNOUNCER identifies Belinda and her horse as last year's second place winner. Then the bell rings and the

race begins. We see the time clicking away as Belinda runs the course.

Various shots from the sides of the horse, the saddle, and underneath the horse; put us right in the middle of the action. We FEEL what it's like to run the barrel course.

Belinda MATCHES last year's time of 84.07 seconds, and her parents go wild. Her father embraces her after she gets off the horse.

WHEN HEATHER'S name is announced, Ken Sterling gives his daughter a lecture on the sins of losing as they wait for the trainer to bring her horse.

The bell rings and Heather comes out of the chute at high speed. She slaps the horse when it begins to slow going into a curve. The horse pours on the speed. Heather kicks and digs into the horse, torturing it to move faster. But she gets results.

Heather's time is 83.16 seconds.

BELINDA'S FATHER grabs Belinda and drags her away from the arena. All the way out to the parking lot, complaining about the money wasted on losing the race. "You know how much that outfit cost? All of that money, wasted."

CATHERINE's name is called, and her father and mother give her a hug, "You know what to do."

When the bell rings, Catherine and her horse burst out

of the gate. She prods and kicks the horse, but can't match Heather's time. The horse just isn't fast enough. 85.37 seconds.

When Catherine dismounts, her mother begins hitting her. Her father tries to control his wife, but gets socked for his trouble. It becomes apparent where the kids who beat their horses learned such actions.

"Last year's winner, Lorraine Saunders on Dutchess!"

Lorraine's parents tell her that they have no daughter that's a loser. She won last year, and all they expect of her is the same this year.

Lorraine takes a deep breath, strokes Dutchess, then the bell rings and she's off.

The first three laps go well. She's AHEAD of Heather's three lap time. It looks like she's going to win.

Then Lorraine takes a turn too close to the barrel. Her knee hits the barrel, shearing her kneecap. She's injured, bleeding, but still attempts to finish the race. Finish time: 84.67.

When she gets off the horse, Lorraine collapses. Her kneecap is shattered. Her parents take her to the hospital, but seem more concerned with her losing the Barrel Race, than the possibility she may never walk again without a cane.

THE ANNOUNCER CALLS "Wendy Kutter, on her Wild Mustang, STORMY!"

Hank gives Wendy a hug, and tells her it doesn't matter if she wins or loses, he's proud of her either way. "When Old Blue died, I thought you'd give up. But you didn't. You were stronger than that. These other girls, they get everything handed to them on a plate. You've had to fight. You took a WILD horse, and only using love, taught it. Communicated with it. Got it to work with you. When bad things happened, you kept on going. You kept working towards your goal. And I'm so proud of you. You're here, and Stormy's here. And that makes you a winner already."

Hank gives her a final hug, then she gets on Stormy, kisses his neck, and gets into the chute.

When the bell rings, Stormy and Wendy fly out of the chute. They make a fast first lap, and Wendy rubs Stormy's ears in praise. The second, third, and fourth laps are also fast.

Wendy keeps stroking at Stormy's ears. Talking to the horse. Giving him words of encouragement.

Wendy and Stormy's final time: 83.16 seconds.

"WE HAVE A TIE! Heather Sterling and Wendy Kutter." Hank looks across the way at Ken Sterling. Sterling isn't a happy man. "THERE WILL BE A TIE BREAKER RACE. BOTH GIRLS

WILL RUN SIMULTANEOUSLY." Wendy and Heather look at each other. Heather tries to spit on Wendy, but misses.

THE TIE BREAKER RACE is about to begin. Both girls and horses in chutes, ready to run. Heather tosses a couple of insults at Wendy, but they slide off. Wendy wishes Heather good luck in response.

THE BELL RINGS. The girls run the course side by side. Heather uses a crop to beat on her horse. At the end of the first lap, they're nose to nose.

On the second lap, Wendy pulls ahead. When Heather catches up, she "accidentally slips" with the crop and hits Wendy. Wendy ignores it and keeps going.

On the third lap, Heather has gained the lead. She's beating her horse, torturing it to move faster. Heather cuts a close corner, and almost smashes her knee against the barrel.

On the fourth lap, Heather is still ahead. But her horse is tiring. Welts have appeared on the horse's flank where Heather has hit it with the riding crop.

Wendy rubs Stormy's ears and gives him words of encouragement.

On the fifth lap, Wendy pulls up beside Heather. Heather tries to knock her away with the crop, but Wendy and Stormy keep on going. They take the lead by an inch. Two

inches. Three inches.

Going around the last barrel, Wendy takes the inside and maintains her lead. Heather keeps on whipping her horse, but the animal is tired.

Wendy and Stormy win the race.

HANK KUTTER CHEERS. Cal Hutchins cheers. Everyone cheers, except the Sterling family.

WENDY is presented with her silver belt buckle, and the cheering continues. Wendy and Hank embrace, holding each other close. "I wish your mom were here to see this. She'd be so proud. She's probably up there in heaven glowing brighter than any star."

Wendy and Hank add Stormy to the hugfest, and Wendy rubs his nose and blows in it. Stormy nuzzles her.

Hank smiles at his daughter and her wild horse, realizing that ANYTHING is possible. Then he marches across the stadium to where Ken Sterling berates his daughter for losing to a Humane Society giveaway.

When Ken turns towards him, Hank smiles. "Mr. Sterling, my farm has been in my family for generations. No one's taking it away from me. You can TRY to zone me out, but I'm going to fight you. I may lose at the city council meeting, and I may lose the first couple of times in court. But EVENTUALLY, I'm going to win."

Sterling sees how STRONG Hank looks, and is threatless.

Hank returns to his amazing daughter and her amazing wild horse, STORMY. The three walk home, standing tall.

THE END.

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