

A Horse Walks into a Bar

by S. Asher Sund

I got this job where I sell snow cones from a cart in a petting zoo. Parents ask if their children can take pictures with me. I neigh and nod my big horse head. After my shifts, I go into the bar, still in my getup, as this horse, and the bartender says, "Why the long face?"

"Ha, ha," I say, and nod at him to pour me a drink.

On one of these nights after work, a cowboy walks into the bar, takes a seat next to me, and says he'll have whatever the horse is having. At first I don't realize he's talking about me. I sometimes forget I'm a horse. I'm a horse, yes, but I'm also a man dressed as a horse.

Anyway, this cowboy saddles up next to me and, two drinks in, begins telling me about his life. He sold Amway in the eighties and did pretty well, even though he got no respect. But he was able to buy a ranch. "It's a real magical place," he says to me. "Sitting up against the far mountains."

"Which far mountains?" I say.

And he says to me, "Whoa, now, horsey, not so fast. That's on a need-to-know basis."

I'm thinking, *Whatever. I've seen your type everywhere. I could just as easily buck you off the stage and send you crashing into the orchestra pit.* I'm motioning at the bartender for the bill in an effort to get home and out of this bodysuit when the cowboy says that he could take me there.

"To your magical ranch sitting up against the far mountains?"

He nods, not realizing that I'm being sarcastic.

I tell him to get lost. I nicker at him, but this only seems to turn him on. He leans over, grabs hold of my mane, and says he wants to ride me. He says he knew it from the moment he saw me.

I pretend this last part didn't happen. Like when the kids at the zoo poke me in the groin of my costume to see what I'm packing back there, I pretend like it never happened. But he leans over again. "Horsey," he says to me. "I really, really want to ride you."

Available online at <http://fictionaut.com/stories/s-asher-sund/a-horse-walks-into-a-bar>

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I'm not sure what it is, but there's something about that *really, really* that makes me feel sorry for him. "But cowboy," I say to him, "I've never been ridden."

"Is that so?" he says.

"Yep, that's so."

"Then we've found our match," he says and smiles. "Because I'm a bronc buster."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning I must break you. Giddyap. Hear what I'm saying?"

Maybe because I'm mostly drunk or whatever, and because I basically hate my life and have nothing better to do than go home and fall asleep on the couch in front of the television after eating two chicken pot pies (although, honestly, on some nights, it's more like three), I let the cowboy pay our tab and lead me out to his truck. I begin to crawl into the cab when he says, "I'm afraid that's not how this is going to work." He nods toward the horse trailer in back.

I agree to be roped up in the trailer next to a donkey. The cowboy introduces me to his old jack donkey, apparently a real stubborn bastard, or so he says, as he slips a bridle over my head and fixes the leather blinkers over my eyes.

"What's this for?" I say.

"Just a precautionary measure," he says.

On the long ride to the ranch, I ask the donkey what he did before this job. He's chewing something in the dark. I can hear the grinding of his teeth as the trailer rocks over the bumps in the road when the cowboy turns off the highway. I try once more with the small talk. "But is it really magical?" I say. "This ranch sitting up against the far mountains?" The donkey stamps his foot, a tennis shoe of some sort, against the trailer floor, and brays, meaning I guess he doesn't wish to talk about it, or about this magical place he has nothing to say.

