

Devil Dog Six

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*“Not a word to each other, we kept the great pace;
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle, and made its girth tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right;
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Then galloped less steadily Roland a whit.”*

Robert Browning

*“A good rider may often be thrown from his horse,
And climb on once again to face forward his course,
Which is how I went forward myself on my way,
Till Christ came to give me my true judgment day.”*

Traditional Irish Poem

“O’ for a horse with wings!”

William Shakespeare

CHARACTERS

Devil Dog Six can be performed by an ensemble cast of six: four men (Actors 1, 2, 3, 4), and two women (Actors 5 and 6)

THE HORSES

DEVIL DOG SIX, a black thoroughbred colt (Actor #1)
MISTER EMORY, a chestnut thoroughbred colt (Actor #2)
IGNATZ KATZ, a dark brown thoroughbred colt (Actor #3)
SIR EDWARD'S EYES, a brown thoroughbred colt (Actor #4)
CROWN RUBY, a golden thoroughbred filly (Actor #5)
ESA'S PRIDE, a bay thoroughbred filly (Actor #6)

THE JOCKEYS

DEVON TRAMORE, age late teens (Actor #6)
GOWRAN GILLESPIE, age early twenties (Actor #1)
JEAN-PIERRE CLUNY, age mid-thirties (Actor #2)
PERTH DUNSTALL, age mid-forties (Actor #3)
ELLIS HASTINGS, age mid-thirties (Actor #2)
CHESTER BLAIN, age early forties (Actor #5)

THE PLAYERS

JOSSELIN TRAMORE, Devon's mother, a trainer (Actor #5)
BERNARD TRAMORE, Devon's father, a gambler (Actor #3)
DOCTOR CALDER MAYWOOD, Devon's neurologist (Actor #2)
OMER NAD AL SHEBA, the Saudi owner of Devil Dog Six (Actor #2)
RETAMA SOLANO, Devon's Jamaican-American nurse (Actor #5)
FONNER BRIGHTON, an African-American groom (Actor #1)
VERNON LAROCHE, an African-American investigator (Actor #4)
MAMBO SANTA ANITA, a Vodoun priestess (Actor #1)
SYDNEY BRISBANE, a television reporter (Actor #4)

NOTE: Most characters speak with southern accents, but the narration should be spoken with no discernible dialect. Jean-Pierre Cluny is French; Retama Solano is from Jamaica; Omer Nad al Sheba is from Saudi Arabia; and Mambo Santa Anita from Haiti.

TIME

the present

PLACE

New Orleans and Bossier City, Louisiana. A sparsely furnished set with hooks and containers for costumes and props serves to suggest the Fair Grounds Race Course, Bossier City Hospital, Louisiana Downs, Tramore Farms, and a Vodoun church.

CHARACTERS

(An ensemble of six actors play twenty-four roles.)

ACTOR #1:

Devil Dog Six, Gowran Gillespie, Fonner Brighton, Mambo Santa Anita

ACTOR #2:

Mister Emory, Doctor Calder Maywood, Ellis Hastings, Jean-Pierre Cluny,
Omer Nad al Sheba, Vodoun Dancer

ACTOR #3:

Ignatz Katz, Bernard Tramore, Perth Dunstall, Vodoun Dancer

ACTOR #4:

Sir Edward's Eyes, Inspector Vernon Laroche, Sydney Brisbane, Vodoun Dancer

ACTOR #5:

Crown Ruby, Josselin Tramore, Retama Solano, Chester Blain

ACTOR #6:

Esa's Pride, Devon Tramore

(Trumpets blare “The First Call to the Post” as lights reveal the SIX ACTORS as HORSES, snorting and whinnying while stomping their hooves and flouncing their manes. When the trumpets cease, the amplified voice of the TRACK ANNOUNCER is heard.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER’S VOICE

The horses have reached the starting gate for the race of the season: The Dixie Derby!

(As the TRACK ANNOUNCER calls their names, the HORSES form a line in their post positions.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER’S VOICE

The first to enter is Esa’s Pride! Then strutting into his post is Mister Emory, followed by Ignatz Katz and Sir Edward’s Eyes. We’re waiting for Crown Ruby -- she’s slipping in nicely. And last comes Devil Dog Six who seems a bit restless, but is settling down, and in he goes! Now they’re ready!

(A bell resounds!)

TRACK ANNOUNCER’S VOICE

And they’re off and running!

(Music as the HORSES thrust forward, gallop swiftly, then freeze as ACTOR #2 (Mister Emory) steps aside and speaks to the audience.)

ACTOR #2

Nine months before The Dixie Derby was run at the Fair Grounds in New Orleans, Devon Tramore was thrown from her horse.

(ACTOR #1 (Devil Dog Six) steps forward to continue the narration.)

ACTOR #1

She broke four ribs, bruised both lungs, shattered her wrist, fractured her neck, and suffered a severe concussion.

(ACTOR #4 (Sir Edward's Eyes) narrates as ACTOR # 5 (Crown Ruby) becomes JOSSELIN TRAMORE, and ACTOR #3 (Ignatz Katz) becomes BERNARD TRAMORE. They stand together with ACTOR #2 (Mister Emory) who is now DOCTOR CALDER MAYWOOD. BERNARD, JOSSELIN, and DOCTOR MAYWOOD speak with southern accents.)

ACTOR #4

Doctor Calder Maywood met with Devon's mother and father to explain that...

ACTOR #4
...her brain is swollen.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
Her brain is swollen.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
(gesturing to photographs) Now this here is your average ordinary brain, and this one here is Devon's.

JOSSELIN
My god in heaven.

BERNARD
She's lit up like a Vegas marquee.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
That's the result of what we call a "blunt force trauma," and is the cause of those migraines she's been having. Naturally, we want to avoid surgery, but to decrease the swelling requires a reduction of information flowing to her brain, so for the next three weeks, we want Devon to refrain from speaking, texting, watching T V, or thinking thoughts of any kind, which is why we're keeping her in a dark, soundproof room.

JOSSELIN
She can't even read the Racing Form?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
No, ma'am.

BERNARD
I've never heard of such a thing.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
Well, now that we're able to scan the brain and see the effects of stress and stimulation, we're helping patients like Devon heal themselves.

BERNARD

Just how does she keep herself from thinking?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

It requires a very special kind of discipline.

BERNARD

So what do you do? Drug her?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Well, yes, and we've taught her some relaxation exercises. The problem is, when the blood vessels in her frontal cortex bulge, they agitate the pain receptors which makes her hypersensitive to sights, sounds, and the lightest touch feels like the thrust of a knife -- you know, like that fairy tale, "The Princess and the Pea."

JOSSELIN

My poor baby.

BERNARD

It's my own goddamn fault, (*to Josselin*) and yours too. We've been dragging her to the track since before she could crawl much less ride.

JOSSELIN

Oh, shush, Bernard, she's just had a run of rotten luck.

BERNARD

Rotten luck?! Hells bells, Josh, aren't you listening? She'll never ride again!

JOSSELIN

'Course she will!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Well, I'm sorry, but I don't think she'll be...

JOSSELIN

Then think again! We want her completely recovered and back at the track!

BERNARD

Now, Josh...

JOSSELIN

It's *her* life, not yours!

BERNARD

And not yours either! *(to Doctor Maywood)* It's bad enough she starved herself till she's so damn small, her bones snap like pretzel sticks!

JOSSELIN

Every jockey breaks bones, and Devon's small 'cause of an iron will!

BERNARD

And a low dairy diet!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Wasn't she given sufficient milk?

JOSSELIN

'Course she was! She could've grown as tall as y'all if she wanted, but she knew she'd be riding from the day she came out kicking. But what matters is who Devon is now, and she's a good jockey on her way to becoming great, and I'm not going to give up on her, so don't you give up on her either, hear?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Ma'am, I'll do everything I can; you have my word.

JOSSELIN

I appreciate that, 'cause I haven't slept a whole night through since her spill. Whenever I close my eyes, all I see is that damn race over and over till every ounce of energy's sucked right out of me.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Then why don't you go on home and get some rest.

JOSSELIN

I can't rest; I've got two new horses to break. Now you call if she needs me, hear?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Yes, ma'am.

(JOSSELIN departs.)

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I heard your wife's a jockey too.

BERNARD

Oh, Josh was a pioneer; now she's a trainer.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Does she have any horses of interest?

BERNARD

One of her owners is a Saudi with a fine looking colt named Devil Dog Six. Remember that name, 'cause he's going to be a winner. Besides that, she's thinking of starting a school for girls and their jumpers.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

What is it with young girls and horses? I've got a niece who's just crazy for them. Must be some kind of animal instinct I guess, like "Beauty and the Beast".

BERNARD

I suppose.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

(pause) I watched a tape of the race, but couldn't determine what caused the accident.

BERNARD

Senor Pepe's what caused it, the incorrigible old nag.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I understand there's an investigation.

BERNARD

It's routine when insurance companies are involved, and Pepe got clipped. The horse in front of him was pulled back by the jock, so the back hooves of his horse collided with Pepe's front hooves, and he buckled under. When he fell, he jolted and threw Devy smack onto the rail. She bounced off, landed on the track, and got trampled. It was a horrible, hellacious, god awful mess -- worst I've ever seen. I swear, every bone in her body's been bruised. Hell, I'm afraid to hug her, afraid her skeleton will crumble and she'll slip through my grip like a raggedy doll. That's what comes of condemning a child to puniness.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Well, I tend to think of Devon as petite. Lots of girls are petite.

BERNARD

True, but it's a life of pitty pats on the head, always being a cutie instead of a beauty. Now, please, Doctor, show me this room where you're keeping her. If I could just sneak a peek, it might ease my restless nights.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Are you taking medication?

BERNARD

Just Makers Mark.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Well, all right, but you'll have to be quiet.

(Dim lights reveal DEVON TRAMORE, a petite girl seated in a barren room with brain scanning equipment, her bald head bandaged and tucked beneath a helmet adorned with wires.)

ACTOR #4

So Doctor Maywood escorted Mister Tramore to a window in a room where Devon was sitting quietly, attempting to silence her fevered mind. But we can hear the thoughts she's trying to suppress.

DEVON

Chill, chill, think cool, think water, think floating, like I'm deep in the ocean, like I'm diving for pearls instead of wasting my life in this fucking hole so my head won't blow off! I'm doomed, I'm fucking doomed!

(BERNARD and DOCTOR MAYWOOD appear, observing Devon.)

BERNARD

Christ almighty, did you have to shave her head?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I'm afraid so.

BERNARD

What are those gadgets?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Positron tomography scanners. They convey images of activity in the basal ganglia and thalamus, and that one over there monitors the phases of her headaches. Right now she's in "prodrome," a warning phase.

DEVON

I smell bourbon. Is somebody there?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Soon she'll move into the "aura stage" where she sees sparkling lights and occasionally hallucinates.

DEVON

Daddy, is that you?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Then comes the pain -- on the left side where the impact was hardest. It brings on dizziness and sometimes vomiting, and finally there's the "resolution" when she loses consciousness.

DEVON

Shit! It's starting.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Look, it's starting already.

DEVON

Little floaties lighting up one by one.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

This red area shows her visual cortices flaring up.

DEVON

Whole hives of hornets are dancing up my arms.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Prepare yourself: sometimes she screams.

DEVON

I'm going, I'm going off, off, ohhhhhhhhhhhhh...

(DEVON moans, rocking back and forth.)

BERNARD

What's happening now?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

We think she thinks she's riding a horse.

BERNARD

Oh, Devy. Lord, how I wish I could bundle her up and take her home.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Sometimes all we can do is be patient and pray.

BERNARD

I thought you doctors put your faith in science.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

We do, but her day nurse works wonders. She was raised in one of those Creole religions, so she chants and burns incense.

BERNARD

Are we talking voodoo?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Something like that. It's perfectly harmless, and I don't subscribe to alternative cures, but I have to admit just the sound of Retama's voice decreases the swelling.

(DEVON ceases rocking and screams!)

DEVON

Aiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiieeeeeeeeeeee!!!

BERNARD

Jesus! What's happening?!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

(referring to the scanner) Prodigious spikes indicate excruciating pain. Look at those neurons misfiring.

BERNARD

Can't you do something?!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

If it continues at this intensity, I'll inject nerve blockers directly to the head.

DEVON

(sighs and slumps) Ahhhhhh...

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Now what the dickens? See those spikes dropping? By golly, she's coming out of it.

BERNARD

Thank Christ!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Now that's peculiar. Look here: this line indicates deep delta sleep, yet there's extreme heightened activity. This is very strange.

ACTOR #1

Strange indeed. In fact, Devon was having her first out-of- body experience.

DEVON

Whooooooa!

(Music is heard as DEVON leaps forward, leaving her helmet, twirling about with graceful gestures until SHE stops, facing her chair.)

DEVON

Holy shit! The pain's gone but so am I! I'm not even sitting in my chair! I mean, I am, I can see myself, which means my mind's out here and my body's still there. This is so weird, and I'm totally sober, totally. Oh, shit, what if I'm history? Fuck! I wanted to leave this place alive!

(DEVON glides towards BERNARD and DOCTOR MAYWOOD.)

ACTOR #1

Devon soon discovered that she could pass through walls, and found herself standing beside her father and Doctor Maywood.

DEVON

Hey, Daddy! Doc! Look over here! It's me, the local freak show!

ACTOR #4

Devon realized that although she could eavesdrop on them, they were unable to see her.

DEVON

Shit!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Her blood pressure's down and her tremors are gone.

DEVON

I guess that means I'm still alive, ha, ha!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

The trouble is just when we think she's better, the pain strikes again with the same severity or worse, but believe me, Mister Tramore, I can empathize. Most of my patients are martyrs to migraines. They try acupuncture, biofeedback, exotic herbs, and my own sister was partial to Vicodin cocktails -- which is why she swallowed a whole bottle with a shaker full of gin.

BERNARD

So you're saying she...?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

On a Sunday in July.

BERNARD

That's not very comforting, but I'm sorry to hear it.

ACTOR #4

Devon was sorry too, and tried to console Doctor Maywood with a stroke of her hand, a gesture that sent her...

DEVON

Whooooooa....

ACTOR #4

...spinning back to her body.

(DEVON returns to her chair.)

DEVON

I guess there's some kind of leash with this trick!

BERNARD

(shaking Maywood's hand) Thank you, Doctor, I know you'll do your best for my little girl. Now I'll be stopping by the track on my way home. There's a horse in the fourth named Brain Fever, and in the fifth there's a long shot named Li'l Baldy -- sounds like a daily double to me. Care to make a wager?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

No, sir.

(BERNARD departs.)

ACTOR #1

Doctor Maywood returned to check on Devon and noticed the monitor indicating...

ACTOR #1
...an increase in swelling.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
An increase in swelling...?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD
Damnation!

(As ACTOR #1 speaks, Devon's nurse, RETAMA SOLANO, enters. She wears a bandana, and speaks with a Caribbean accent.)

ACTOR #1
There seemed sufficient time for verbal sedation, so Doctor Maywood paged Retama Solano who implored Devon to...

ACTOR #1
...think of nothing.

RETAMA
Think of nothing,...

RETAMA
...nothing at all. Imagine the pitch black vastness that existed before creation. Hidden inside lies the deepest, darkest, densest of holes that is the source of our souls before the bokors of this earthly life came to harm us. From the void you were created and to the void you shall return, to the heart of oblivion, forgetfulness, and nothing,...

RETAMA
...nothing, nothing,...

DEVON
Nothing, nothing,...

DEVON
...fan-fucking-tastic!

(Music as DEVON, RETAMA, DOCTOR MAYWOOD and the ACTORS become HORSES again, galloping as the TRACK ANNOUNCER recounts the race.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE
Mister Emory grabs the lead followed by Ignatz Katz! Crown Ruby is right there in third, and here comes Sir Edward's Eyes with Esa's Pride forced wide but heading inside. And the early trailer is Devil Dog Six, running eight lengths off the leaders!

(The HORSES freeze, then ACTOR #3 steps aside with INSPECTOR VERNON LAROCHE and the jockey, ELLIS HASTINGS. All the jockeys wear colorful silk jackets and speak with southern accents.)

ACTOR #3

Vernon Laroche was assigned to investigate the race and interview the jockeys. He started with Ellis Hastings who rode Wolverine, the horse in front of...

ACTOR #3

...Senor Pepe.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Senor Pepe,...

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

...broke down and was euthanized. Now in your statement, you said that Wolverine was faltering, showing signs of stress in the right front leg, so you eased him out of the race.

ELLIS

Yeah, at the eighth pole. I figured we were three lengths ahead when I felt him dip, so I pulled back.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Wolverine was odds on, and the track vet said he was fine.

ELLIS

Well, he wasn't. He hadn't raced in a month 'cause he'd pulled a ligament, but he needed more time.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I asked an independent vet to X-ray all four legs. He found nothing but a slight bruise on his left hind hock.

ELLIS

Look, I ride hundreds of horses, and I know what I feel! What's goin' on anyway? Is Devon claimin' a foul against me?! 'Cause I already said I didn't see her comin', and if anyone says different, it's a fuckin' lie!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did you and Miss Tramore get along?

ELLIS

Sure.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

You're not uncomfortable with a woman in the jockeys' room?

ELLIS

I got used to her, we all did. Look, most jocks respect each other. If we get pissed and hold grudges, they can't last 'cause people get hurt.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did Miss Tramore hold grudges?

ELLIS

Let's just say she didn't like guys makin' cracks.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What sort of cracks?

ELLIS

You know, like "how come you're not home bakin' pies?" -- stuff like that.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did you make those sort of cracks?

ELLIS

Maybe at first. Look, Devon's a hustler, really wants to ride, but lots of trainers don't ride girls, so she gets frustrated, and you know how girls get when they're frustrated.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Suppose you enlighten me.

ELLIS

Some get nasty, especially if they're hung over or havin' their monthlies. Look, bottom line: they resent it when you get the decent mounts and they think they're just as good.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

But they're not?

ELLIS

It's the quads -- they don't have the strength to control a thousand pound horse. They're women for chrissake; they're not built for ridin'.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Really? I would think it might suit them. After all, there's nothing between their legs to get in the way. Just one more question: was Miss Tramore as good as the guys?

ELLIS

Well, yeah, but she's the only one, and that's 'cause she knows horses, has a natural feelin' for 'em.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Of course, one wonders, if she's so good, why couldn't she maneuver Senor Pepe out of harm's way.

ELLIS

Pepe was slow to react, and she should've taken him out wide. 'Course, he's gone now, and I hear she's so busted she can't take a piss for the pain.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Thank you, Mister Hastings, and by the way, it was not Miss Tramore who initiated this inquiry; it was the Chairman of the Louisiana Racing Commission. It seems formal charges have been filed.

ELLIS

What charges?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

That the race was fixed.

ELLIS

Bullshit!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

There's speculation that Devon's accident was no accident, that she was set up.

ELLIS

Who says so? Was it Fonner Brighton?!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I'm not at liberty to say.

ELLIS

You tell that bastard to mind his own goddamn business!

(ELLIS marches off as GOWRAN GILLESPIE enters.)

ACTOR #3

Later that day, Inspector Laroche interviewed the other jockeys beginning with...

ACTOR #3
...Gowran Gillespie.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
Gowran Gillespie?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
Now you were riding the horse that stepped on Devon Tramore.

GOWRAN
I got locked in with no place to go. The stewards said it's not my fault.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
We're still reviewing the tape.

GOWRAN
You try stoppin' a horse goin' thirty-five miles an hour!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
Relax, Mister Gillespie.

GOWRAN
I don't know what you want me to say.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
How would you rate Miss Tramore as a jockey? Did you consider her competent?

GOWRAN
Yeah, sure, the main thing is the horses liked her. They ran like hell for her.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
Then why didn't she get more mounts?

GOWRAN
For one thing her agent's no prize, and besides, she's young so folks think she's green, and she can be uppity.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
You said the horses liked her; what about the jockeys?

GOWRAN
Sure, what's not to like?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE
You just said she's uppity.

GOWRAN

Yeah, well, she gloated when she won. You know, hooped and hollered and bragged about how great she was, how she's gonna be the best jockey in Louisiana, bar none.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Was she being unrealistic?

GOWRAN

Looks like it now, don't it?

(The INSPECTOR turns towards CHESTER BLAIN.)

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What about you Mister...?

CHESTER

Blain -- Chester Blain.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What did you think of Devon Tramore?

CHESTER

She's okay -- 'course I hated her bein' such a pip-squeak. While we're heavin' and steamin', she's eatin' double cheese pizzas and fries. That's 'cause she's a girl and naturally smaller which really ain't fair.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

And you must be Perth Dunstall. Tell me, what's your opinion of Miss Tramore's handling of Senor Pepe?

CHESTER

She handled him good as anybody.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I'm asking Mister Dunstall.

PERTH

Devon's a fine, competitive rider. She's kind with the whip, never fouls another jockey -- she's a true professional.

CHESTER

In more ways than one.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What do you mean?

PERTH

(glaring at Chester) He means she can do more than just ride. She knows breeding and training, and everything there is to know about a horse's anatomy.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

So you gentlemen agree that Miss Tramore was a capable jockey?

GOWRAN

Yeah.

CHESTER

Sure.

PERTH

Yes.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What do you think of the accusation that Ellis Hastings was deliberately trying to harm Miss Tramore?

CHESTER

It's a crock. Ellis wouldn't hurt Devon. Hell, he was always eyeballin' her.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Really? Was he...intrusive?

CHESTER

If you mean did she mind,...

PERTH

That's enough, Chester!

CHESTER

(ignoring Perth) At least if Ellis could ride the race over, he'd let his horse take the fall, but Devon -- hell, she'd never sacrifice a horse.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Maybe she trusts them more. *(pause)* I checked the hospital visitors log, and noticed none of you boys have come calling.

PERTH

We were told she's too sick for visitors, so we sent flowers.

CHESTER

Yeah, we heard she's bald as a cue ball, and her brain's so scrambled she's ridin' horses that ain't there.

GOWRAN

Jesus, Chester...

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I understand there was another jockey in the race, a Mister Cluny.

CHESTER

Old Frenchie's not a regular here. He's back home, in New Orleans.

(The JOCKEYS disperse as lights reveal DEVON moaning beneath her helmet as ACTOR #3 speaks.)

ACTOR #3

Back at the hospital, Devon began to master the art of leaving her body when the headaches became too painful.

DEVON

Yooooooooowwww!

ACTOR #2

Soon she began to welcome the pain, so she could fly through the corridors and observe the other patients. Then one day...

DEVON

I'm sick of this nut house! I'm going to mama's farm!

(DEVON leaps out from under her helmet and twirls around the stage.)

ACTOR #2

The moment she spoke, Devon found her soul-self standing in the fields of Tramore Farms with two familiar horses and one she'd never seen.

(CROWN RUBY, IGNATZ KATZ, and DEVIL DOG SIX appear grazing about the stage.)

DEVON

Awesome! I'm here; really here! There's Crown Ruby and Ignatz Katz. Hey, there, Ruby.

CROWN RUBY

(whinnying) Ppprrrrrrbbbrrrrr...

DEVON

(to Devil Dog Six) And who are you? You must be new. I wonder if y'all can tell I'm here?

CROWN RUBY

(whinnying and nodding) Pppbbbbbrrreeehheee...

IGNATZ KATZ

Ppppprrbbrrrrrrr...

DEVON

(stroking Devil Dog Six) You're really big, really beautiful. You let me get right in your face. Can you feel my breath mingling with your own?

DEVIL DOG SIX

(whinnying and nodding) Ppprbbbbbrrreeehhheee...

DEVON

You know, my very first memory was of the rear end of a Clydesdale, Old Skeeter, hauling a red wagon with me and mama inside.

(Music as the HORSES encircle DEVON.)

ACTOR #4

The horses surrounded Devon, and at first it startled her.

DEVON

Hey, back off!

ACTOR #2

Then Devon's feet began to tingle.

DEVON

Ouch! Ouch!

(DEVON gallops in place as an eerie humming is heard.)

DEVON

Somebody's tickling my feet with firey feathers. They're burning straight through my boots! Yooowwww!

(The THREE HORSES start galloping with DEVON.)

DEVON

Shhhiiittt! Electric sparks are flying, shooting right up my legs, my spine, my neck, ohhh!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I heard she was underemployed, so did this make her envious of the men?

JEAN-PIERRE

No, only of their opportunities.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I'm told that when she won, she boasted in an unseemly way.

JEAN-PIERRE

True, but winning is exhilarating, is it not? Why should it not be as appealing to women as it is to men? But it was not the winning so much as the riding, and she would ride any mounts that were offered.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

By "mounts" I assume you mean horses.

JEAN-PIERRE

Devon was a girl, a restless girl who wished to be relieved of her virginity, and when a girl has a virile thoroughbred racing between her legs, it can be...arousing.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did the men respond?

JEAN-PIERRE

Let us say the jockeys' room was the scene for some erotic exactas and trifectas.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Really? Then it's possible Ellis Hastings had reasons for wanting Devon out of his life?

JEAN-PIERRE

Who am I to say, Inspector? If you really wish to know more, you should read the little red datebook Devon keeps in her locker.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

All right, I will. Now forgive my imprudence, but did Miss Tramore ever attempt to seduce you?

JEAN-PIERRE

Let us say we had a brief encounter while celebrating a profitable victory. We shared a bottle of Bordeaux, and later, well...we all have our regrets.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Then it wasn't...satisfactory?

JEAN-PIERRE

Au contraire, I can still see her eyes blazing, her back arched, her thighs grasping like a vice till my heart went poppity-pop-pop!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Do you still think about her?

JEAN-PIERRE

The word is "possessed," Inspector. I am possessed.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Is it possible the other jockeys feel the same?

JEAN-PIERRE

Look into their eyes, Inspector. They are filled with desire, some more than others, but we are none of us the same.

(The focus turns to DEVON seated under her helmet, rocking and nickering as RETAMA SOLANO and DOCTOR MAYWOOD appear, and ACTOR #3 speaks.)

DEVON

(nicking softly) Pppppbbbrrrrrrheee...

ACTOR # 3

Meanwhile, back at the hospital...

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

That damn snorting is very disconcerting! Can't you do something?

RETAMA

She cannot hear me. Some devil's got her good, or she's thinking of horses.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

She shouldn't be thinking at all! Look at her nostrils flaring -- damndest thing I've ever seen!

RETAMA

Her habits are changing. She eats only vegetables and sweets, and this morning I found her sleeping on the floor.

DEVON

(whinnying) Pppppbbbrrrrrrheee...

RETAMA

Mambo Santa Anita would call this a manifestation of a soulful bonding with horses.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

No offense, Retama, but people don't form soulful bonds with totally different species. Animals may have feelings, but they're not capable of lasting empathy or self awareness.

RETAMA

How do we know? We are all animals, are we not? In Vodoun there is a spirit called Baka who can take the form of animals. Perhaps Baka has entered Devon's body as a horse.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

That's superstitious mumbo jumbo, and an educated woman ought to know better.

RETAMA

I know what I believe, and if Baka has entered Devon, then she's in grave danger.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Shhhush, she's waking up.

DEVON

Hey, Doc, would you please get me more drugs 'cause I'm back in the saddle and that band in my head's playing bongos again.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

What do you mean "back in the saddle"?

(DEVON leaps from her chair and starts galloping!)

DEVON

(whinnying) Ppppppbbrrrheee...

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Jesus Christmas!

RETAMA

(gasping) Ahhh! My god!

(Music as DEVON's galloping is superseded by the hoof clomping of all the ACTORS becoming HORSES again.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

We're approaching the first turn of The Dixie Derby! Mister Emory is in command by four lengths. Very close for second are Esa's Pride and Ignatz Katz, running side by side, stride for stride. Next comes Crown Ruby followed by Sir Edward's Eyes who is dropping behind to join Devil Dog Six at the back of the pack.

(The HORSES disperse as DEVIL DOG SIX steps aside and DEVON'S soul-self approaches. SHE leaps on DEVIL DOG'S shoulders as ACTOR #2 narrates.)

ACTOR #2

Back at Tramore Farms, Devon's spirit was taking daily rides.

DEVON

Hey, look, mama's coming! She can't see me, but let's show her some fancy riding!

ACTOR #2

Josselin Tramore was approaching with Inspector Laroche at her side, explaining the origins of...

ACTOR #2

...Devil Dog Six.

JOSSELIN

Devil Dog Six...

JOSSELIN

...is sired by Running Dog, a champion turf runner. Isn't he the most gorgeous hunk of horseflesh you've ever seen?

DEVIL DOG SIX

(whinnying) Pppppbrrrrrrrrrrrrr....

JOSSELIN

Look at the fancy footwork!

(DEVIL DOG SIX gallops with DEVON in a circle.)

JOSSELIN

I can't believe my luck. Those dumb ass crackers at Huntington Bowers refused to take him 'cause the owner's an Arab. I can't wait till Devon sees him. I'm hoping to talk the owner into letting her ride.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

You're certainly optimistic about her recovery.

JOSSELIN

The Dixie Derby's in seven months. By then Devon will be riding, you mark my words.

DEVON

You tell him, mama! Now, let loose, Devil!

(DEVIL DOG SIX and DEVON gallop off.)

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

You may have heard, there's an investigation into Devon's accident.

JOSSELIN

There usually is with insurance claims.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Yes, ma'am, but there's speculation that the race was...well, sabotaged.

JOSSELIN

(pause) Sabotaged...? Are you saying Devon was set up?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Devon or her horse or...

JOSSELIN

My god! You mean somebody deliberately tried to cripple my baby?!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

No, ma'am, so far there's no proof of infractions of any kind.

JOSSELIN

There better not be or the bastards will rot in hell!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

As I said...

JOSSELIN

I'll belt whip and shoot the sons of bitches with my own bare hands!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I'm sorry, I didn't intend to upset...

JOSSELIN

Ellis clipped her, and Gowran stomped her! I witnessed the whole travesty!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

But you never suspected foul play?

JOSSELIN

No, 'cause it's too vile and despicable to even consider. 'Course any fool can sense their resentment.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Because she's a woman?

JOSSELIN

'Cause she invaded their precious jockey room! They can't stand to see a girl as good as they are, much less winning with long shots which is Devon's specialty. Trouble is, jockey chauvinism in Louisiana is the worst in the country. They can't abide her taking what they think is their god given right to make all the money. I've been there, so I know.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Haven't things changed since you were a jockey?

JOSSELIN

If they had, there'd be more girls riding.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Tell me, does your husband feel as you do?

JOSSELIN

Not anymore. Bernard's hoping she'll quit 'cause he wants her safe like any daddy would. He says girls are hard wired to be different than guys, and that's just dandy, but that doesn't mean we have to keep sweeping shit while y'all ride home to glory. It's long past time for us to be having some of the fun.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, it does seem that Devon has had some fun.

JOSSELIN

Oh, she just loves being a jockey. It's in her blood 'cause it's in mine, and the horse is our sign in Chinese astrology. Truth is, when Dev came along, I thought I'd lost my future, but we have a fine life and strong connection, which is why I know she'll be making a comeback.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Yes, well, I hope so. Now can you tell me anything about Devon's social life?

JOSSELIN

Jockeys rise too early to be fooling around all night, and when Devon's not racing horses, she's exercising or rubbing them down. She loves it all.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Girls sure do have a fondness for horses. I've got two daughters, and they go riding every chance they get.

JOSSELIN

How old are they?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

One's ten and the other's twelve.

JOSSELIN

Then that's perfectly natural. By then they've seen enough of their mama's lives to realize they're not getting as much respect as their daddy's -- which is why they start relating to horses instead of men. At least that's how I see it.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Yes, well, thank you for your time, Mrs. Tramore, and now I need to chat with Fonner Brighton. Is he here?

JOSSELIN

Why? Is he in trouble?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

No, ma'am.

JOSSELIN

Good, 'cause he's the best groom we've ever had. Fact is, I'm thinking of promoting him to assistant trainer. You'll find him at the stables, right down that road.

(JOSSELIN departs while ACTOR #3 speaks as FONNER BRIGHTON, BERNARD TRAMORE, and OMER NAD AL SHEBA convene by the stables. FONNER is African-American, and OMER speaks with an Arabic accent.)

ACTOR #3

While Inspector Laroche strolled across Tramore Farms, Fonner Brighton and Bernard Tramore were getting acquainted with Omer Nad al Sheba, the owner of...

ACTOR #3

...Devil Dog Six.

OMER

Devil Dog Six...

OMER

...hails from Exeter in England and is a descendant of the valiant Running Dog. The six represents his being the sixth foal of the brood mare, Devilry.

BERNARD

So how long have you had him?

OMER

He was procured as a yearling for frugal sums since he resists containment and is stout in the flanks. But I perceived innate aptitudes. *(to Fonner)* As his groom, you know of what I converse.

FONNER

We're gettin' to know each other all right. He doesn't appreciate gettin' shoved into the van, but once he's at the track, he's rarin' to run.

BERNARD

I can tell by his workout he's going to be a closer.

OMER

On this we concur.

BERNARD

I understand you bought yourself a fine old house by our oil fields -- ought to make you feel right at home. Of course, it must be a real culture shock with all our drinking and gambling and carrying on.

OMER

We Saudis glimpse American life on the internet and television.

FONNER

I hear you can't even look at a woman, so how do y'all get together?

OMER

Most marriages are contracted by parents, or we attend cafes where we inscribe our smartphone numbers on paper and pitch it towards the woman. If a fellow is fortunate, she will retrieve it, although I encountered my own wife through my sister.

FONNER

You only have one wife?

OMER

Yes, I have succumbed to decadent American values.

BERNARD

So what do your Saudi friends think of you having a woman trainer?

OMER

(smiling) More decadence.

(INSPECTOR LAROCHE enters.)

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Good afternoon, I'm Inspector Laroche. I'm looking for Fonner Brighton.

FONNER

I'm Fonner.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, I'd like to have a little chat if you don't mind. I hope I'm not interrupting you gentlemen.

BERNARD

No, sir, not at all. I'm Bernard Tramore, and this is Omer Nad Al Sheba, the owner of Devil Dog Six.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I've seen your horse, sir, and he's a fine animal.

OMER

Ah, yes, magnificent! And now I must depart to bestow his ration of peppermints.

(OMER departs.)

BERNARD

You look disappointed, Fonner. Did you expect him to be wearing one of them Arab head scarves?

FONNER

Yeah, and ridin' a camel besides, ha, ha!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(to Bernard) I'm sorry to hear about your daughter, though your wife seems to think she'll make a full recovery.

BERNARD

That's highly unlikely, but before this spill, she had legs as strong as a man's, and her hard little hands -- firm for the course but gentle on the horse. You top that with the balance of a gymnast, and pound for pound she was world class -- world class!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Mister Tramore, would you mind if I questioned Mister Brighton in private? Then I'd like to speak with you, if I may.

BERNARD

I'll be at the house. Got any tips on the Swamp Stakes?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I've got my eye on Loebelly.

BERNARD

Hmmm, I was thinking of boxing him with The Bubster and Rozino.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I've heard you're a regular investor.

BERNARD

It's my sole source of income, but it's a tough season. Might as well let whimsy guide me for all the good it does reading the Form. Come to think of it, there's a horse named Whimsical in the sixth. What the hell?

(BERNARD departs.)

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Now, Fonner, the first thing I want to know is why Devon has your name and number in her little red book?

FONNER

There's plenty of other names there too.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Yes, but yours has a heart by it. Were you two dating?

FONNER

As a matter of fact we were.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

How is it that her mama doesn't know this?

FONNER

'Cause Devon kept her personal life private.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Just how personal?

FONNER

If you mean did we have sex, that's none of your damn business.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Now what do you suppose the Tramores would think of you dating their daughter?

FONNER

They'd pretend to tolerate it, then do everythin' possible to wreck it, which is why I'd appreciate your not mentioning it.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I'll be the soul of discretion.

FONNER

Mister Tramore thinks Devon's finished. He wants her to put up a white picket fence, and make him a grandpa. But I know Devon; she'd rather be stone dead than quit ridin'.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

It must be a challenge -- dating a jockey.

FONNER

No, but it might have bothered some of the jockeys that she was datin' a groom.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

So they knew?

FONNER

One of the valet's saw us in Shreveport.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did it bother you that Devon was going out with other jockeys?

FONNER

Devon doesn't go out with jockeys.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(retrieving the red book) Well now, let's see: there's Perth Dunstall, Chester Blain, Gowran Gillespie, and a dozen others.

FONNER

Yeah, but that's not a datin' book; that's a ratin' book. Dev was big on keepin' score. Those are the jocks she was competin' with. If you notice all those slashes by their names -- that's the number of times she beat 'em in a race.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Now I may be wrong, but I got the impression that Devon was a regular social butterfly.

FONNER

Whoever told you that was lyin'.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

As a matter of fact, it was Jean-Pierre Cluny.

FONNER

Cluny the Loony?! He's pullin' your leg!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

He seemed pretty convincing, and he told me where to find the book.

FONNER

Hell, everybody knows about that book. Shhhhhit! Did you really think she was shaggin' all those guys?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, he said the jockey room was the scene of "erotic exactas and trifectas."

FONNER

That's bullshit! Devon's a girl in a guys' world so sometimes she's a tease, but that's all. It's just flirtin' cause everybody flirts, and maybe that's her way of gettin' back at them, you know, by distractin' them, throwin' off their ride while she sits it out.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did you ever witness her flirting?

FONNER

Only once, and all she did was blow the guy a kiss, and besides, she's not that popular.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

And why's that?

FONNER

'Cause she's always talkin' shop, always analyzin' every race, but most guys just wanna move on to the next, 'specially older guys like Chester. He hates the pressure and keepin' up with the stats, but Devon's young and loves every minute of it, and that's hard for some guys to take.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

So she's ambitious?

FONNER

Yeah, and her ma rides her hard, but that girl has dreams of her own, big dreams.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Does she share them with you?

FONNER

Yeah, but I ain't gonna share 'em with you.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, would you mind sharing your opinion about the race? What happened?

FONNER

I think Ellis pretended not to hear Devon when she was callin' from behind, warnin' him she was there. Jocks know when someone's gainin' on them by the sounds they make, and Devon always made these clickity sounds, you know, ccckkxxx, ccckkxxx, ccckkxxx.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Ellis claims he didn't see her, and pulled back to save his horse.

FONNER

Bullshit! Wolverine was fine and even if he wasn't, Ellis had plenty of room to move aside and let her pass. Check out the tape. There's no way she wasn't makin' those sounds 'cause her lips were movin'. Look for yourself, look real close.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Seems to me that you're pretty upset.

FONNER

Upset? Nah, I'd like to kill the Judas son of a bitch -- which is why I'm real glad you're investigatin'.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Just one more question: would you mind telling me what attracted you to Devon?

FONNER

She's got everythin': looks, brains, and she never cared that I was black and she was white. Truth is, she craved me and I craved her, and I don't mind saying it. Trouble is, I'm still flashin' back to her little body all crumpled on that track like it happened yesterday. It just ain't right, it just ain't, and y'all better do somethin' about it.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

We'll certainly try, and don't you do anything foolish.

FONNER

I may not stick around. I've been offered a job at Delta Downs.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Congratulations.

(Music as FONNER becomes DEVIL DOG SIX and the other FIVE HORSES join him in continuing the race.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Three quarters of a mile to go, and they're heading up the backstretch! Esa's Pride moves up to get on even terms with Mister Emory. They're followed by Ignatz Katz, Crown Ruby, and Sir Edward's Eyes -- all bunched together, three across the track! Devil Dog Six is still the trailer, and drifting towards the rail.

(The HORSES disperse as ACTOR #2 speaks, and DEVON spins her way to Tramore Farms, approaching IGNATZ KATZ and CROWN RUBY.)

ACTOR #2

A week after Inspector Laroche visited Tramore Farms, Devon decided to do her own investigating.

DEVON

Hello there, Ignatz, can you hear me?

IGNATZ KATZ

(nodding and whinnying) Ppppprrrrrrbbbbbrrrr...

DEVON

Remember that claiming race when Senor Pepe went down, and me with him? It's a long time ago, but do you remember Wolverine? You used to team-work a half mile with him.

IGNATZ KATZ

(nodding) Pppppbbbbbrrrrrrr...

DEVON

The thing I need to know is did Wolverine really falter or did Ellis pull back so he wouldn't win?

(IGNATZ KATZ confers with CROWN RUBY.)

IGNATZ KATZ

(whinnying) Ppppprbbbbbrrrrr...

CROWN RUBY

Ppppprbbbbbrrrrr...

DEVON

Well, was Wolverine pissed when he didn't win the race?

IGNATZ KATZ

(nodding with a snort) Bbbbbbbrrrrrskkk!

DEVON

How did Wolverine feel about his jockey that day?

IGNATZ KATZ

(whinnying, stomping the ground) Ppprrrrbbbbbrrrr!!

CROWN RUBY

Ppppprbbbbbrrrrr...

DEVON

Thanks!

(IGNATZ KATZ and CROWN RUBY gallop off as DEVON spins back to her hospital room.)

ACTOR #1

The next morning Devon woke up without a headache.

DEVON

Cool...

ACTOR #1

This meant she no longer required the meditation chamber, and Doctor Maywood permitted visitors.

(DOCTOR MAYWOOD, RETAMA, and BERNARD gather by Devon's bed.)

ACTOR #1

Unfortunately, Devon was attracting...

ACTOR #1

...flies.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Flies!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

We don't know where they're coming from or why, but every bluebottle in Bossier wants a piece of Devon.

DEVON

It bites, but it's better than those damn headaches.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Now I know you were counting on taking Devon home soon, but I want your permission to keep her here for further observation.

BERNARD

Why? Isn't she healing right?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I've consulted three other neurologists. Although the sub-cranial swelling's receded, we have reason to believe that Devon's trauma has caused some... (*Devon emits a snort*) abnormalities.

DEVON

They think I'm a freak.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Mr. Tramore, if you don't mind, I'd prefer to continue this discussion in my office.

DEVON

Go ahead, you boys have a field day!

ACTOR #1

So Doctor Maywood led Mister Tramore to his office while Retama Solano remained with Devon.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Mister Tramore, I'm afraid Devon's starting to...well, she snorts and whinnies and stomps around like she's half horse. And lately she only drinks water and eats cereal and leafy greens.

BERNARD

(pause, then chuckling) Heh, heh, why that little devil. If I know Devy -- and believe me, I do -- she's playing tricks to drive y'all crazy!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I don't believe that's the case because... *(he sighs)* well, frankly, she refuses to bathe and she's starting to smell like a barn in July.

BERNARD

Oh, Devy, Devy! That girl was born making mischief! Next she'll be leaving hoof prints!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Please, Mister Tramore...

BERNARD

And piles of manure! You know, Doctor, a Cajun hot walker once told Devon she was more horse than woman. He didn't mean it as an insult; it's just that she likes them so much, it makes her kind of frisky. Well, after that she couldn't get near him without whinnying up a storm and stamping her feet.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

That's very amusing, but trust me when I say this is more than a childish prank. This is a morbid compulsion, and I'm calling it equineomania.

BERNARD

Equineomania my ass!

(BERNARD and DOCTOR MAYWOOD freeze as ACTOR #4 speaks.)

ACTOR #4

Meanwhile, Retama Solano was taking Devon's pulse when Devon decided it was...

ACTOR #4

...time to explain.

DEVON

Time to explain...

DEVON

...what's been happening -- mostly at night. *(pause)* I can leave my body, like my soul's slipping out of my skin, and I can fly wherever I want!

RETAMA

My god, girl! In Vodoun, we believe our souls are composed of a gros bon ange and a ti bon ange, a large guardian angel and a small one. They say the small one leaves the body during sleep.

DEVON

I don't know shit about angels. All I know is what I can do, and trust me, I'm wide awake.

RETAMA

They say some people remain conscious.

DEVON

Then you believe me?

RETAMA

Yes.

DEVON

Thank Christ! *(pause)* You didn't zap some spell on me, did you?

RETAMA

I only prayed to Ogou Balanjo, the spirit of healing. You know, Devon, these weeks of sitting in silence may have widened the boundaries of your mind.

DEVON

Yeah, 'cause you wouldn't believe where I've gone and what I've seen.

RETAMA

Tell me.

DEVON

For awhile I stayed here, spying on zoned out patients which was not a happy scene, so one day I flew to mama's farm to see the horses. After a few trips, I started to figure out their language which includes their ears, eyes, noses, and tails, and I'm beginning to listen, really listen.

(RETAMA and DEVON freeze as the focus shifts to Doctor's Maywood's office.)

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

My theory is that Devon was in such excruciating pain that to distract herself, she imagined becoming an animal, and naturally she chose a horse.

BERNARD

Well, who wouldn't want to be a healthy horse instead of a cripple? Sounds to me like a kind of creative deliverance.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

That may be, but the mind is a curious conniver, and certain pathological preoccupations can settle inside. You see, the thrust of the brain against the skull can cause wires to cross and form obsessional neural pathways. Imagine seeing nothing but reruns of the same movie clips over and over. Now we try to untangle those wires with medication and therapy, but we don't always succeed, so then we have to implant electrodes to reroute the pathways or burn them out altogether.

BERNARD

Burn them out how?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Well, it's my professional opinion that Devon's case will prove the efficacy of the latest electroconvulsive therapy.

BERNARD

(pause) Are we talking shock treatments?

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Yes, sir, we are.

BERNARD

Jesus Christ Almighty!

(BERNARD and DOCTOR MAY WOOD freeze
as the focus shifts.)

DEVON

Horses can see and hear and smell more of the earth in one afternoon than we do in a whole lifetime. When I visit, they prick up their ears and come sniffing towards me, then pass right through like I'm made of smoke. Some people think horses are dumb as dirt, but they're not. They just think one purely simple thought after another instead of all at once and twisted like we do. What's more, when I look into their eyes, they stare right back, and one of them winks, and I know he doesn't see me as a girl but as another living, breathing animal on the planet, and we know we're going to be close and it's going to be awesome.

RETAMA

That's all very fine, but we worry when you snort and gallop around your room.

DEVON

I can't help myself. If I'm gonna ride them, then I want to know them inside and out. I want to think and feel and talk like a horse. I know it's affecting my whole body, but the way I see it, this is a serious opportunity, and I don't want to blow it.

RETAMA

My god, girl, if what you say is true, then you have been given a great gift. But is it fair to know so much more than the other jockeys?

DEVON

Fair?! Bullshit! Do you think it was fair the way those peckerheads treated me?! I worshiped them when I was a kid. There was so much I needed to learn, but whenever I asked about technique or conditions, they put me down or ignored me -- so now I'm gonna know more than they ever dreamed of knowing.

(Now the separate conversations intersperse swiftly.)

BERNARD

Now listen here, Maywood: that's the most god awful thing I've ever heard, and I absolutely positively forbid it!

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

I realize how distressing...

BERNARD

We all have ways of getting through the night, and if she wants to pretend she's a horse, that's fine with me!

RETAMA

We saw the pain piercing your mind, but we did not ponder your soul.

BERNARD

You're not turning my daughter into some drooling zombie!

RETAMA

Doctor Maywood is writing about your case. He thinks you may require...

RETAMA

....electroconvulsive therapy.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Electroconvulsive therapy...

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

...can be very restorative.

DEVON

No fuckin' way!

BERNARD

Over my dead body! Fact is, I've got plans for Devy, great plans.

DEVON

I've got plans, Retama, serious plans!

BERNARD

Forget riding! I'm going to set her up teaching dressage to girls.

DEVON

I'm gonna be the best jockey in the country, maybe the world!

BERNARD

I'll sign her discharge papers now.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

She can leave, but I'm going to recommend a psychiatrist. And by the way, Inspector Laroche has asked to speak with Devon, and he wants to see me as well.

BERNARD

I suppose you'll tell him your equineomania theory.

DEVON

Promise me you'll never tell about me leaving my body.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

Everyone knows she's been acting peculiar.

RETAMA

Everyone knows you have changed.

DOCTOR MAYWOOD

The whole hospital's heard her carrying on, and that includes a nurse who's dating a jockey and a radiologist who's married to a trainer.

RETAMA

You will have to explain.

DEVON

I'll just say the accident's given me e.s.p. only it's h.s.p.: horse sensory perception, and shit, it's the truth! Watch me, Retama, that horse I was telling you about: well, he walks like this, flicking his tail. (*imitating Devil Dog Six's stride*) And when I touch down near his stall, he bobs his head and bats his big brown eyes. Sometimes he flares his nostrils 'cause he smells my scent, and then he starts nickering hello with a kind of high tone like this. (*whinnying*) Ppppprrrrbbbrreee. That's when I hop on his back, and we canter round the exercise ring like we're some kind of circus act!

(RETAMA departs, then ACTOR #1 steps forward as JOSSELIN, BERNARD, and INSPECTOR LAROCHE enter Devon's room one at a time.)

ACTOR #1

At eight o'clock the next morning, Josselin Tramore visited Devon.

JOSSELIN

(*handing Devon a riding crop*) I wanted to bring your saddle, but I brought your stick instead. Just don't tell daddy.

(JOSSELIN leaves as ACTOR #1 continues and BERNARD enters.)

ACTOR #1

At ten o'clock Bernard Tramore paid a call.

BERNARD

(*handing Devon a pie*) Now don't tell mama, but I brought you a pecan pie.

(BERNARD departs as ACTOR #2 speaks, and INSPECTOR LAROCHE enters.)

ACTOR #1

At noon Inspector Laroche stopped by.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I brought your little red book.

DEVON

That's private; I need that!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(returning the book) I'm afraid I took the liberty of looking inside, and I've spoken with Fonner Brighton. What you do on your own time is your own affair, but part of my job is to delve into the social dynamics of the jockey room -- to ensure integrity and investigate any indiscretions that might have led to your accident.

DEVON

Fonner is *not* an indiscretion -- he's my man. But if you're asking what it's like in the jockey room, I'll talk.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Please do.

DEVON

What do you think? Me and ten jocks with valets and agents and the press coming and going, all of them guys and all of them thinking they're god's gift. You wouldn't believe the stunts they pulled to get rid of me: spreading rumors that I'm a nympho who gets mounts by jerking off trainers, or putting catfish in my locker and spying on me in the shower, but mostly they just acted like I wasn't even there.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

If that's true, then it's harassment, and you had every right to report it to the ethics committee.

DEVON

Yeah, they'd really love me then.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did anyone know about you and Fonner?

DEVON

I never said a word, but Chester made a crack about me having a bad case of jungle fever, so yeah, I guess they knew.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did they ever make inappropriate advances towards you?

DEVON

Frenchy did, and Ellis tried to paw me, but I told him to take a hike.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Do you think he resented that?

DEVON

Sure, but what he really resents is anyone who rides better.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

By “Frenchy” did you mean Jean-Pierre Cluny?

DEVON

Yeah.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Did you ever share a bottle of wine?

DEVON

Yeah, ‘cause he wanted to get laid, but I sobered up. Look, those guys are like a wolf pack and I’m the chicken, and there’s nothing girls can do but wait till they die off and hope the next batch come out better.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

That’s not true; you can hire a lawyer.

DEVON

No thanks. I’ve got my own brand of justice.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I see, but you never made inappropriate advances towards the men...?

DEVON

If you’re asking did I flirt, then yeah. I smiled and whistled when they walked around naked, but I didn’t screw around if that’s what you’re asking, and it’s not that I never wanted to. When I started here two years ago, I was sixteen and had a crush on half the jocks riding. ‘Course the ones I liked blew me off, and the rest were total creeps.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Weren’t any of them friendly?

DEVON

Just Perth and sometimes Gowran, which is why I know he didn’t stomp me on purpose.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Now about the race: did you warn Ellis that you were behind him?

DEVON

I screamed my fucking head off, so maybe he’s going deaf.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Why didn't you claim a foul against him?

DEVON

I can't go there, 'cause it's my word against his, and who gives a rat's ass anyway?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

The Racing Commission, the stewards, and most of the owners, trainers, and riders -- not to mention my daughters. They're great fans of yours, which is why I've taken a special interest in this case.

DEVON

Yeah? Look, bottom line: I fell off Senor Pepe and nearly croaked. At first I hated Ellis and the whole fuckin' world 'cause I thought I was through. But now I know I'll be riding long after that lowlife's retired, and guess what? If I hadn't fallen, I'd never have known what I know now, so I'm glad!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

And just what do you know?

DEVON

I can talk to horses.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Like the horse whisperer?

DEVON

No, 'cause I don't whisper, I whinny; I speak their language.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Can you demonstrate?

DEVON

I can, but I won't 'cause it's between me and the horses.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(pause) You realize since you're unwilling to testify, this investigation may end with no conclusive evidence against Ellis.

DEVON

That's right, so close the damn case, and leave me alone.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Oh, I've got a few more angles to pursue. Now what about you, Devon? What's your prognosis? Your chances for recovery?

DEVON

I know what "prognosis" means. I'm not as dumb as I look.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I didn't mean to imply...

DEVON

Forget it! All their drugs and high tech shit can't do fuck all, so I'm healing myself. You wait: I'm going to be the first woman to win a grade one stakes in Louisiana, and I'll keep breaking records -- so if you're a gambling man, don't forget me.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Oh, I'm not likely to forget you.

(INSPECTOR LAROCHE departs as ACTOR #3 steps forward, and FONNER approaches DEVON.)

ACTOR #3

It was past visiting hours when Fonner Brighton conspired with Devon to sneak into her room.

FONNER

(stunned) Devon! Where's your pretty hair?

DEVON

Snip, snip. Now close the door and hop on in! I've been so lonely; did you miss me?

FONNER

(crawling into bed next to Devon) Every single day.

DEVON

I hear you're taking care of a new colt.

FONNER

Yeah, his name's Devil Dog Six -- biggest two year old I've ever seen, and your ma's great with him -- gettin' him real fit.

DEVON

Oh, yeah? You like hosing him down, giving him a massage? 'Cause as soon as I get out of here, I want you to do that to me.

FONNER

Yeah?

DEVON

And when my hair grows back, I want you to brush it like you brush Devil Dog's mane.

FONNER

Anything you say.

DEVON

And don't take a shower next time you come. I like it when you smell like the stables.

FONNER

You sort of smell like the stables yourself.

DEVON

If we could bottle that scent and sell it, we'd be millionaires. In fact, why don't you rub up against Devil Dog Six so you pick up his scent. Then you'll be interchangeable, and when we make love we'll be like a colt and filly.

FONNER

Then I can bite your ass and kick your shins?

DEVON

That's what I love about you, Fonner. You're as close to horses as you are to people, so you understand.

FONNER

Look, Dev, I got an offer to be foreman at Delta Downs. I'll be makin' more money.

DEVON

Shit, Fonner, you can't leave now! Besides, a foreman grooms grooms, not horses.

FONNER

I know, but...

DEVON

You've got to stay! Mama's making you her assistant, and soon as I'm riding again, we'll share my winnings, and when I win the Dixie Derby, the purse is a million dollars!

FONNER

I don't know, Dev. You sure you're gonna be strong enough?

DEVON

I may not be as strong, but I'm quick, and I've got more finesse, and don't forget timing! I always know how fast I'm going -- every fraction of every race!

FONNER

Yeah, but...

DEVON

Don't underestimate me Fonner, or we're finished!

FONNER

Fine, fine, let's not argue. Let's make love.

DEVON

Mama brought me my stick to keep me company, but let's do it different. This time, I'll be the horse and you be the jock.

FONNER

Anything you say, babe.

DEVON

Now be gentle, I'm still bruised.

(FONNER straddles DEVON, and rocks the bed to a crescendo of whinnies, then leap to join the HORSES galloping in the race.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

We're on the backstretch of The Dixie Derby with Esa's Pride taking the lead followed by Mister Emory, and three lengths off the leaders comes Ignatz Katz! In close pursuit is Crown Ruby and Sir Edward's Eyes. Devil Dog Six is being asked to pick up speed and he's responding well! Look at them run!

(The HORSES gallop, then freeze. ACTOR #2 steps forward to speak as DEVON returns to her hospital bed.)

ACTOR #2

The next day, Josselin and Bernard Tramore visited Devon at different times, but asked the same question.

(JOSSELIN and BERNARD stand at different angles near DEVON'S bed as she chomps on an apple.)

JOSSELIN
How are you feeling?

BERNARD
How are you feeling?

JOSSELIN
You keep thinking positive thoughts!

BERNARD
You take it easy, Dev.

DEVON
I'm better than ever! That spill's changed my life, fired the jets in my brain 'cause I feel smarter, more confident. My eyes and ears are sharper, so it's like having special powers.

BERNARD
You mean like telepathy?

JOSSELIN
Like E. S. P.?

DEVON
Yeah! Retama says the whole universe is intertwined with dimensions that shimmy and shake, and now I can feel them. It starts with my heart beating from a trot to a gallop, then my mind sprints out of my skull and the next thing I know I'm looking out from two big brown eyes, only they're not mine. I'm inside the horse's head, and I can hear his thoughts.

BERNARD
Now which horse would that be?

JOSSELIN
You haven't seen a horse in months!

DEVON
I have in my dreams.

JOSSELIN
Look, baby, dreaming's one thing, but nickering like a mare in heat is another.

BERNARD
You know you're scaring the bejesus out of everybody.

JOSSELIN

Please don't take offense, Dev, but...

JOSSELIN

...you smell.

BERNARD

You smell...

BERNARD

...like alfalfa.

JOSSELIN

...like you need a tub of rose water!

BERNARD

Just don't be bitter, Dev. The trick in life is to resist feeling...

BERNARD

...hate.

JOSSELIN

Hate...

JOSSELIN

...those bastards! They deserve it! Sometimes...

BERNARD

Hatred is poison!

JOSSELIN

...hatred is power.

BERNARD

It bloats you with bile or turns to tumors that suck you dry.

JOSSELIN

Every time you feel pain, you just remember the sons of bitches who put it there. Never...

JOSSELIN

....forget!

BERNARD

Forget...

BERNARD

...Dev, learn to forgive and forget.

DEVON

I'll forget, but you forget too. Stop hassling me to quit, and treating me like I'm made of glass. At least I know what I want to do. Most girls my age are waiting tables.

BERNARD

But sweetheart, do you really want to spend your prime straddling high strung horses, racing with guys too damn short to do anything else?! Don't you want to expand your horizons?

DEVON

My horizons are just like yours -- they go as far as the track, only I'm going to be a winner. You know, daddy, I could be of use to you. Why don't you take me to the paddock, and I'll listen in, see who's planning to win.

BERNARD

Stop bullshitting me, Dev.

DEVON

We'll see who's bullshitting who, and please stop blaming mama. She misses you.

BERNARD

She's too damn busy to miss me. She's training a new colt,...

JOSSELIN

I've got a colt named...

JOSSELIN

...Devil Dog Six.

BERNARD

...Devil Dog Six.

JOSSELIN

We're training him for The Dixie Derby!

BERNARD

Now don't let your mama influence you.

JOSSELIN

Don't let daddy scare you.

BERNARD

Just remember, there's plenty of ways of being great.

JOSSELIN

Never be afraid to shine, baby, 'cause shining's what it's all about!

DEVON

You want to know my future? I'm going to win so many races, you'll have to build a new wing on the house to hold my trophies! Someday soon, all the best trainers will

DEOVN (cont'd)

be begging me to ride their horses at every track in the country. I'll need my own private jet, 'cause I'll be flying to fan clubs in all fifty states full of girls even younger than me and smaller too -- 'cause even though size is everything in this macho man's world, it's our turn to rule and be cool! There's no stopping us now, and you'll see: there'll be so many wonder women jockeys and trainers, we're going to shake up the sport of kings till they call it the sport of (*whinnying*) queeeeeee hee hee heeeens!!!

(DEVON raises her fists to a jubilant whinny as lights indicate the passing of time. Then ACTOR #2 appears, as DEVON enters riding DEVIL DOG SIX while JOSSELIN watches from the side.)

ACTOR #2

Three months later Devon was at Tramore farms, where her mother supervised her recovery.

JOSSELIN

Easy, easy... Lord, I love how he's taken to you! Look at his ears prick right up!

DEVON

That's 'cause we're old friends.

JOSSELIN

Everyone thinks I'm a genius 'cause I got the Devil to calm down, but I just poured some wine in his feed, a trick I learned from a trainer in Tampa. 'Course, I don't dare tell Omer 'cause those Saudis are teetotalers.

DEVON

I can't wait to break his maiden. Promise me I'll be the first to ride him! Promise!

JOSSELIN

'Course I'll recommend you, but there's no sense in coming back too soon. You'll get hurt again if you're not ready.

DEVON

Oh, I'm ready; I'm beyond ready!

JOSSELIN

Now come on down! (*pause while helping Devon dismount*) You know, Dev, it won't be easy walking back in that jockey room. So far there's no suspension, no fine, not even a slap on the hand. Just say the word, and I'll shoot the whole damn lot of them.

DEVON

Like I told the inspector -- I have my own form of justice, and besides, I don't want to be one of those wandering demons.

JOSSELIN

What demons?

DEVON

Retama says there's these souls floating around full of hate. That's 'cause when they were living, they got screwed, and they're still so pissed, they cause heart attacks, train wrecks -- all kinds of shit.

JOSSELIN

Now don't you start falling for that voodoo hoodoo.

DEVON

I'm not, but Retama says when you drift out and come back, a part of you gets reborn, and that's how I feel.

JOSSELIN

Well, you must've been reborn in a bed of straw.

DEVON

I guess.

JOSSELIN

I'm serious! Look at your hands and nails; even your pretty white teeth are turning yellow. And why is your hair coming in so thick and coarse?

DEVON

'Cause it's my mane. (*whinnying*) Ppppprrrrbbbbbrrrr...

JOSSELIN

That's not funny, Dev! You're scarin' folks. You're even walking with a lopey stride, and I'm sick to death of these damn flies!

DEVON

That's the downside.

JOSSELIN

Look, I try to be patient, but it's time we set some rules: First, watch your mouth. There'll be no swearing, and I won't have you sleeping in the barn. I've seen you sneaking out at night, lying next to Devil Dog and Ruby, and it's not natural never mind sanitary.

DEVON

Who cares if it's where I belong?

JOSSELIN

Says who?! You're a young woman who belongs in a real bed in a real house with hot showers. Maybe you don't realize it, but you're taking your gamey odor everywhere you go. It's on your clothes, your pillows, and my slipcovers. It's fine on a horse, but downright revolting on a girl. Doctor Maywood thinks you should be seeing a psychiatrist, and your daddy and I are inclined...

DEVON

No way!

JOSSELIN

Look, Dev, I know you love horses and so do I, but there's such a thing as loving too much. Don't you want a boyfriend and a family?

DEVON

Horses are family too. They've been showing me their world, and they feel so purely -- the sweetest joy and meanest rage. Everyone thinks if we let them loose, they'd be running wild and mounting each other every chance they get, but it's not true. We've bred them till all they want to do is eat, sleep, and compete. So now we're their guardians, and they love us, mama, they love us more than we love ourselves.

JOSSELIN

That's fine, but don't you want a man in your life?

DEVON

Shush, mama, someone's coming -- over there.

JOSSELIN

Oh, damn! Brush yourself off!

(OMER enters.)

OMER

Good morning, ladies.

JOSSELIN

Hello there. My daughter's been admiring your fine horse. Devon, this is Omer Nad al Sheba, the owner of Devil Dog Six.

DEVON
Hi.

OMER
How pleasant to meet you.

JOSSELIN
You'll have to excuse Devon's appearance. She's been mucking out the stalls, but she's a superb rider, and the Devil's really taken to her.

DEVON
He's totally awesome, and I bet he wins his first race.

OMER
Ah, I was ruminating upon this very subject. (*to Josselin*) I suggest we enter Devil Dog Six in the Southern Cup Maiden Race. It occurs in three weeks, does it not?

JOSSELIN
Let's give him a little more time. He's not ready just yet.

DEVON
Sure he is! That's why he's kicking the walls of his stall! He's dying to hit the track.

JOSSELIN
Please, Dev...

DEVON
He's got great heart, so he'll run fast as he can, but not with just any jockey 'cause he hates the whip.

OMER
How can you discern this?

DEVON
'Cause he told me, and I speak horse.

JOSSELIN
Devon...

OMER
I hope it is easier to master than English. I implore your patience with my ponderous speech.

JOSSELIN
You speak very well, Omer, very eloquently.

OMER

(to Devon) Your mother is most charitable.

JOSSELIN

What I am is a trainer. I can judge Devil Dog's fitness, and trust me, he needs more time.

DEVON

No, mama, he's primed, ripe, and ready to make his first trip to the winner's circle, aren't you boy?

DEVIL DOG SIX

(whinnying and nodding) Ppprrrrbbbbbuuurr...

OMER

Indeed! I am desirous for prompt victories as are my brothers. *(to Devon)* We are altogether five investors, and keen for winning the Triple Crown but first things first, as you Americans say.

DEVON

Well, matching the horse and rider is the key to winning, and I hope you and mama won't mind if I take over exercising Devil Dog in the mornings.

OMER

I do not perceive a problem if he is amenable.

DEVON

Oh, he loves me, don't you, boy?

DEVIL DOG SIX

(whinnying and nodding) Pppppppppbbbbbrrrr...

DEVON

(whinnying) Ppppppprrrrbbbbbrrrr... I just told him to give me a peck on the cheek.

(DEVIL DOG SIX nudges Devon's cheek.)

OMER

Good heavens, he perceives your meaning! You must teach me to speak horse as well. *(to Josselin)* Now, please arrange for Devil Dog's racing debut. *(to Devil Dog)* Come, my friend, let us circumambulate the field.

(OMER and DEVIL DOG SIX walk off.)

DEVON

Shit, I hope he likes girl jockeys 'cause Arabs are famous for treating women like slaves.

JOSSELIN

Omer's not like that. After all, he hired me as his trainer, and his wife's a doctor. And now, Devon, you listen up: don't you ever contradict me in front of an owner again, hear?

DEVON

Okay, but ...

JOSSELIN

No buts! You may speak horse, but I speak trainer and I'm the boss!

DEVON

Look, I know he's ready!

JOSSELIN

Ready or not, he's racing now, and you'd damn well better be right 'cause if he gets hurt, it's on your head!

DEVON

Jesus, mama,...

JOSSELIN

Don't Jesus me! I'm bigger than you, and the next time you embarrass me, you'll be too damn sore to sit in the saddle never mind ride!

DEVON

(muttering, walking away) Oh, fuck off.

JOSSELIN

Did you say, "fuck off?"

DEVON

Yeah, 'cause you're blind! The Devil's prime, and you can't see it much less hear him tell you!

(JOSSELIN slaps DEVON across the face!)

JOSSELIN

Don't you ever sass me like that again, hear!? And while we're at it, I don't want another word about you being a goddamn horse! You're *not* a horse; you're a horse's ass! An ornery, arrogant, harebrained ass!

(JOSSELIN marches off, as Devon sobs become snorts.)

DEVON

(snorting) Knnrrrsk, knnrrrsk...

(As ACTORS #2 and #4 speak, DEVON recovers to ride DEVIL DOG SIX while JOSSELIN times him, and BERNARD reads The Daily Racing Form.)

ACTOR #2

The racing season had begun. Fonner and the horses moved to the backstretch of Louisiana Downs where Devon exercised Devil Dog Six while her mother clocked his progress, and her father gambled.

ACTOR #4

One day Mister Tramore asked Devon to accompany him to a race called...

ACTOR #4

....The Belle of the Ball.

BERNARD

(while reading) The Belle of the Ball,...

BERNARD

...for fillies and mares four years and older.

(DEVON and BERNARD stroll towards the track.)

DEVON

So what's your bet?

BERNARD

A trifecta wheel: Molly Mine on top with Binky, Cheese Louise, and Flirty Gerty.

DEVON

Forget Molly Mine. She's the favorite, but she's colicky and Binky's blinkers are bothering her. Stick with Cheese Louise, and box her with Bulis and Felippa.

BERNARD

Bulis!? Bulis is sixty to one and look at her -- she's bloated and bow legged.

DEVON

Yeah, but it's just an act. She likes to lower expectations.

BERNARD

Bow legged is bow legged, and she's taken another drop in class.

DEVON

I don't care. She's going to hit the board.

BERNARD

Oh, all right, but I'll only bet six dollars.

(Horse stomping sounds crescendo as BERNARD and DEVON cheer, and ACTOR #2 speaks.)

ACTOR #2

The horses came in as Devon predicted, with the trifecta paying nearly three thousand dollars. This made Bernard Tramore realize that his daughter had...

ACTOR #2

...real talent.

BERNARD

Real talent,...

BERNARD

...that's what you've got, Dev! Does your mama know about this?

DEVON

Nobody knows, and it depends on when the horses decide who's going to win. We got lucky this time 'cause they were sending signals in the paddock. Bulis was wiggling her ears (*twitching her ears*) like this.

BERNARD

Hells bells, I didn't know you could do that!

DEVON

My vision's better too. I can smell magnolias from miles away and sludge from the river, not to mention the bourbon on your breath and the Altoids you're sucking to cover it up.

BERNARD

Please refrain from telling your mama.

DEVON

I won't tell, but I need a favor: get mama to raise Fonner's salary. I don't want to lose him to Delta Downs. The Devil loves him to death, and we can't afford to have him depressed when he's about to make his debut.

BERNARD

I'll see what I can do.

DEVON

Shit! Don't look now, but that creepy inspector's coming this way. Let's take a hike.

(INSPECTOR LAROCHE waves and approaches.)

BERNARD

Too late. *(to Inspector Laroche)* Well, hello there! So how's the investigation coming along?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

It's on record now, so I can tell you: Senor Pepe's owner claims that Wolverine's owner paid Ellis to lose the race.

BERNARD

Jesus...

DEVON

It figures.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

So far they seem to have covered their tracks, so to speak.

BERNARD

Ellis has been top jock for most of the meeting, so why jeopardize his career -- unless he's greedy.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Or in debt. As for Devon's spill: the trouble with malicious intent is that it's very hard to prove, especially when the injured party refuses to file charges.

DEVON

That's right, so forget it. Success is the best revenge, and remember, I speak horse, which makes up for any handicaps left from my fall.

BERNARD

Now, Dev...

DEVON

(to the inspector) 'Course you don't believe me.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Oh, I believe you have a very special affinity with horses...

DEVON

If you need proof, ask my dad 'cause I just gave him a tip.

BERNARD

Well, now...

DEVON

Straight from the horse's ear!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

You know, it's hard keeping secrets at the track, and you're quite the subject of speculation. In fact, I hear Mister Al Sheba has agreed to let you ride his colt.

DEVON

That's right, the first race of Devil Dog's career, and if you boys are smart, you'll bet the ranch!

(DEVON, BERNARD, and INSPECTOR LAROCHE
depart as ACTOR #1 speaks.)

ACTOR #1

The Southern Cup Maiden Race took place the following week. It was the first time since her accident that Devon had seen her fellow jockeys. They seemed pleased to see her, but we can hear what they're thinking.

(ELLIS, CHESTER, PERTH and DEVON convene
in the jockey room, joining ACTOR #1 as GOWRAN.)

ELLIS

She's lookin' like road kill, even walks funny.

CHESTER

She's still got that tight little ass.

PERTH

How does that rat, Ellis, look her in the eye?

ELLIS

Next time the bitch goes down, it'll be her last.

GOWRAN

Everyone knows Ellis set me up to stomp her -- fuckin' psycho!

ELLIS

What's everyone gawkin' at?!

CHESTER

Where'd these flies come from?

ELLIS

Shit, why'd she have to come back?

GOWRAN

She sure is persistent.

ELLIS

Why didn't she die?!

CHESTER

(to Ellis) Did you say somethin'?

ELLIS

Who me...?

DEVON

Well, I want to say something: It's great to see y'all. I'm sure you've heard my brain's a few furlongs short of a track, and I may not be as quick as I was -- at least not yet. I guess you'd say I'm a little scared, but it's good to be in the program again. Anyway, I hope you'll be patient with me 'cause I feel like I'm learning to ride all over again.

CHESTER

Your horse sure is big, at least eighteen hands.

DEVON

Yeah, but he's green and skittish and prefers the turf, so don't expect much.

CHESTER

He's looks strong over the withers. Your ma trained him, right?

GOWRAN

The Form says he's got good breeding.

DEVON

Yeah, but he hasn't got a winner's instinct. I just hope he's got the decency to cross the finish line and not embarrass me.

CHESTER

Well, he's fifteen to one -- could be worse.

GOWRAN

Good luck, Dev.

PERTH

And welcome home.

CHESTER

Yeah.

GOWRAN

Yep.

ACTOR #4

The jockeys mounted their horses and rode the race!

(Music as the JOCKEYS (and ACTOR #4) mime mounting horses, then ride, wielding their whips. After a moment, the JOCKEYS freeze and time is suspended as ACTOR #1 becomes DEVIL DOG SIX and DEVON jumps on his shoulders, and THEY ride together.)

DEVON

Isn't this fun, Devil? Isn't this the best!? This is what we're born for! This is who we are! Not yet, babe, hold back a bit, just a bit; then as soon as we cross that next pole, you can show them what you've got. *(pause)* All right -- now! Go on, that's my Devil! Sprout those wings! We'll show those boys who's coming home a winner! Dev and the Devil, that's who! Yahooooooooooo! We're coming, we're coming, we're coming!!!! We're hooooooooome!!

(DEVON'S shouts are overtaken by the TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE:)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

What a race, ladies and gentlemen! What a race! In less than two minutes, Devil Dog Six won by ten lengths and made a track record for a seven furlong race!

(As the JOCKEYS dismount, ACTOR #4 speaks and DEVON returns with the JOCKEYS to the jockey room.)

ACTOR #4

After the race, Devon's fellow jockeys regrouped.

GOWRAN

Christ, Devon, you're ridin' good as ever!

PERTH

Better! Congratulations.

GOWRAN

That horse is a prize!

CHESTER

Devon, you fox, you knew what you had all along!

ELLIS

My grandma could've ridden that colt and won.

CHESTER

Lord, I'd love to ride him someday.

DEVON

Sorry, fellas, he's all mine.

CHESTER

What do you mean, he's "all yours"?

ELLIS

She means "mama" will make sure she's his rider.

CHESTER

Well, nothing can stop my agent from recommendin' me to his owner.

ELLIS

Chester's right. We've got higher rankings, so don't get snooty or we'll steal that horse right out from under you.

(ELLIS slaps Devon's thigh with his whip.)

DEVON

Ouch!

(DEVON grabs Ellis's whip and smacks his shoulder.)

DEVON

Fuck off, creep!

(ELLIS tries to slug DEVON who blocks his fist.)

DEVON

(whinnying) Ppppbbbrrrrr...

ELLIS

Jesus! She whinnied! Ha, ha, she whinnied!

(DEVON swings, but is blocked by PERTH while
GOWRAN and CHESTER pin back ELLIS'S arms.)

CHESTER

Goddamn, you two, cut it out!

GOWRAN

You leave her the fuck alone!

PERTH

Now stop it, both of you! For chrissake!

DEVON

You already tried to kill me once! You touch me again and I'll deck your scrawny ass!

ELLIS

Yeah, right, you and your nigger stud!

PERTH

Jesus, Ellis!

GOWRAN

Goddamn racist!

CHESTER

What'd he say?!

DEVON

I heard him and he heard me! *(to Ellis)* I speak horse, so you'd better watch yourself or I'll tell your mounts what a peckerhead you are so they rear up and drop you in the dirt!

ELLIS

Is that some kind of threat?

DEVON

Yeah, I guess it is.

PERTH

(approaching Ellis) I think Ellis needs a shower.

GOWRAN

(joining Perth) Yeah, he's stinkin' up the room.

(ELLIS marches off as DEVON scans the room.)

CHESTER

You lookin' for something?

DEVON

My little red book!

(The JOCKEYS disperse as ACTOR #3 speaks and SYDNEY BRISBANE, a reporter, approaches DEVON.)

ACTOR #3

Devil Dog Six's debut, coupled with Devon's comeback was...

ACTOR #3

...big news for Louisiana Downs.

SYDNEY

Big news for Louisiana Downs!

SYDNEY

Devon Tramore is with us today. *(to Devon)* It seems your comeback has been an unparalleled success. Of course, it's too early to tell if it's a fluke or the beginning of a winning season.

DEVON

I plan to continue winning. Today at least twenty people said they've never seen me ride, and some of them are trainers, so I'm hoping they'll give me a chance.

SYDNEY

We hear you're well acquainted with Devil Dog Six, so can you tell us anything about his personality?

DEVON

He's competitive but a charmer, always nuzzling, and he loves apples and music. He's the smartest horse I've ever known, so it's fun helping him perform.

SYDNEY

I've heard you've been a horse lover since childhood. Young girls are known for their attraction to horses, and I wonder if you have any insight into that phenomenon?

DEVON

Girls love horses 'cause they're beautiful and love us back, no questions asked. They never argue or scold, and they don't mind putting themselves in our control. The only problem is we can't marry them.

SYDNEY

Ha, ha, very funny.

DEVON

Not really.

SYDNEY

Do you have any long term goals?

DEVON

I'd like to win the Dixie Derby on my way to the Kentucky Derby and eventually score the Triple Crown.

SYDNEY

Well, I guess that's every jockey's dream.

DEVON

(snatching the microphone) Yeah, but I've got the guts, the talent, and now I've got the horse. My daddy calls that synchronicity, and that's what being an athlete's all about!

(SYDNEY BRISBANE departs as ACTOR #2 speaks, and BERNARD and JOSSELIN convene with DEVON.)

ACTOR #2

Devon rode Devil Dog Six to three more victories. She was also hired by other trainers and continued to win, place, or show.

ACTOR #4

Then two weeks before the Dixie Derby, Devon's parents summoned her into the parlor to relate...

ACTOR #4

... some unfortunate news.

BERNARD

Some unfortunate news...

BERNARD

...is about to break your heart, so sit down. *(pause, he sighs)* Your mama and your agent did everything they could, but I'm afraid Perth Dunstall's going to ride the Devil in The Dixie Derby.

JOSSELIN

It's true, baby. I protested and Fonner threatened to quit, but since it's such a prestigious race, Omer chose Perth. That's 'cause he's ranked first, and you're only fifth. 'Course we know you get fewer mounts 'cause you're still establishing yourself, but... well, that's the situation.

DEVON

(pause) Shhhhhhit!

BERNARD

We're as devastated as you are, but from Omer's investors' point of view, Perth was less of a gamble.

DEVON

But we've won every race we entered!

BERNARD

True, but people tend to credit the horse more than the jockey.

DEVON

But I know the Devil better than anyone. He'll win for me, I know it! Does Fonner know?

JOSSELIN

Yes, and he marched right up to Omer and said you'd be the best rider. I was there. He was very persuasive.

DEVON

Not persuasive enough. I'll talk to Omer myself!

BERNARD

I wouldn't do that. There's other trainers who'd love to get their hands on the Devil, and we can't jeopardize your mama's position.

DEVON

But he'll lose if I'm not on him!

JOSSELIN

Dev, you can't think that way. If the Devil wins, we all win, and maybe Omer will change his mind for future races.

DEVON

How can you say "we *all* win?" I've lost! Lost my chance at the Derby, and it's not fair! Omer knows how good I am; he knows we're a team, and he fuckin' blew us apart!

JOSSELIN

You're right, and there's no slow burning hell like not getting the chance to do what you do best, 'specially when you're as good as anybody out there.

DEVON

Not "as good" -- better! You should've fought for me, mama; you should've given Omer a choice: use Devon on the Devil or go to hell!

BERNARD

Now you know she can't do that.

JOSSELIN

Baby, please...

DEVON

Does Perth know?!

BERNARD

Yes, and he's accepted the offer.

DEVON

Then pay him to reject it!

BERNARD

That's unethical and even if we did, the next choice is Cluny.

DEVON

Cluny?! That crazy prick!

BERNARD

He's ranked second. Hell, it could've been Ellis except he's on a losing streak.

DEVON

I don't care what y'all say, I've got to do something!

JOSSELIN

No one can keep the Devil from being his best -- even with some other rider.

DEVON

Bullshit! I'll tell him to throw Perth on his butt!

BERNARD

Now, Dev...

DEVON

I'll tell him to limp like he's lame!

JOSSELIN

Devon!

DEVON

I'll put tranqs in his feed!

JOSSELIN

You're acting like a child! Now, stop this instant, you hear?!

BERNARD

Devon! Now sit here and listen: *(pause)* Naturally, we anticipated your reaction, and have devised an alternative strategy. It was your mama's idea, so go ahead, Josh, tell her.

JOSSELIN

As you know, Crown Ruby's also scheduled to run, so I'm recommending you as her jockey. Of course, Ruby's the only filly in the race, and the odds aren't in her favor.

DEVON

She can't beat the Devil -- nobody can!

JOSSELIN

At least you'll be in the race, and it's a chance to show them your stuff. You could bring her in second or third.

DEVON

I don't want second or third! I want first! The best!

BERNARD

You know, Dev, too much ambition is unseemly in a man and downright vulgar in a woman.

DEVON

That sucks.

JOSSELIN

It sure as hell does! *(to Devon)* Watch your language!

BERNARD

The point is, people who love you know how good you are, and that should be enough.

DEVON

Well, it's not!

BERNARD

Why don't you try to see this situation in the larger scheme of things? I notice you don't read anything but the Form,...

DEVON

Bullshit! I check the news on my phone.

BERNARD

Then I'm sure you're aware that every blessed minute of every day folks we'll never know are dying of diseases, depravation, whole countries are in chaos,...

DEVON

Cut to the chase!

BERNARD

All I'm saying is that one lost race is just a feedbag full of grief in a crop full of sorrow. It's not the end of the world.

DEVON

It's the end of mine, and stop making it seem puny 'cause it's not! Retama says everything we think and do matters, every man and woman carries the same weight -- one heavy metal mountain of shit.

BERNARD

So Drones dropping bombs rates the same as a girl dropping grits in a fryer?

DEVON

That's right! (*starting to leave*) Everything affects everything else, so my little feedbag means as much as your fuckin' bombs!

BERNARD

Where are you going?

DEVON

To get loaded -- you can relate.

(DEVON canters off furiously.)

JOSSELIN

My god, look how she's stepping -- just like a filly.

BERNARD

Josh, our little girl needs help, and she needs it now.

(DEVON'S canter becomes a gallop, and she's joined by the HORSES, continuing the race.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

They're turning into the homestretch of the Dixie Derby, and it looks like Devil Dog Six has started his run and is moving towards the leaders, and there goes Crown Ruby on his

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (cont'd)

heels! Mister Emory has dropped back and now the trailer is Ignatz Katz who is four lengths behind and out of the running. Esa's Pride still holds the lead, and there she goes, but only by a nose!

(The HORSES disperse as ACTOR #2 speaks, and RETAMA and DEVON convene in a hospital lounge.)

ACTOR #2

Devon phoned Retama Solano who agreed to meet with Devon who asked if she could conjure...

ACTOR #2

...a voodoo curse.

DEVON

A voodoo curse!

DEVON

That's what I need, and I need it now! Can you get me some jockey dolls and plenty of pins? I don't want them dead, just sprain their ankles or bloat them so they don't make their weight.

RETAMA

My god, girl, what are you thinking?! I'm a nurse, not a witch. All I can do is pray to Damballah, the serpent spirit of wisdom, and Osun, the spirit of healing streams.

DEVON

I don't need streams; what I need is to stop the competition so Omer has to use me in the Derby.

RETAMA

What you need is symmetry, so you will remain more human than horse.

DEVON

Why? It's the human part that sucks.

RETAMA

Oh, Devon, Devon, calm yourself, and let me look at you. *(pause)* So much hair...

DEVON

Yeah, I'm getting horsier every day. Sometimes I slip off my shoes and run wild in the fields, which is why the soles of my feet are hardening into hooves. The trouble is, the horsier I get, the less I'm able to travel -- you know, out of my skin.

RETAMA

Devon, when will it end? When you are sleeping in stables and eating grass?

DEVON

Oh, I'm already there. It drives mama crazy, and she and daddy are threatening to drag me to a shrink. So can't you do anything...?

RETAMA

(pause, sighing) Sometimes I fear that your gift is not a gift, but a trouble making spirit called Baka. He breathes his wicked ways into an animal's soul as it lies dying, then he merges it with a human soul -- if there is someone nearby. The priestess, Mambo Santa Anita, believes this explains how civilized people regress to beasts, how careless leaders succumb to primitive herd instincts and form armies to slaughter each other.

DEVON

If you're saying this Baka's put an animal soul in me, then it must've happened when Senor Pepe fell. He was euthanized, but I swear I heard him blow his last breath before I passed out.

RETAMA

Mambo will know for certain.

DEVON

So what does she do? I heard y'all slit the throats of goats.

RETAMA

Sometimes we sacrifice chickens and cats.

DEVON

Yuuuuck.

RETAMA

You would have sacrificed your fellow jockeys!

DEVON

Yeah, but I wasn't going to slit their throats, though I've been tempted. I guess that makes me pretty primitive, which I know I am 'cause all I want to do is eat, sleep, make love and make the wire. So how can this Mambo know if Baka's inside me?

RETAMA

After the ceremony, you will not be the same. For instance, you will walk with the stride of a woman and have cravings for chocolate bon bons.

DEVON

(pause) I'm not sure I believe this stuff, and what if it's Baka who gives me my instincts and energy? I mean, maybe I'm better off, maybe this is what makes me a winner.

RETAMA

In Vodoun, when girls become women, they adopt totem animals to help them through the transition. These animals become phantoms that dwell inside their breasts. Many girls adopt horses, but I chose a she wolf.

DEVON

Is she still inside you?

RETAMA

(pause, sadly) She left many years ago.

DEVON

Did she make you howl?

RETAMA

My god, yes. *(howling)* Whhhooooooooooooo...

DEVON and RETAMA

(howling together) Whhhooooooooooooo...

(DEVON'S howl expresses her pain until she dissolves into heartfelt sobs, and RETAMA strokes her back.)

RETAMA

Oh, girl, how I hate to see you suffer, but part of our journey is learning to endure such losses.

DEVON

I've had my losses! This was going to be the race to wipe them out! I was going to be the comeback kid they called amazing -- the girl who won the prize, broke the boundaries, and made guys horny just looking at her picture.

RETAMA

But Devon, you are already amazing. *(retrieving a small pouch)* Here, I have a little gift for you: take this gris gris. Inside is a magic banishing ball with herbs against Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies. It will rid you of your pests. The gris gris also opens the way for Damballah to intervene.

DEVON

Yeah, well, I'll need all the intervention I can get -- 'cause now I have to deal with the boys directly.

(RETAMA departs as DEVON approaches the backstretch at Louisiana Downs where OMER, PERTH, and FONNER stand in different areas. DEVON stands among them, speaking at presumably different times.)

ACTOR #4

The next day Devon returned to Louisiana Downs to meet with...

ACTOR #4
Omer,...

DEVON
Omer!

ACTOR #4
...Perth,...

DEVON
Perth!

ACTOR #4
...and...

ACTOR #4
...Fonner.

DEVON
Fonner?

ACTOR #4

They met at different times in different areas of the backstretch, but Devon asked the same question:

DEVON
Can we talk about Devil Dog Six?

PERTH
Sure

OMER
Yes.

FONNER
Yeah.

DEVON
I should be riding 'cause I know the Devil best, and I know we'll win!

FONNER
Yeah, but you ain't the boss.

PERTH
Sorry, but it's my turn.

OMER

I regret such grievous discontent.

DEVON

It's 'cause I'm a girl, right?

OMER

No!

PERTH

No,...

PERTH

...your record's not as good as mine.

OMER

Mister Dunstall has the tiptop, A-one ranking.

FONNER

Shoot, Dev, let it go.

DEVON

I know Arabs hate women.

OMER

Enlightened Saudis believe in equality, but...

OMER

...that's not the point.

PERTH

That's not the point.

DEVON

(to Omer and Perth) Is there anything that can change your mind?

OMER

No.

PERTH

No.

DEVON

(taking Fonner aside) Refuse to groom the Devil unless I'm his jockey!

FONNER

I tried that, but your ma wants me to stick by him.

DEVON

So? Threaten to leave again and Omer will see the light.

FONNER

No, he won't. He'll just find another groom, and the Devil might act up and your ma wants him to win.

DEVON

Your choice, Fonner: me or my ma!

FONNER

Shit, Devon, you don't play fair.

DEVON

You heard me!

FONNER

Then maybe my choice is to go to Delta Downs and get a fresh start with someone who cares about somethin' besides racin'.

DEVON

Just what are you sayin'?

FONNER

Get over yourself, Devon, or you'll have to get over me!

DEVON

What...?!

FONNER

Now you're the one makin' a choice!

(FONNER walks away as DEVON stomps her foot.)

DEVON

Son-of-a-bitch! *(to Perth)* Perth, I'll give you every cent of my winnings, but you've got to press Omer into letting me ride. Just say it's a matter of honor since I rode him first.

PERTH

You've got no claim; you don't own him.

DEVON

(speaking to both Omer and Perth) Look, you know I speak horse, so if I don't get to ride, who knows what I'll say.

PERTH

Cut the bull, Devon.

OMER

Are you threatening mischief?

DEVON

I'm not just good on a horse, you know.

OMER

What...?

PERTH

What?!

DEVON

Let me ride, and I'll do anything anytime.

PERTH

You're pathetic.

OMER

This is unseemly.

DEVON

Want to see my tits?

OMER

No!

PERTH

No,...

PERTH

...and stop hassling me!

OMER

Harass me further, and there will be consequences.

DEVON

You wait! He'll bolt before he hits the gate!

OMER

You *are* threatening mischief!

PERTH

This is beneath you, Devon!

DEVON

Nothing's beneath me! Nothing!

(OMER and PERTH depart. DEVON gallops towards JOSSELIN and BERNARD seated in their parlor.)

ACTOR #4

That evening Devon returned to Tramore Farms where...

ACTOR #4

....all hell's broken loose.

BERNARD

All hell's broken loose,...

BERNARD

...so tread lightly.

JOSSELIN

(tearfully) Omer just fired me. Delmar Haydock's taking over as the Devil's trainer.

BERNARD

Didn't I say be careful about trusting a Saudi? Those soldiers of Allah are raised to despise our whole way of life.

JOSSELIN

I broke that horse; I was the one who got him fit and taught him how to run, really run!

DEVON

Did Omer say why?

JOSSELIN

Not a word, just called out of the blue. I thought we had a relationship, a mutual respect.

DEVON

It's my fault.

BERNARD

Now don't you start! It's nobody's fault. Omer knows he's got a hot horse, and he's succumbed to all those sweet talking tush-kissers who want a piece of him.

JOSSELIN

At least he asked Fonner to stay on as the Devil's groom.

DEVON

What did Fonner say?

JOSSELIN

He said no; he said his loyalty was to you and me and Tramore Farms.

BERNARD

But we insisted. Omer offered him twice what we could afford, so we told Fonner to pack his bags with our blessing. Of course, this means we'll have to hire a new groom.

DEVON

I'll be your groom till you do. And I'll ride Ruby in the Derby, and make it up to you, mama, I promise I will.

JOSSELIN

Thanks, baby, but you don't owe me a thing.

DEVON

Yes, I do, and there's something you should know -- you too, daddy.

BERNARD

(pause) Well, what is it? If you've got something to say, don't keep us in suspense.

JOSSELIN

I think I know what it is.

DEVON

You do...?

JOSSELIN

(pause, to Bernard) She loves Fonner.

BERNARD

Well, sure, we all love Fonner.

JOSSELIN

No, they're a pair, Devon and Fonner, and she wants to date him in the open like a real couple.

BERNARD

Christ almighty.

DEVON

How...? How did you know?

JOSSELIN

After your accident, Fonner was moping around like he'd lost his best friend -- till you came home and he couldn't wipe the smile off his face. Then last week I saw the two of you kissing by the stables when Fonner was spraying you with the hose.

BERNARD

Jesus, Dev, did you have to complicate your life any more than you already have? Just how long has this been going on?

DEVON

A year, maybe longer.

BERNARD

(to Josselin) Doesn't this bother you?

JOSSELIN

I suppose I'm relieved.

BERNARD

Relieved?!

JOSSELIN

Well, better Fonner than a horse.

DEVON

Mama!

BERNARD

Oh, fine, fine, I'm sure Fonner would love to know he's better than a horse! Of course, I'm speaking as a man who's lost both his wife and daughter to horses, so what do I know? Just keep in mind that Fonner's not as educated as you.

DEVON

Or as white.

BERNARD

He's a certified shit shoveler which next to a hot walker is the lowest of the low rungs on the social ladder.

DEVON

When I see Fonner, all I see is a man who's smart, full of heart, and a thousand times better than I'll ever be!

JOSSELIN

Sounds like love to me.

DEVON

Besides he's taking classes on his computer, and there's that job at Delta Downs.

BERNARD

So he's leaving?

DEVON

Yeah, so relax, daddy, you've got nothing to worry about.

JOSSELIN

(patting Devon's shoulder) Oh, baby, I'm sorry...

(BERNARD and JOSSELIN depart as ELLIS approaches DEVON, and ACTOR #4 speaks.)

ACTOR #4

Devon thought life couldn't possibly get any worse -- until the next morning at the backstretch where she was approached by...

ACTOR #4

...Ellis.

DEVON

Ellis...?

ELLIS

We need to talk. You'll find out soon, so it's best you hear it from me. I've filed charges against you for spookin' my horses. I know you're into voodoo, and everybody in the jockey room heard you threaten' me.

DEVON

You can't be serious?!

ELLIS

You're cursin' me. You're tellin' my mounts to lose races!

DEVON

Bullshit! You're doin' that on your own!

ELLIS

I got everythin' documented -- so expect to be hearin' from the Racing Board any day.

DEVON

What is it with you, Ellis? Why do you hate me so much? Is it 'cause I don't have a pecker or 'cause I turned you down?

ELLIS

Don't flatter yourself. I can get better and already have.

DEVON

Maybe, but at least I'm not fixing races. You're the one being charged!

ELLIS

And you're the one bein' tailed. Here comes your inspector friend.

(INSPECTOR LAROCHE enters.)

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Hello there, Mister Hastings. I'd like a word with you and Miss Tramore if I may?

ELLIS

Sure.

DEVON

Do I have a choice?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(to Ellis) I hope you're not bothering her.

DEVON

He's accused me of making his mounts lose.

ELLIS

While *her's* win!

DEVON

It's bullshit! All I ever did was tell a gelding named Goldie to bite his butt.

ELLIS

Screw you!

DEVON

In your dreams!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Shush! You're making a spectacle of yourselves! Now be civil or go your separate ways.

ELLIS

I'm goin'. *(turning to Devon)* Besides, it stinks around here!

DEVON

That crazy Ellis thinks I'm using voodoo.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, there's rumors that you're into that shenanigans.

DEVON

(pulling out her gris gris bag) All I've got is my magic potion -- keeps the flies off me.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Not entirely. There's one on your shoulder.

DEVON

(brushing off the fly) Shoooo!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I wouldn't worry about Ellis. Fortunately, the Racing Board's comprised of skeptics who think he's out of his fool mind. Besides, your fans can see you're winning fair and square.

DEVON

Yeah, but that's squat compared to the Derby.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

I've heard you've lost your chance to ride Devil Dog Six.

DEVON

Shit happens. How'd you know already?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Word travels fast.

DEVON

Did someone complain?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Nothing official, but I wanted to advise you.

DEVON

About what?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

What do you think?

DEVON

(pause) I screwed up. I tried to sell my body and soul so I could ride the Devil. It was the stupidest damn thing I ever did 'cause now my mama's lost her prize horse, her prize groom, and I've lost my man and what's left of my pride. Now Omer and Perth think I'm a lowlife whore which I might as well be, so if you're here to suspend me, go right ahead. I really don't give a shit, and I'm sick to death of you following me!

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Devon, I'm not here to suspend you. The reason I'm here is to tell you about Wolverine.

DEVON

Everyone knows Ellis pulled him back to make Senor Pepe fall.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Well, Wolverine got real ornery after that. Last Tuesday he knocked down his owner, Stockton Hawthorne, and stomped his head. Hawthorne thought he was dying and confessed he paid Ellis to forfeit the race. This means Ellis deliberately caused your spill, and since rigging a race is a felony, it's likely he'll serve time. In fact, he's being arrested even as we speak.

DEVON

Jesus...

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

(pause) Now, Devon, before we part ways, I should tell you that from now on it's in your best interest to play fair, so promise you won't let anything happen to Devil Dog Six.

DEVON

Shit no! I love that horse; I wouldn't hurt him for the world! 'Course I can't help wishing he'd throw Perth on his ass, but I guess they're getting along.

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

Perth tells me they're the best of friends.

DEVON

Stick a knife in and twist it, why don't you?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

At least you'll be riding Crown Ruby.

(The VODOUN DANCERS sustain high pitched tones while performing a snake dance throughout the ritual.)

MAMBO SANTA ANITA

Move to the currents that flow through your bodies!

RETAMA

Devon, join in! Let the flow grow!

MAMBO SANTA ANITA, RETAMA, VODOUN DANCERS
Aaaaaiiiiiiiiieeeeeee....Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....Ahhhhhhhhhhhh...

MAMBO SANTA ANITA

Before me the howling winds!

RETAMA

Behind me the raging sea!

VODOUN DANCER (ACTOR #2)

To my right the consuming flames!

VODOUN DANCER (ACTOR #3)

To my left the trembling earth!

MAMBO SANTA ANITA, RETAMA, VODOUN DANCERS
Eeeewwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww...

(The VODOUN DANCERS spin circles around DEVON who twists her torso as if something has escaped from her stomach through her throat with a whinny.)

DEVON

(whinnying) Ppppprprbbbbrrrrr....

(The dancing ceases. DEVON'S whinny turns to a whimper as SHE faints into RETAMA'S arms.)

RETAMA

Oh, Devon, speak to me... She is leaving her body.

(As RETAMA speaks, DEVON leaps up and twirls.)

MAMBO SANTA ANITA

She is flying towards a wooden enclosure.

RETAMA

The stables...

(DEVIL DOG SIX stands in his stall as DEVON spins towards him, and the VODOUN DANCERS disperse.)

DEVON

Oh, Devil, can you hear me?

DEVIL DOG SIX

(whinnying) Ppppppbbbrrruuuu....

DEVON

Listen, I may not be able to pull this trick again. I'm here 'cause I never thanked you for letting me into your horse world and making me brave when I was scared shitless of falling again. Learning to ride with my soul gave me back my body, my grit. Now all I'm scared of is myself. Daddy thinks I stunted my size, but what I've stunted is my life 'cause now I still can't stop thinking past winning or hoping certain jockeys drop dead. Retama says there's too much horse in me so I'm gettin' rid of it, 'cause I know how mean and competitive y'all can be, but shhhiiiit! You should've been *my* mount -- mine! I got cheated, so I was going to distract you, but now I've warned you, so it's best we just run the damn race straight on. Everyone says you'll win, and I know we'll all be proud, especially mama. 'Course you'll be rich and famous, so you'll probably forget me, but I'll never forget you. *(she sighs)* Oh, Devil, my sweet Devil...

(DEVON hugs DEVIL DOG SIX, then spins off as ACTOR #4 speaks and FONNER appears.)

ACTOR #4

Four nights later, Devon asked Fonner to meet her at Tramore Farms where she told him she'd...

ACTOR #4

...lost it.

DEVON

Lost it.

DEVON

I let them dance it right out of me, so I'm not like I was. Maybe you'll give me another chance. *(pause)* Don't I look different?

FONNER

No. *(he sniffs)* You smell different, more like the saddle than the horse.

DEVON

You'll like me better now, you'll see.

FONNER

I won't miss the flies.

DEVON

(pause) Does this mean you're going to stick around?

FONNER

What do you think? *(pause as he kisses Devon)* Now Dev, since your folks know about us, maybe we can stop meetin' in the stables.

DEVON

Yeah, sure...

FONNER

Are you cryin'?

DEVON

Oh, Fonner, something totally cool happened to make me special, and now I'm so grounded, I can't leave my body past the ceiling. Even my appetite's changed. Yesterday I ate fried chicken and moon pies, and I can't smell the hay from across the fields or whinny when I laugh.

FONNER

Try to think of it this way: if you're all woman and win, then you're doin' it on your own.

DEVON

I guess. *(pause, she sighs)* At least Ruby likes me and her times are improving, though we don't talk like we used to, and why do I feel so heavy? Am I getting fat?

FONNER

Shush, Dev, relax. Maybe you'll get lucky and fall on your head again.

DEVON

Very funny.

FONNER

Shhhhh now, and let's make love.

DEVON

Okay, but this time you be the horse.

(FONNER starts galloping, followed by DEVON and the HORSES, racing thunderously at the track.)

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

They're racing to the final furlongs, and Devil Dog Six has left the rest behind! Only Crown Ruby's on his heels, and she's drifting to the rail and gathering speed.

(An extended tone is heard as time is suspended. The ACTORS playing HORSES become JOCKEYS, racing in slow motion, with DEVON in the lead.)

DEVON

Oh, Devil, you dog, here we come! Ruby and I are riding your tail, but we're flying up your flanks! Perth, you damn fool! You can't use the whip on the Devil!

PERTH

The hell I can't!

DEVON

Come on, Ruby! You're a cool jewel on fuel, so shine while you're mine, and we're flying, we're flying! -- oh, Jesus!

TRACK ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Now the horses are neck and neck! Devil Dog Six is bobbing his head and going wide, but look out! Ruby has just taken the lead and by golly, she's coming, she's crossing, she's passed the wire! What an upset! What a race! Crown Ruby, ridden by Devon Tramore, has just won the Dixie Derby!! A dilly of a filly has triumphed!!

(The HORSES freeze. ACTOR #2 speaks as DEVON and CROWN RUBY step forward and cameras flash.)

ACTOR #2

Devon and Crown Ruby strolled to the winners circle and took their bows.

CROWN RUBY

(whinnying) Ppppprrrrbbbrrr....

(CROWN RUBY departs as SYDNEY BRISBANE appears, thrusting his microphone towards DEVON.)

SYDNEY

What a phenomenal ride for Ruby! But what happened to Devil Dog Six?

DEVON

You'll have to ask his jockey.

SYDNEY

To bad I can't ask the horse, but folks here claim you can -- so did you say something to influence the race?

DEVON

No, and even if I could, everyone knows the horses decide who wins.

SYDNEY

Well, congratulations! You're a very talented lady.

DEVON

So is Ruby. She's a great filly and I hope she'll go far.

SYDNEY

As far as the Devil?

DEVON

I can't read Ruby's future or the Devil's or even my own. All I know is I'm glad I'm still riding, and we've all got ways yet to go.

ACTOR #1

Then Devon and her parents posed for the cameras along with Fonner, Omer, and Inspector Laroche who came to congratulate Devon.

(DEVON, JOSSELIN, BERNARD, FONNER, OMER
and the INSPECTOR pose.)

ACTOR #2

They all stood speechless, but we can hear what they're thinking:

BERNARD

Damnation! I should've bet Ruby across the board! But...

BERNARD

...who knew?

JOSSELIN

Who knew...

JOSSELIN

...Ruby had it in her?

INSPECTOR LAROCHE

By god, maybe that girl does have powers!

OMER

Was I wrong to exchange riders?

BERNARD

Let's pop the champagne!?

JOSSELIN

Our baby's a real champion!

(The cameras flash, then FONNER steps out of the picture and turns towards DEVON.)

FONNER

(to Devon) You won this on your own, babe. You're all woman now!

DEVON

Am I?

FONNER

Hell, yes!

DEVON

But the girl in me remembers,...

FONNER

Oh, Dev...

DEVON

...I once had the heart of a horse!

(The ACTORS freeze. DEVON'S foot strokes the ground as a snort escapes her mouth, and she smiles. From a distance, a whinny is heard, echoed by others.)

End of Play

