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"The only thing thicker than blood"

A Horse-Horror Story

Written by

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EXT. PRAIRIES - BEFORE DAWN

The sleepy PRAIRIES on a warm summer night.

EXT. RANCH - HORSE TRACK - BEFORE DAWN

An abandoned HORSE TRACK. Rusty. Dusty. Decayed.

A bullet-ridden SIGN for HOLDEM RANCH SQUEAKS in the breeze. A BLOODY BANDAGE, YELLOW PASTE on the edges, ON THE GROUND.

On the horizon, the RANCH HOUSE (giving *Texas Chainsaw*). A single LIGHT is ON.

The LIGHT goes DARK. A DOOR CREAKS like nails on a board.

A SHADOWY FIGURE descends from the house with a BUCKET. We'll call them THE RANCHER. As they cross the ranch, they are no more than a shadowy silhouette against the pre-dawn sky.

INT. RANCH - BARN - BEFORE DAWN

The Rancher enters. They wear JEANS, PLAID SHIRT and PINK COWBOY BOOTS. We never see their face (yet).

The Rancher dumps the bucket into a TROUGH:

GUTS. Human? Animal? We'll find out.

The Rancher THROWS A LEVER on the wall. STIRRING in the barn stalls as the CAGES OPEN UP.

The Rancher grabs a CATTLE PROD. With a flick of a switch, a CRACKLE and ELECTRIC WAVES pulse from the business end. The Rancher STICKS IT INTO A PILE OF HAY.

A GREAT SCREAM. But this is no animal scream.

From the hay emerges...

A HUMAN. A cold, bruised, scared human.

ECU on this human's blood-shot EYE.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. RODEO STADIUM - HOLDING PENS - NIGHT

ECU: A BRONCO'S EYE.

This bronco stirs restlessly in the shadows of a holding pen. Steers, bulls, and sheep shift nervously nearby.

TWO RODEO HANDS suddenly grab our bronco's reigns and--

BRONCO POV: the bronco is lead left, right, then left again, forced through a claustrophobic LABYRINTH of metal fences.

A BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHT takes us into--

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

A CRESCENDO OF NOISE as we ENTER THE STADIUM.

Cowboy hats, American flags, Montana State flags.

The crowd goes NUTS, CHEERING AND WHOOPING. BEER spills, FOOD flies, people SCREAM. TWO CHILDREN watch quietly in their seats having not yet picked up this learned behaviour.

A METAL CHUTE SLAMS SHUT on the bronco, pinning it in place. It GRUNTS as a heavy weight comes down on its back.

DENNIS GORDON (early 30s), tall, rugged, a cowboy who handles horses as well as the ladies, has mounted up.

DENNIS

Alright! Letta rip!

The chute FLIES OPEN with a BANG-- Bronco and Dennis fly out! The bronco BUCKS and STEERS on the STADIUM FLOOR.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Dennis Gordon is showing immense technical skill out there.

The bronco does everything it can to buck Dennis... But Dennis hangs on.

After a violent effort, the horse grunts and comes to a STOP.

Dennis victoriously salutes the crowd and the stadium ERUPTS IN MORE NOISE.

INT. STADIUM - HORSE STALLS - NIGHT

A FIGURE watches Dennis from the stadium's horse stalls.

This is STEPHANIE HOLT (late 20s), a steely barrel racer with a head on her shoulders and no time for bullshit. She wears her rider's uniform: JEANS, PLAID SHIRT, WHITE COWBOY HAT and BROWN COWBOY BOOTS.

Steph allows herself to take a breath.

GEORGIA (O.S.)

Hey.

GEORGIA HOLT (early 20s), a blonde, former beauty pageant winner and Steph's sister, steps beside her. In her hair, a DISTINCTIVE PINK HAIRBAND.

STEPH

Looks like your boyfriend won.

Dennis heads off-stage as Steph and Georgia watch another COWBOY come out on a bronco.

This cowboy FLIES off almost immediately, landing painfully on his ASS. The crowd "ooooooo"s in disappointment.

Steph and Georgia watch, a tension between them.

GEORGIA

Dad come by?

STEPH

No.

Steph heads into the horse stalls. Passing RIDERS prepping their HORSES, Steph steps into a stall with a YOUNG QUARTER HORSE. This is DASHER.

STEPH (CONT'D)

Hey, Dasher.

Steph brushes Dasher, passing over a BIRTHMARK.

Georgia leans against the entrance of the stall. She watches Steph with a heartfelt sadness.

STEPH (CONT'D)

(feeling watched)

Need something?

GEORGIA

You can stop, you know.

Steph stops brushing. So many things Georgia could be referring to both past and present.

STEPH

You--

Dennis grabs Georgia from behind and lifts her into the air!

DENNIS

Guess who's the new bronco riding
champion?

GEORGIA

Aaah! Babe, you were amazing!

Dennis puts Georgia down and gives her a BIG KISS.

DENNIS

Your sister knows how to pick a
winner, Steph.

STEPH

(unimpressed)
Winner of what?

GEORGIA

Steph.

DENNIS

It's alright, Georgia. Steph's
still getting used to me. Little by
little. It's like taming a mare.

Steph stares daggers at Dennis. He flashes his trademark
million dollar smile, but Steph is unmoved.

FAN (O.S.)

IT'S DENNIS GORDON!

A group of ATTRACTIVE FANS crowd the horse stall entrance.

Dennis grins but Georgia's disapproval gives him pause.
Dennis flashes his million-dollar smile. Georgia softens,
swoons even, for all his admirers, Dennis is hers.

Dasher, overwhelmed by the commotion, stirs and whines.

STEPH

Guys, do you mind?

GEORGIA

(to Dennis)
Go on.

Dennis leads Georgia to the fans for selfies and autographs.
Steph gives Dasher a reassuring pat on the neck.

STEPH

(to Dasher)
It's okay, girl.

OUTSIDE THE HORSE STALLS--

The BACK OF A BLACK COWBOY HAT strides forwards.

FANS part like the Red Sea, revealing Dennis, getting a selfie with a particularly attractive fan.

Dennis, for a second, is scared, but he flashes his smile once again.

DENNIS

Reg!

The wearer of the black hat is REG (50s), Steph and Georgia's father, an unemotional, oak-tree of a man. Behind his quiet gaze is a frightening intensity one stirs at their own risk.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

I was just... checkin' on your daughters.

REG

Mighty kind. But I think all the commotion is rustling the horses.

DENNIS

(to the fans)

Alright, everyone. Let's take this party elsewhere.

Dennis and his fans scatter. Georgia stays.

GEORGIA

Daddy, I think Steph needs--

But Reg puts a fatherly hand on Georgia.

REG

Sweetheart, be a darlin' and grab me a beer?

Georgia feels the weight of her father's hand and dutifully heads off. Inside the horse stalls, Reg spots his prey.

BACK IN THE HORSE STALLS--

Steph finishes saddling Dasher when she feels a presence behind her. She tenses as Reg PUTS A HAND on Dasher's flank.

Reg inspects Dasher. Steph watches him like a wary she-wolf.

REG

She seems nervous.

STEPH
It's her first race.

Reg, not a fan of her attitude, corners Steph in the stall.

REG
You gonna win?

STEPH
Yes.

Reg looks to Dasher as if the horse will speak the truth.

Then, without a word, Reg leaves.

Steph makes sure he's gone. From her saddle bag she finds a SMALL ZIPLOCK BAG. She taps a BUMP of yellow-ish POWDER on her finger and very quietly SNORTS.

She hides the bag before placing her forehead on Dasher's.

STEPH (CONT'D)
You're gonna do great, girl.

Off this intimate moment--

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Rodeo Hands roll out THREE BARRELS onto the stadium floor.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Ladies and gentlemen, cowboys and
cowgirls, next up: the barrel race!*

INT. STADIUM - START AREA - NIGHT

Calmly mounted on Dasher, Steph waits ready at the lip of the stadium. She gives Dasher a pat.

STEPH
We've done this thousands of times.
Now, we're just gonna do it in
front of thousands of people.

INT. STADIUM - FENCE LINE - NIGHT

Reg leans against the fence line of the stadium floor, wringing his hands. Dennis sidles up.

DENNIS
It's done.

REG

Good. Let's hope she delivers.

Reg remains pregnantly silent.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next up, Montana's own, Stephanie Holt!

A HORN BLARES. Dennis and Reg turn their heads towards--

INT. STADIUM - START GATE - NIGHT

Steph SPURS Dasher--

STEPH

(to Dasher)

Let's show 'em, girl!

And Dasher TAKES OFF--!

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Steph and Dasher SHOOT INTO THE STADIUM! THE CROWD GOES NUTS!

From a SPECTATOR BOX-- Georgia cheers. Next to her is FRANK (mid 30s) a stocky burn-out smoking a VAPE PEN.

GEORGIA

Go Steph!

FRANK

(laconically)

Hurraaaaaye.

STADIUM FLOOR-- Steph approaches the first barrel... Dasher turns on a dime!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

This is Holt's first go of the year on her new mount, Dasher.

Dasher and Steph approach the second barrel-- a tight turn!

ANNOUNCER

Winner of the '13 Junior Women's National Barrel, and the '19, '20 and '21 International Women's Barrel, she looks better than ever after a two-year hiatus...

Steph and Dasher round the third barrel and...

They're home free! Steph SPURS Dasher straight to the gate.

FENCE LINE-- Dennis nods with approval. Reg remains unmoved.

INT. STADIUM - START GATE - NIGHT

Steph and Dasher ZOOM back to where they started. Steph brings Dasher to a stop and waits for the announcement...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...16.34 seconds for Holt!

STEPH
That's it. That was great, girl.

As Steph DISMOUNTS, a FLASH FROM A CAMERA PHONE.

STEPH (CONT'D)
(covering Dasher's eyes)
Watch it!

A FAN we're calling HORSE GIRL (late 20s) lowers her phone, dressed in JEANS with PINK, BEJEWELLED COWBOY BOOTS. She's very peppy. Very high-energy.

HORSE GIRL
Hang on. That wasn't a good one.

STEPH
You shouldn't be back here.

Horse Girl glances at Steph's boots.

HORSE GIRL
(ignoring, gestures)
You're wearing spurs.

STEPH
For now. She'll be off them soon.

HORSE GIRL
They hurt her.

STEPH
I'm gentle.

HORSE GIRL
I heard you and your father before.
He's not very nice.

STEPH
Do I know you?

HORSE GIRL
(re: Dasher)
Do you love her?

STEPH
Yes.

Satisfied, Horse Girl prances away with a cantering gait. Steph watches her go, baffled by the strange encounter.

INT. STADIUM - START GATE - NIGHT

Steph is mounted on Dasher and ready for her second go.

But something seems different with Steph. More tense. Dasher senses it and thrashes and squirms beneath her.

STEPH
(patting Dasher)
Easy, girl.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
...now Stephanie Holt's second go.

THE BUZZER GOES! But instead of spurring Dasher, Steph gives her a pat on the rump-- THEY'RE OFF!

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Steph and Dasher FLY onto the stadium floor like before. They take the first barrel. It's VERY TIGHT.

SPECTATOR BOX-- Georgia and Frank watch.

GEORGIA
That was close.

Steph takes the second barrel -- her shirt GRAZES the side.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Holt is cutting it close with those barrels. If she knocks one over, it's a 15 second penalty...

FENCE LINE-- Dennis and Reg watch concerned.

REG
What the hell does she think she's doing?

Steph approaches the third barrel. She LEANS to guide Dasher--

BUT SHE LEANS TOO FAR and SMASHES INTO THE BARREL.

An EAR-SHATTERING BONE SNAP, followed by--

Steph HITS THE GROUND. HARD. Dasher FALLS ON TOP OF HER--

A BLOOD-CURDLING HORSE-CRY.

SPECTATOR BOX-- Georgia clasps her hands over her mouth.

FENCE LINE-- Dennis has one leg over the fence to go help. He looks back at Reg.

DENNIS

Reg?

Reg clutches his heart. The side of Reg's face droops.

STADIUM FLOOR-- Steph sees Reg FALL TO THE GROUND then...

EVERYTHING GOES TO BLACK.

INT. STADIUM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Steph, still on the ground, slowly blinks back to reality.

Steph's HAZY POV-- Paramedics lift Reg onto a stretcher.

Steph gropes until she finds Dasher's head, breathing weakly.

REVEAL: A BLOODY BONE STICKS OUT OF Dasher's LEG.

STEPH

It's okay, girl...

CLINK, CLINK, CLINK-- THREE PAIRS OF SPURS plant themselves in front of Steph. We only see the cowboys from the waist down. One is armed with a PISTOL.

But Steph is DRAGGED OUT FROM UNDER Dasher.

A holster CLICKS OPEN. A gun hammer COCKS. The barrels aims--

Steph throws herself over Dasher's head.

STEPH (CONT'D)

No, don't!

BANG!

CUT TO BLACK: