



Going, Going, Gone

By Tyson Greer

Cecelia Wagoner stepped aside as a little girl in a frilly pink dress galloped on a red plaid hobbyhorse through the crowded alleyway of the Twin Falls Annual August Horse Sale. Exasperated, the girl's mother called, "If you want ice cream . . ." The child tossed her hobbyhorse aside and ran to meet her mother.

"The dress code for the horse sale has certainly changed," Cecelia said to her sister as they lugged their five-gallon white buckets of grooming tools down the alleyway. After a morning of prepping their brother Jesse's horses, their tank tops and jeans looked tired and their cowboy boots were grayed with dust.

"Just four more horses," Roz said.

The horses perked up their heads as Cecelia opened the gate to their pen. She jostled the buckskin out of the way while Roz tied the chestnut gelding loosely to the tall board fence. Their boots and the horses' hooves made soft swishing sounds through the straw.

Cecelia squatted down and rubbed baby powder onto the gelding's right front white stocking. The scent of baby talc mingled with sweet straw and warm horses.

Roz, ten years older, five inches shorter, and just as slim, sprayed Mane Shine on the gelding's long pale mane. "I wish I had this when you were a brat and I had to wash your hair." Both sisters had auburn hair, but Roz didn't bother to hide the gray. "Did Jesse tell you the Holloways sold their ranch?"

"No. They retired?" Cecelia moved to rub the powder on another white stocking.

"Things have been tough. Price of hay skyrocketed last year—it was so damn dry everywhere. Mom was lucky to get any hay at all. I don't think they wanted to sell, but Jesse said they got an offer they couldn't refuse."

"I'm still surprised. Frank and Patsy loved their cows."

"She liked working cows better than working at home." Roz laughed. "Remember that time you came over and we helped move the cows?"

"God, that was fun, except I lost my favorite cowboy hat."

"Not much call for wearing a sweat-stained Stetson in Seattle, is there?" Roz teased.

Cecelia doffed her beat-up straw cowboy hat. "No, I have my straw one for special occasions."

Roz laughed again. "How's your business doin' anyway?"

"Last year was tough." Cecelia didn't say how tough it was for a boutique events management firm to come back from COVID's lockdown. "Things are rough all over."

Roz sprayed the chestnut's tail and began combing out the tangles. "And the boyfriend?"

Cecelia sighed and rubbed powder more vigorously. "He's got a name."

"I forget," Roz said.

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Cecelia decided to change the subject. "I was surprised Clint is selling Stretch."

"Sometimes you have to move on." Roz didn't look at her sister, but her meaning was clear. Cecelia knew Roz only asked about *the boyfriend* because she was hoping he wasn't. The whole family thought he was as useless as white paint on a ranch fence.

The argument before she left for Twin Falls, Idaho, still tasted sour. She made the mistake of showing Gordon the sale catalog with LOT #41 circled in red. He, an economist with a prestigious Seattle firm, had complained, and not for the first time, by saying, "Every time you go back there, you get all fired up about . . ." The fight was about whether she would come back with a horse as a fortieth birthday present for herself. She hadn't had a horse since she put her high school diploma in her back pocket and boarded a bus for Seattle.

Cecelia fished a square of canvas, a paint brush, and a small can from her sister's bucket. "I think I'm gonna bid on Clint's horse."

Roz stopped combing. "What?"

"I talked to Clint earlier." Cecelia's family had known Clint's family since he was a baby. *Could you take him home?* he had asked, not altogether joking.

"Where would you keep him?" Roz asked. "You move to a condo with a stable and didn't tell me?"

"A lot of people board horses in Seattle." Cecelia's voice came out sharper than she intended. Then she said, "Ready for a little horse nail polish?"

"Yup." As Roz stooped down and brushed the straw away from the gelding's left hind leg, Cecelia pried open the tin of blacking. Roz crouched next to her and lifted the gelding's left hind leg, and when Cecelia slid the canvas under it, she eased the leg down and painted the hoof black with even strokes. They repeated the blacking process on the other hooves.

"So, Roz, what do you think Stretch will go for?" Cecelia asked.

Her sister squinted. "Uhhh, forty-five hundred. Maybe even five thousand. Depends on how the bidding goes. Why don't you buy one of Jesse's horses? Help your brother."

"Two-year-olds take more work." Sometimes she thought Gordon acted like a two-year-old.

Further down the alleyway, a young cowboy stood outside a pen and studied the picture of his horse on the eight-by-ten flyer marked LOT #41 then stapled it to the gate. The horse's ears perked forward, his eyes inquisitive and smart. Clint knew the words on the flyer by heart:

LOT #41. AQHA #2855378. PUNKY ROOSTER. 'STRETCH,' A BEAUTIFUL BLOOD BAY GELDING, STANDS 15.4. CLINT HAS RIDDEN THIS GELDING ON OUR RANCH FOR 12 YEARS. HE'S ROPED CATTLE BY THE HUNDREDS, SORTED PAIRS, AND DONE NEARLY EVERYTHING A HORSE COULD POSSIBLY DO, INCLUDING TEAM ROPING. 'STRETCH' EARNED HIS NAME BY HIS ABILITY TO TRAVEL THE COUNTRY AT A FAST, SMOOTH PACE. HORSES LIKE THIS ARE SELDOM FOR SALE.

Clint was ten when he first rode Stretch, who was two at the time and tall for his age. Nobody called the horse by his full name, Punky Rooster, which was one of the silliest the American Quarter Horse Association had assigned.

"That's a fine horse in there," an older man's voice drawled behind Clint.

He nodded and his straw Resistol seemed to enlarge the

gesture. He continued to focus on sorting through auction flyers for the ranch's other horses.

"Beautiful head. Holds it right proud," the man observed.

Clint wiped his face on his sleeve and glanced at the man. Lines etched the brow under the man's new straw cowboy hat. His crisp white Western shirt had buttons, not snaps. Next to him, stood a boy, about eight, in a matching white shirt and cowboy hat.

"Look, Grandpa. He's coming over to see me." The big bay walked to the fence, lowering his head and nickering inquisitively.

The grandfather checked the sale catalog, pulled a silver pen out of his shirt pocket and drew a neat circle around the write-up for LOT #41.

"He's a real good horse. Cow smart too." Clint moved to the next pen.

The older man didn't follow. He continued to peer through the fence at LOT #41.

Three hours later, the area outside the auction ring was as busy as any backstage. Only instead of actors or divas, riders and horses lined up waiting for their cue. Riders in brightly colored embroidered shirts and polished boots adjusted their cowboy hats as they listened to the action inside the crowded arena.

Cecelia and Roz stood near the entrance. Cecelia wrote down the sale price of each horse on her catalog in handwriting that was neat and precise. She kept track for her brother, Jesse, who, with his wife Marlys, had been trailering a dozen or so two-year-olds and about six four-month-olds from Montana to the August sale for over twenty years. Most years, but not last year, Cecelia joined them and Roz for the weekend sale. Last year for her birthday, Gordon had surprised her with a trip to Paris—their first trip after COVID restrictions eased. She enjoyed strolling the sights and sipping a café au lait while he attended a conference.

The woman in the auction booth, the matriarch of the Bar Double D Ranch, adjusted her bifocals and read from her notes. "This little filly already shows the wide hips and graceful legs of Midnight Songster, who produces fine red roans."

The crowd was quiet as Jesse loped one of his two-year-old fillies around the small ring, turning her easily with a light pressure on the reins—impressive for a horse who had only been ridden twenty times, and the auctioneer said so. His voice rumbled into the microphone. "I'll take one thousand. Who'll start us off with one thousand for this top solid ranch horse?"

The bidding started with a jump and the auctioneer kicked it quickly up to fourteen hundred, where it stalled. He smiled but scanned the crowd like a hawk. "Fourteen-fourteen-fourteen. Gimme fifteen-fifteen, I'll take fifteen. I'll say fourteen-five-fourteen-five-fourteen-five. I have fourteen hundred. I'll take fourteen-five."

In the arena, the two bid spotters looked incongruously like umpires in their black-and-white striped shirts. The tall bid spotter on the right pointed to the man bidding and nodded to encourage him, never losing eye contact with him, leading him on to bid. Meanwhile, the other bid spotter tended his side of the crowd, pacing continuously, searching for a glint. At intervals he stopped, faced the crowd, opened his arms wide in supplication, and mouthed the words, "How 'bout it? How 'bout it?" If his posturing netted nothing, he'd make a wide sweep of his arm, herding attention back to the auctioneer and resume his pacing.

Cecelia scanned the crowd—lots of cowboy boots, plaid shirts, and a few big silver buckles. There was a sea of faces, some weathered, some bright with anticipation. Next to a couple she thought she recognized, she saw a granddad sitting beside his skinny grandson wearing the same stylized white Western shirt and straw cowboy hat—and the same intense expression.

The auctioneer nudged the bidders higher and higher as Jesse performed quick maneuvers and easy loops around the small space. Then he wheeled his horse; the horse gathered its haunches and leaped forward. They executed another lightning-fast turn and a dust-swirling stop, and the crowd showed their approval.

The auction pace was brisk. When the bidding topped out and the gavel came down, a cowboy swung open the exit gate that led through a long corridor back into the main alleyway.

Cecelia wrote down the sale amount—\$3,150. Not bad, but not enough. Trailering three rigs of horses from the ranch near Hamilton, Montana, to Twin Falls, Idaho, was an expensive proposition. Gas, motels, food for Jesse and Marlys and two ranch hands—it added up. Not to mention the grain, winter hay, vet bills, and the time.

Behind them, a young man said, "Excuse me, ladies," and the sisters stepped aside, just as Lot #41 entered the arena.

"Good luck, Clint," Roz said.

The arena grew quiet. Both bid spotters hit the speed dial on their cellphones, then aimed their phones to the loudspeaker nearest them. Clint's riding posture seemed casual, the kind of "sitting a horse" that a cowboy could do for hours and hours, miles and miles. Although many already knew the history of this horse, everyone listened.

"To say that Punky Rooster is a fine horse is a gross

understatement," the woman in the booth began.

The auctioneer interjected, "Kind of like saying Trigger was a nice horse . . . or Trevor Brazile can ride."

Roz leaned over to her sister. "I heard somewhere that Brazile roped his first calf from the back of a horse when he was just three years old."

Cecelia smiled; her eyes focused on Clint's horse.

The matriarch's voice flowed over the PA system. "You can see for yourself his conformation. Strong, athletic. Clint raised this beautiful bay from a foal, and he's been an exceptional working horse. They've ridden hundreds of miles together in the heat of summer and bitter cold of winter. He's always done what he was asked, and willingly."

"Clint's not using a bridle," Cecelia said to Roz. "Just his halter and lead rope."

Clint and his horse loped effortlessly around the arena. He didn't show off quick stops, fast starts, or sharp turns. They just rode together as they always had.

The woman's voice continued. "Clint has ridden Stretch—yes, his nickname is Stretch—for twelve years . . . that's longer than we've had our younger son Billy." The crowd laughed with her. "But we are a working ranch and it's time." She swallowed. "Clint agrees. It's time Stretch gets to enjoy retirement. His new owners will be getting a capable, willing horse who deserves an easier life now." She nodded curtly to the auctioneer.

The auctioneer started the bidding at \$2,000 and the bid spotters caught two signals immediately—\$2,100, then \$2,200.

Cecelia raised her program and chimed in at \$2,300.

Clint and Stretch continued their we-can-do-this-all-day lope around the arena, occasionally stopping, backing up, reversing direction; and the bidders caught the stride. The bid spotters, cellphones to their ears, slid their attention between bidders in the arena and bidders on the phones. There was a buzz about the cell buyers. Where were they from? New York? Or maybe Los Angeles? Or maybe they were rich folks now buying up so many places in Montana.

The auctioneer asked for and got \$2,900, \$3,100, then asked for \$3,300.

Cecelia raised her program high.

Clint jumped off his horse and unfastened the cinch strap, pulled the saddle off, set it aside, vaulted onto Stretch's back, gathered the halter rope, and, with the pressure of his legs, urged his horse forward again. Now he rode around the arena bareback, to the crowd's delight.

The auctioneer acknowledged another bid. "Thirty-five-thirty-five-thirty-five. I have thirty-five hundred—who'll give me four. Just a little more. Who'll give me four-four-four-

four—four thousand?”

Cecelia raised her program and called out clearly, “Thirty-seven hundred.”

“I have thirty-seven hundred, from this little lady . . . Who’ll give me four?”

The older fellow in the white Western shirt did just that. The boy was leaning forward, his hands either holding on to the bench or holding himself back.

The auctioneer looked at Cecelia. “How about forty-two, ma’am. Can you go forty-two?”

“You really want him?” Roz asked.

Cecelia kept her eyes on the horse, nodded, and raised her program. “Forty-one.” To Roz she said, “I broke up with the boyfriend.”

Roz looked from the horse to her sister. “You could keep him at my ranch. One more horse makes no difference to my herd. I’d see you more often.”

An older woman dropped out and another bidder went to forty-three hundred and two more nudged the price higher.

“Five thousand,” Cecelia called and held her breath.

There was a pause, but then a new tidal wave of bidding roared past her. The man in the second row dropped his gaze and shook his head in defeat. The auctioneer could barely be heard when he said, “Sorry, Hank.”

A spare man in sunglasses five rows behind the grandfather had been waiting. He gave a curt gesture—five fingers blinking twice.

“Fifty-five hundred!” The auctioneer’s voice barreled over the PA system like a whitewater ride, careening over the syllables, catching a breath in eddies, only to come roiling back again. The bidding splashed up to \$6,500, where the ride began to slow, but still higher than any horse-sale regular ever expected to pay.

When Clint’s young wife walked into the arena carrying their eighteen-month-old son, the crowd went silent. He was a cute little guy in his little toddler blue jeans and a red-and-white-striped Western shirt that matched his daddy’s.

Clint brought Stretch to a stop beside her. And when she reached up to offer the child and he reached down to accept him, the crowd gasped. He set the small boy in front of him, cuddling him close with his left arm, holding Stretch’s halter rope with his right. The child wiggled with glee, grabbed a handful of mane in his tiny fist, and they loped around the arena. The horse arched his neck, as if proud of being trusted with the delicate bundle.

The bidding found new life and soared.

Clint reined Stretch to a stop, leaned forward, and spoke to the horse. The horse adjusted his feet and stood still as a

postcard. Clint slid to the ground, leaving his baby boy with his fistful of mane perched like a peanut on Stretch’s back.

Cecelia murmured. “That is so beautiful—that little guy sitting by himself on his horse.”

Clint unfastened the halter and tossed it to the exit gate, then looped a rope around Stretch’s neck and climbed aboard again.

The bidding climbed too.

Bareback, no bridle, not even a halter. A young man and his son and his horse—his boyhood horse—ambled around the arena, as if treating his son for a ride after work was done for the day. Clint eased the rope to the right or to the left, and the horse did as he was asked. Down to the creek on a summer evening. They seemed oblivious to the excitement around them, much less that they were the cause.

But in the stands, the auction roared on like a rodeo. Compelling, pleading, wheedling—the auctioneer sat, stood, pointed, and praised those clever enough to give him another bid.

From the other side of the arena, a heavy-set man in a very faded shirt chimed in, then back to the spare man, and to the grandfather, and a bid spotter shouted out the cellphone caller’s bid. The auctioneer wrangled all the bidding threads as smoothly as a teamster handled sixteen sets of reins. He pointed his gavel to the older man in the white shirt. “This one deserves a happy retirement with people who will love him as much as Clint does. Is that you, sir?”

The old man nodded.

The auctioneer pointed his gavel to the man in the faded shirt, “Seven-seven-seven-seven thousand here. Seven thousand—cheap at that price—and I’ll throw in a new shirt. Seven thousand dollars! You can’t buy a good truck for that.”

The spare man nodded.

The grandson slumped.

The auctioneer whipped his gaze back to the grandfather. “And will you, sir, say seventy-four, seventy-four, seventy-four? Would you like seventy-three-five? Seventy-three-five, seventy-three-five?” And the instant he got it, “Thank you, sir!”, he pivoted to the spare man, and, pointing at him, said, “Are you gonna let that old man take your horse?” The crowd laughed, but the auctioneer got what he wanted by baiting, bullying, teasing, taunting.

“I never dreamed it would go this high,” Roz said. “I want to go get some water. You comin’?” Cecelia shook her head.

Clint and his son and his horse amused themselves doing figure eights. Clint let his boy hold the neck rope with him and guide the horse’s easy turns. Cecelia’s eyes never left

the horse and his family, unless they shifted momentarily to the grandfather and grandson. She felt a stab of envy. She wondered what it would have been like to have a grandparent who could bid on and try to buy her such a horse, or even buy matching shirts and hats, for that matter.

Seventy-nine hundred! Eighty-two fifty! Eighty-four hundred! One of the bid spotters closed his cellphone. That buyer was out. The other bid spotter talked rapidly into his, then held it up for the buyer to hear the action, then back to his ear, jabbered again and shouted out a new bid.

By now, the grandson was shaking his arms up and down with excitement. The dueling went back and forth. Eighty-six hundred! Eighty-seven fifty! Eighty-nine hundred! The auctioneer got it from the spare man and shook his gavel at the grandfather. "If you let that man walk outta here with this horse, you're gonna have a lot of explaining to do to somebody's grandma." The crowd laughed with him.

It was over quickly after that.

The auctioneer banged down his gavel. "Sold! At nine-thousand-one-hundred dollars!"

The spare man saluted, declaring the white-shirted guy the better man.

Many in the crowd stood and applauded. The young boy sat open-mouthed, stunned with happiness. Those nearby reached out and clapped the old man on the shoulder. The boy's hat flew off as he bear-hugged his grandfather, who ruffled the boy's hair and laughed as if he had won him a teddy bear pitching balls at a county fair.

Clint and his boy rode slowly around the arena one more time. One last time. He tucked his hat down and pulled his son close to his chest. The cowboy at the gate swung it open and they disappeared into the exit corridor.

Tears welled in Cecelia's eyes, but she knew the money would be a welcome windfall for Clint and his young family.

"Cecelia?" The woman's voice sounded familiar to Cecelia. "Your sister said I'd find you here."

"Mrs. Dayee," Cecelia said. "What a surprise to see you here." The woman's posture was still as straight as a flagpole in a school yard.

"Call me Marianne. We're a long way from your junior year and my English class." Mrs. Dayee beamed with affection.

"Are you still teaching at Kooskia High?" The small one-story school building. Peeling paint. A dirt yard, dusty or muddy, depending on the season.

"I retired from teaching ten years ago. I met and married a wonderful man in Montana and became the principal at Hamilton High School. But I missed teaching. So, when

. . . uh . . . he had to give up his hardware store in town a couple years ago—Walmart, you know—I started a little riding stable."

"That was a dream of mine once," Cecelia said.

"It's good work." She held up her dog-eared sale catalog. "I need a couple more 'mature' horses. This was one of the horses I came to see. But too rich for my blood."

With promises to be in touch, Cecelia headed for the exit corridor. A single light bulb shone down on the area. Clint had slid off the horse. His wife took the baby, held her husband tightly, and he clung to her. The beautiful bay stood still. Even the baby was quiet. As the young man's shoulders began to quiver, his wife hugged him tighter. Inside the arena, the auctioneer's voice was riding herd again.

Cecelia walked to the pen in the covered area where Marlys tended the four-month-old foals. "How are the little ones doing?" Cecelia asked her sister-in-law.

Two of the gawky, spindle-legged foals nipped nervously at each other. "They're gettin' tired and missin' their mothers too."

"Strange crowd in there this year." Cecelia cocked her head to the arena, then let herself into the pen.

"Seems so." Marlys unbuckled the blue show halter from a dark-eyed buckskin and fitted it onto the palomino she would lead next into the auction arena. "I heard you bid on Clint's horse."

Cecelia ran a hand down the back of the little buckskin. "I did, although, to be honest, I had no business bidding that high, but I knew I wasn't gonna get him . . . Fourteen years he's had that horse."

"A horse can live twenty-five, thirty years, but not as a ranch horse."

"Still," Cecelia said, "it's sad he had to sell him."

"Sad, *schmad*. They don't run a rest home. He's done his job, earned his feed. He shouldn't work no more. Time he retired. Clint knows that."

Cecelia encircled the palomino's face with her hands and the foal's soft pink lips nibbled her wrist. "Be honest, Marlys, aren't you sad when you sell one of your babies?"

Marlys picked up a comb and fussed with a possible tangle in a little black colt's shiny tail. "Can't pretend I'm not. I'm up in the night with them. Feedin' them with a nipple on a whiskey bottle when their new momma won't take 'em. Holdin' their heads when they got foal pneumonia. Spoonin' medicine down their throats when they're colicky. Can't pretend I'm not. But . . . it's what we do. We birth 'em. We raise 'em. We doctor 'em. We feed 'em." She pulled the comb hard through the tail. "We sell 'em." His tail was

exceptionally long. "They grow up. They grow old. Can't keep 'em young forever."

His saddle now over his shoulder, Clint trudged down the alleyway and his horse followed. Cecelia joined him. "I'm sorry, Clint. I tried, but the bidding . . ."

"I know. I appreciate it." Clint kept his eyes on the ground. "It's never been like that here."

As they approached the pen, the old man caught up with him. His grandson fairly skipped beside him. "What should we call him, Granpa?"

"That's up to you, Rodney." To Clint he said, "He's a fine horse and you can be sure he'll be well treated." The old man took no notice of Cecelia.

Clint nodded without looking at him. "Thank you." His voice came out thin. He led the horse inside the pen, closed the gate behind him, and laid down the saddle. The horse watched his every move.

Cecelia folded her arms on the top board of the fence, watching the horse.

The old man looked at his catalog. "Says here you live outside of Hamilton."

"My grandfather built the ranch." Clint checked the water level in the drinking trough.

"I bought a spread outside of Darby last year, right up the road from Hamilton.

Cecelia raised her eyebrows at the man telling Clint where Darby was.

"Actually, bought a couple big ranches," the old man continued. "Consolidated them."

Clint held up a curry brush and Stretch walked to him. "Did one of them have the house set back among old ponderosas and an all-season stream running through cottonwoods? The Holloway place?"

"Don't recall the name. I came out to visit a lawyer friend of mine a year before that, he's retired, and he had gotten a really good deal on a very big place. Saw the potential."

Clint brushed his horse, careful with the cowlick on the left side of his neck. "Do you ride, boy?" In the sunlight, the horse's coat already shone like copper.

The boy climbed the second rung of the fence. "I rode a pony once. It was at my friend Marshall's birthday party. We live in Connecticut."

Clint looked at the boy, then felt a nudge on his back. Stretch lifted Clint's cowboy hat off his head and stepped back, waving the hat at him. "You give that back," Clint chided. The horse stretched out his neck and offered him his hat. "Stretch likes to play."

The boy laughed.

"Get down from there, Rodney. Might get hurt." Then to Clint, the grandfather continued, "I had a new barn built, the one there wouldn't do for chickens. He'll have his own pasture, all to himself, beautiful grass. House was a tear-down too."

Cecelia appraised the old man. His watery eyes were Arctic blue, and the straw hat was not the kind sold on racks in convenience stores. Neither was the hat band with silver conchos.

"You lookin' for other horses?" Clint asked the man.

"No, I don't ride. I'm too old and my wife doesn't like riding. But Rodney will learn and can ride when he comes to visit. Almost done with the new house. Log cabin style. Six thousand square feet. Had a heck of a time getting a builder, they're all busy. But the county was pretty reasonable about the permits. They can be tough, you know."

Clint didn't know but didn't say so.

Cecelia straightened away from the fence. "You're planning to put this beautiful blood bay horse in a pasture alone, without any other horses? You're sentencing him to solitary confinement."

The old man looked at her as if he didn't know she could speak.

"Charles! We've been looking all over for you." A tall woman

"Don't recall the name. I came out to visit a lawyer friend of mine a year before that, he's retired, and he had gotten a really good deal on a very big place. Saw the potential."

not quite Cecelia's age and weighted down with turquoise jewelry was holding onto a squirming little red-faced girl in a frilly pink dress. "Your daughter is tired and wants to go back to the hotel."

"Okay, honey." The old man smiled at his young wife.

"I'm dying of the heat," the woman complained.

"I wanna go swimming," the girl pleaded. "You promised."

As the girl twisted and fretted, Clint reminded the man—Charles—to arrange a pickup time in the office. When the old man offered his hand to shake, Clint looked at his own. "My hands are pretty dirty. I want to remind you . . . we have a first refusal return policy. If you decide the horse is

not for you, you can bring him back.”

As the family walked away, Cecelia muttered to Clint, “A first refusal return policy?”

Clint shrugged with the hint of a smile, which faded.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t buy him,” Cecelia said.

“I know. But, if you’d consider a different one . . . we’ve got a seven-year-old mare that Frank Holloway insisted on giving me when they moved. She’s not as pretty as Stretch, but she’s smart. She taught Stretch how to steal hats. The thing is . . . she don’t like cows. I don’t know what to do with a horse that’s cow shy.” He paused. “You need a cow horse, or . . .?”

“A good horse,” Cecelia said. “With personality.”

“She’s a gray, not a beautiful bay.”

“I’m not looking to match hair color. She and I would have to talk about the hat stealing, but . . .” She twirled her old straw hat. “I could use a new hat.” She put it back on. “Keep in touch with that old man. My guess is, in a year or two, that beautiful horse is going to be looking for a new home.”

She offered her hand, and he took it.

AUTHOR

TYSON GREER



Tyson Greer lives in Lake Forest Park, WA. For twenty years, she ran her own media company, writing on topics from art to virtual reality for national, regional, and local magazines. She also wrote and directed corporate television and documentaries, taught screenwriting for the University of Washington, and authored a book for the Microsoft Press Strategic Technology series that was published in eight languages. She has contributed to, ghost-written, or edited other non-fiction books as well, the most recent being *Writing While Masked: Observations on 2020*, an anthology of essays about life during the pandemic, written and compiled by the writers’ group Tyson belongs to, and published in 2021 by Washington State University Press. Her work has received recognition from the Birmingham International Film Festival Award, Telly Award, as well as the Society of Southwestern Authors. And now—besides traveling, gardening, or hanging out with horses—she is focusing her attention on fiction.