

# ROCKING HORSE WINNER

SYNOPSIS AND SCENE BY SCENE WRITTEN BY AARON DURAND

## SYNOPSIS

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*Rocking Horse Winner* primarily explores the relationship between Paul, a developmentally challenged young adult, and his mother Ava.

Paul is driven to bridge the relationship with his mother, but Ava sees Paul's attempts to engage as fussy and considers motherhood an obligation. She remains distant, trapped in a materialistic reverie. Driven into poverty by "bad luck", Ava longs for past luxuries, and her gloom pervades the house to the point where the walls themselves whisper in Paul's ear.

Paul assures his mother that he's lucky, and he'll fix their bad luck himself. He runs upstairs to ride his rocking horse, who he thinks will help him. As he rides, he goes into a trance, calling out a mysterious name.

Paul's uncle Oscar hears the noise and enters the room. An exhausted Paul tells Oscar the rocking horse has a new name every week; last week his name was Blue Peter. Oscar realizes this was the winner of last week's horse race, and off-handedly asks Paul for betting tips for today's race. Paul answers far too firmly for it to be guesswork. Sensing possibility but needing proof, Oscar

calls in the caretaker, Bassett, and the three head to the upcoming race.

Doubt turns to awe and then to excitement as Oscar and Bassett discover Paul isn't guessing but *predicting* the winning horses. The cash starts rolling in for everyone. Oscar can stop lying about his poverty, Bassett can quit his job, and Paul is finally able to make his mother happy, but insists his part in things stay hidden.

However, it's not enough for Ava. She spends it as fast as Paul makes it, filling their home with more and more. The house joins in, asking for increasing amounts of decoration and decadence. Paul rides his rocking horse again and again, sometimes long into the night, desperate to make her happy and to stop the house from singing in his ears.

After one last ride, Paul predicts the winner of the biggest race of the season. Oscar and Bassett bet everything, and Paul has made everyone incredibly rich. And yet, his mother remains unhappy. Desperate, drained, barely alive, he climbs one last time on the horse, and dies alone.

## MUSIC DESCRIPTION

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It's best to describe *Rocking Horse Winner's* music using the opening line of the show: nothing is as it should be.

This is not to say it's incorrect; far from it. Rather, it is intense and masterful at creating exactly what the drama calls for, which is often a sense of unease and foreboding.

**DH Lawrence's** story is famous, and many will know the ending before setting foot in the theatre. Thus, **Gareth Williams'** music purposefully haunts the ear just as Ava's need for more haunts her family, reflecting

the psyche of each character as if through an antique mirror.

There is a reminiscence of Debussy's treatment of text, and the usage of certain motivic elements (particularly one tone cluster) serve to ground the soundscape. There are flavours of minimalism, ala Glass, Reich, and Pärt joined to ethereal moments, complex rhythmic sections, and engaging melodies.

The result is a textural feast made of both gossamer and granite.

# SCENE BREAKDOWN

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## OPENING SCENE

A waltz.

## SCENE 1 - AVA AT THE PIANO

The waltz is cut short. Ava discloses how far she's fallen and how difficult she finds caring for her son.

## SCENE 2 - AVA AND PAUL TALK ABOUT LUCK

Paul is curious about why he and his mother don't have a car, and Ava explains it's because they're poor. Paul again asks why that's so, and Ava states it's because his father has no luck. Paul announces that *he* is lucky.

## SCENE 3 - PAUL RIDES HIS ROCKING HORSE

Paul creeps upstairs and rides his rocking horse, asking it to take him to where luck is. He rides faster and faster and at the peak, shouts a name: Daffodil.

## SCENE 4 - PAUL TELLS UNCLE OSCAR HIS SECRET

Uncle Oscar enters, having heard the noise, and asks Paul what's going on. Paul reveals his secret: the rocking horse is lucky, and tells him the names of race horses. Oscar calls in Paul's caretaker, Bassett, who admits Paul tells him the names of *winning* race horses. The three head to the races to prove it.

## SCENE 5 - AT THE RACES

Paul is nearly overwhelmed by the noise, but manages. Oscar and Bassett place their bets on Daffodil. Bassett takes the role of a race announcer, and the three watch Paul's prediction come true. The three sing of how this will change everything.

## SCENE 6 - PAUL TELLS OSCAR ABOUT THE HOUSE

Paul tells Oscar he hopes the winnings will stop the house from singing. Paul hears "her" sing of how there's never enough, how there must be more. He makes Oscar promise not to tell his mother about where the money comes from; it might ruin the luck. Oscar tells him to never stop riding.

## SCENE 8 - AVA AT THE PIANO, WITH PAUL

Paul asks his mother why she always sings sad songs and if she knows anything happier. Ava rebukes him. She expresses profound regret for the stupidity and vanity of her youth. The world only smiles for the young, she says. Paul hopes she'll smile for her birthday tomorrow, but she does not.

At her birthday party, Oscar gives her the winnings from the race, but her response is dry: it's not enough.

## SCENE 9 - THE MONEY GETS SPENT

The predictions keep coming true, and the money keeps coming. The money gets spent, and Paul keeps riding. All the while the house is getting filled with finery. But it keeps singing. There must be more, but Paul's luck falters as his energy wanes.

## SCENE 10 - AVA AND PAUL

Paul begs his rocking horse for more luck for the Derby. Ava decides Paul's been too agitated lately, and the distance between them grows wider. Ava leaves his room and bemoans Paul's lack of understanding. She deserves luxury now and then. Paul robs her of comfort. As if on cue, she hears Paul noisily riding his rocking horse again. While she screams at him to stop, Oscar, Bassett, and the house cheer him on. Paul calls out a name.

## SCENE 11 - PAUL DIES

The last ride has left Paul gravely ill. Oscar and Bassett tell him they bet it all, and they're set for life. Paul asks his mother if she'll finally be happy--finally smile. She does, but as they leave his room to celebrate, Paul hears the house whisper. There must be more.

Paul is desperate, and crawls to his rocking horse for more luck, more money. He tries to ride, fails, makes one final call for his mother, and dies alone.

