

Champion of Her Heart

Jody Morris's heart flutters whenever she's around rodeo-star rancher Max Hadden. His tussled hair, broad shoulders and powerful, jean-clad thighs positively exude sex appeal. But Max is all business. She's at his magnificent Circle M Ranch to learn how to improve her rodeo skills—nothing more. Yet she can't help daydreaming about what else Max can teach her...with those strong, brown hands and hard, sensual lips.

* * *

As Max helps her to her feet, Jody's heart is pounding. She can feel a sudden delicious desire course through her. Max is not immune to her, either. He feels a familiar heat stirring inside him.

Man, she's sending out sparks. And it's getting me all wound up, too.

Max tries hard to remain detached, though his pulse is hammering in his throat and his one desire is to take Jody in his arms and make love to her. He's rooted to the spot, feeling her womanly warmth under his fingers. He's hungry for that kind of intimacy again.

Let go of her! Let go now if you know what's good for you! A voice hammers unheeded in his head.

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JODY MORRIS HAS ALWAYS LOVED RANCHING AND RODEO COMPETITION. HER HEART ALMOST BROKE THE DAY HER FAMILY'S RANCH WAS EXPROPRIATED FOR A WATER CONSERVATION PROJECT, AND HER PARENTS MOVED INTO TOWN. BRAVELY SHE SET OUT ON HER OWN WITH ONLY AN OLD PICKUP, A HORSE TRAILER AND HER MARE, STARLIGHT. SHE IS DETERMINED TO MAKE HER MARK AS A BARREL RACER, UNCONSCIOUSLY SEEKING SOMETHING TO FILL THE VOID IN HER LIFE.



Champion of Her Heart





OUT OF THE BLUE, A GREAT OPPORTUNITY COMES JODY'S WAY...A CHANCE TO BE COACHED BY ONE OF THE BEST—HER IDOL, MAX HADDEN.

HEY, LOOK AT THIS. HADDEN IS GIVING RODEO CLINICS AT HIS RANCH. HE HARDLY EVER LETS PEOPLE ON THAT PRECIOUS SPREAD OF HIS. HE MUST NEED THE MONEY.

YEAH, GUESS SO. OL' MAX'S TURNED INTO A REAL LONER SINCE CHARLEEN SQUIRE THREW HIM OVER FOR OLIVER LOATES.

CHARLEEN, THE TRICK-RIDING QUEEN? HER LOSS, I'D SAY.



JODY SIGNS UP. SHE HAS JUST ARRIVED AT THE CIRCLE M, MAX'S RANCH, FOR HER INTENSIVE BARREL-RACING CLINIC. MAX'S FIRM HANDSHAKE SENDS A SHIVER STRAIGHT THROUGH HER. MAX, TOO, IS VERY AWARE OF THE FEEL OF HER HAND IN HIS...

YOU'LL SLEEP IN THE BUNKHOUSE. BREAKFAST'S AT SUNUP. WE GET TO WORK RIGHT AFTER.

SO THIS IS THE FIREBALL I SAW RACING BACK AT THE WAKELY RODEO. WONDER IF SHE'S GOT THE GRIT TO BE TOP CLASS?

STARLIGHT AND I WILL EARN OUR WAY AROUND HERE, MR. HADDEN. THANK YOU FOR TAKING US ON.

MAX CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE HOW *GOOD* JODY LOOKS IN THE SADDLE. JODY IS FULL OF *ADMIRATION* FOR MAX AND A BIT *AWESTRUCK* AT WORKING WITH HIM ONE-ON-ONE. SHE TRIES TO IGNORE THE *SHIVER OF ATTRACTION* SHE FEELS FOR HIM RUNNING THROUGH HER WHOLE BODY.



YOU'RE RUNNING THE HORSE TIGHT TO ONE SIDE. TRY HOLDING THE REINS LIKE THIS INTO YOUR START.

SHE SMELLS OF LILACS...AND THERE ISN'T A LILAC FOR FIFTY MILES.

WHAT WOULD THOSE STRONG, BROWN HANDS FEEL LIKE ON ME? I WONDER.

TO HELP DEFRAY HER COSTS JODY PITCHES IN AROUND THE RANCH. SHE FINDS SHE LOVES WORKING WITH MAX AND LOVES THE CIRCLE M, BUT NOTICES ALL IS NOT WELL...



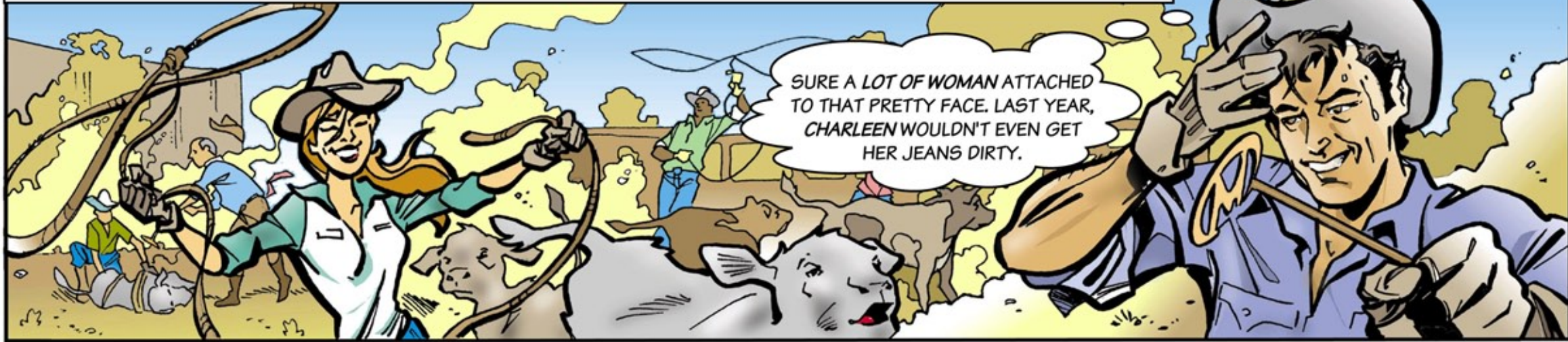
COWS LOOK A BIT LEAN, MAX. PASTURE ISN'T ALWAYS THIS THIN, IS IT?

NAH. DROUGHT'S HIT US BAD. TOOK MY DADDY AND HIS DADDY FIFTY YEARS OF

HARD WORK TO GET THE CATTLE JUST THE WAY THEY WANTED 'EM. AND NOW THIS. BUT IT'S STILL A FINE HERD.

SHE HAS NO IDEA HOW TOUGH THINGS REALLY ARE, AND HOW MUCH I'M SPENDING ON FEED. SHE'S A CUTIE, BUT SHE'S JUST PAYING HER WAY, REMEMBER. BETTER HOPE I CAN DO THE SAME.

JODY PROVES SHE'S NO QUITTER. SHE HELPS MAX WITH THE GRUELING ANNUAL TASK OF ROPING, BRANDING AND TAGGING THE WILD NEW CALVES OFF THE RANGE. PATCH AND STARLIGHT WORK HARD, TOO. MAX CAN'T HELP BUT BE IMPRESSED...



SURE A LOT OF WOMAN ATTACHED TO THAT PRETTY FACE. LAST YEAR, CHARLEEN WOULDN'T EVEN GET HER JEANS DIRTY.

MAX REALIZES HE HASN'T TAKEN HIS EYES OFF JODY ALL DAY. CRAZY NEW FEELINGS ARE STIRRING INSIDE HIM, CAUSING ACHES WITHIN HIM HE HAS A TOUGH TIME DEALING WITH.



SHEESH, HADDEN, YOU'RE GETTING NESTING URGES AGAIN. LOOK AT ENOUGH CALVES AND YOU START THINKIN' HOW A RANCH NEEDS KIDS AND A GOOD WOMAN AT YOUR SIDE.

DON'T GO GETTING IDEAS ABOUT ANOTHER AMBITIOUS RODEO GAL BESIDES, WITH THIS DROUGHT, THE LAST THING YOU NEED IS A WIFE!

APPRECIATE YOUR HELP TODAY, JODY. STICK TO YOUR RIDING LIKE THAT AND YOU'LL BE A BARREL-RACING QUEEN IN NO TIME.

I COULD WORK TEN TIMES AS HARD AS TODAY AS LONG AS YOU'RE THERE, MAX.



JODY CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT MAX. SHE LOVES TO WATCH THE WAY HIS FACE LIGHTS UP WHEN HE LOOKS OUT OVER HIS ROLLING RANCH LAND. SHE CAN'T DENY THE ELECTRICITY THAT COURSES THROUGH HER EVERY TIME THEIR EYES MEET, NOR THE SINKING, SENSUAL FEELINGS THEY EVOKE IN HER WOMANLY REGIONS.



I'M FALLING FOR YOU, MAX. BIG TIME. WHAT I'D GIVE TO FEEL YOUR LIPS ON MINE... YOUR BODY PRESSED AGAINST ME...

EVERY DAY, MAX WORKS JODY HARD IN THE PRACTICE RING. THEIR GOAL IS THE BIG BLUESTONE RODEO COMING UP SOON. HE IS AN EXACTING TASKMASTER, BUT LATELY JODY, UNABLE TO KEEP HER MIND OFF MAX, IS MAKING A LOT OF ERRORS.



JODY IS EMBARRASSED BY HER FALL. AS MAX LIFTS HER UP, HER HEART IS POUNDING. SHE CAN FEEL HER NIPPLES PEBBLING WITH SUDDEN DELICIOUS DESIRE. MAX IS NOT IMMUNE TO HER, EITHER. HE FEELS A FAMILIAR STIRRING IN HIS LOINS.



HOW CAN I BE SO CLUMSY! BUT I KEEP THINKING ABOUT HIM AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT.

TROUBLE IS, YOU'RE GETTING ALL WOUND UP WHEN YOU RACE. STARLIGHT'S PICKING UP ON YOUR NERVOUSNESS AND LOSING PACE. LET ME GO CATCH HER FOR YOU AND WE'LL CALL IT A DAY.

MAN, SHE'S SENDING OUT SPARKS. AND IT'S GETTING ME ALL WOUND UP, TOO.

MAX TRIES HARD TO REMAIN DETACHED, THOUGH HIS PULSE IS HAMMERING IN HIS THROAT AND HIS ONE DESIRE IS TO TAKE JODY IN HIS ARMS AND MAKE LOVE TO HER.



A COOL HEAD AND LOOSE MUSCLES ARE EVERYTHING IN THE RODEO GAME. LOOK AT YOUR SHOULDERS, TIGHT AS TWO BOARDS.

THEY'RE NOT!

TO PROVE HIS POINT, MAX PUTS HIS HANDS ON JODY'S SHOULDERS. THE INTENSITY OF THE SENSUAL JOLT TAKES BOTH OF THEM BY SURPRISE. MAX FIGHTS TO KEEP HIS SELF-CONTROL. JODY FEELS HER KNEES TURNING TO JELLY.



ARE SO. SEE, IT'S LIKE PUTTING MY THUMBS...INTO... A...PLANK.

OH...

MAX IS ROOTED TO THE SPOT, FEELING JODY'S DELICIOUS WOMANLY WARMTH UNDER HIS FINGERS. HE'S HUNGRY FOR THAT KIND OF WARMTH AGAIN.

LET GO OF HER! LET GO NOW IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU!

OH, MAX...

SUDDENLY ALL REASON EVAPORATES AS THE POWERFUL ATTRACTION BETWEEN THEM TAKES OVER.

HER MOUTH IS SO SWEET...CAN'T GET ENOUGH...


OH, YES. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, MAX!

A man with dark hair and a blue shirt is embracing a woman with long blonde hair wearing a yellow top. They are in a close, intimate embrace.

GOT TO STOP...BUT HER SKIN IS SO SOFT, HER BODY SO LUSH...

THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN DREAMING OF...

TAKEN ABACK AT THE *FIERCENESS* OF HIS DESIRE, MAX BARELY MANAGES TO GET HIMSELF UNDER CONTROL...

A close-up profile of Max looking at Jody. Jody is looking back at him with a slight smile.

LOOK, JODY, I'M *SORRY*. I'M JUST...I'VE BEEN WANTING TO DO THAT FOR AGES. I HAVE NO BUSINESS...

YES, YOU *DO*. I WANT IT, *TOO*. I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THIS EVER SINCE I GOT HERE.

AND THE *FIRE* OVERTAKES THEM AGAIN. HIS BURGEONING DESIRE DRIVES JODY TO THE BRINK OF HER CONSCIOUS RATIONALITY. SHE WANTS HIM—HE WANTS HER—SHE CAN'T *FIGHT* IT ANYMORE.

Max and Jody are in a stable. Max is on the floor, and Jody is leaning over him. A horse is visible in the background.

JODY, DARLING, I JUST CAN'T STOP...

PLEASE... PLEASE...OH, MAX, TAKE ME NOW...

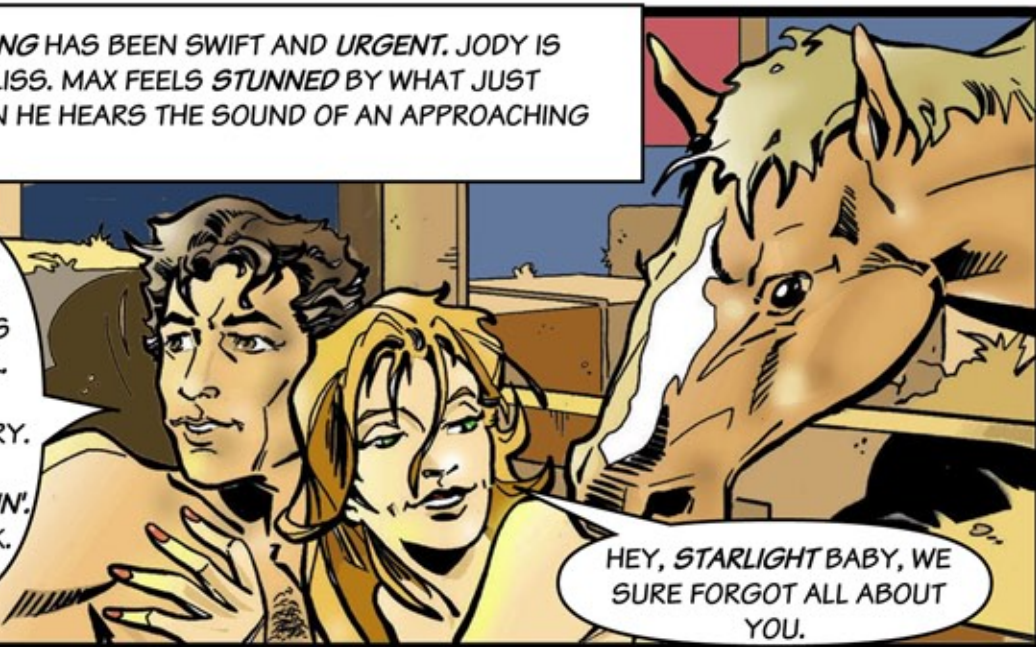
GOD, JODY, I WANT YOU MORE THAN I'VE EVER WANTED ANYBODY.

THE FLAMES RISE HIGHER, AND NEITHER CAN STOP. SO SWIFTLY, IT SURPRISES THEM, THEY CREST IN A SHUDDER TOGETHER.



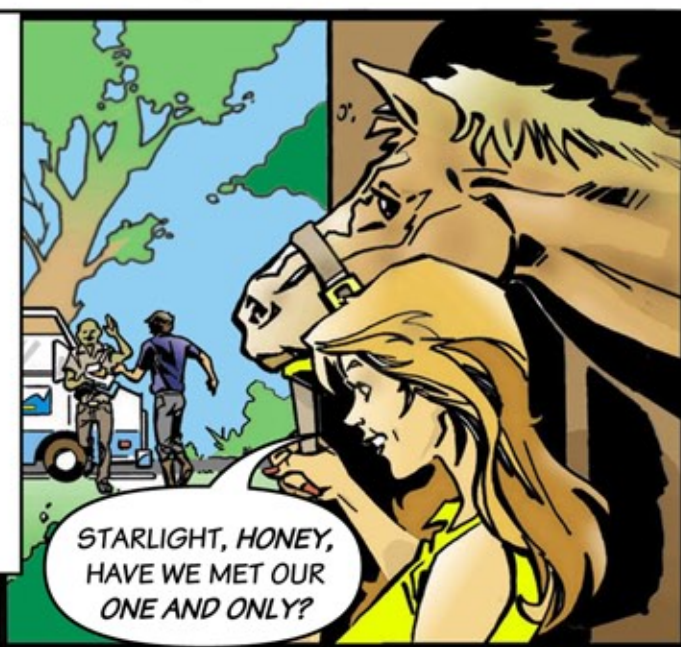
THEIR LOVEMAKING HAS BEEN SWIFT AND URGENT. JODY IS SWIMMING IN BLISS. MAX FEELS STUNNED BY WHAT JUST HAPPENED. THEN HE HEARS THE SOUND OF AN APPROACHING VEHICLE.

DAMNATION! SOUNDS LIKE SHORTY JACKS WITH THE MAIL MUST BE A SPECIAL DELIVERY. GOTTA GET DRESSED, DARLIN'. BE RIGHT BACK.



HEY, STARLIGHT BABY, WE SURE FORGOT ALL ABOUT YOU.

JODY IS IN HEAVEN. MAKING LOVE WAS SO RIGHT. SHE ENVISIONS HERSELF LIVING ON THIS RANCH, LOVING MAX, SHARING THE RODEOS WITH HIM. THAT DEEP VOID SHE CARRIED INSIDE HER HAS BEEN FILLED—NOT WITH A LONELY LIFE ON THE RODEO CIRCUIT, BUT WITH A HOME FOR HER HEART.



STARLIGHT, HONEY, HAVE WE MET OUR ONE AND ONLY?

IT'S *BAD NEWS* FROM MAX'S MAJOR CREDITOR—THEY REFUSE TO EXTEND HIS LOAN AND DEMAND *PROMPT PAYMENT*. FAILING PAYMENT, THE HADDEN HERD, USED AS COLLATERAL, WILL BE SEIZED AND SOLD. MAX COULD ACTUALLY *LOSE HIS BELOVED CIRCLE M!*

HELL! THOSE SKINNY CATTLE AREN'T WORTH SPIT NOW, BUT THEY'LL BE WORTH A *FORTUNE* IF WE EVER GET RAIN. FOLKS'LL PAY TOP DOLLAR TO RESTOCK. MAKES *NO SENSE* FOR THE HERD TO BE SEIZED NOW...UNLESS THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE *CATTLE*. SOMEBODY'S GOT THEIR EYE ON MY LAND! I BET IT'S *OLIVER LOATES*. HE'S THICK AS THIEVES WITH THAT FINANCE MANAGER AND *RUTHLESS* WHEN IT COMES TO WINNING.

JODY IS STILL *BLISSFUL* AND EXPECTS MAX TO FEEL THE SAME. BUT MAX IS CONSUMED BY HIS WORRIES AND REMAINS *GRIM*, DETERMINED ONLY TO GO ON WITH HIS COACHING.

THE BIG BLUESTONE RODEO'S COMING UP SOON. SO I'M GOING TO LET YOU TRY *PATCH* THIS MORNING. GIVE YOU THE FEEL OF HOW A REAL *EXPERIENCED* HORSE RUNS.

WHAT? NOT SO MUCH AS A *KISS*? WHY IS HE ACTING LIKE YESTERDAY NEVER HAPPENED?

CONFUSED AND STUNG BY MAX'S INEXPLICABLE COOLNESS, JODY'S JUDGMENT IS OFF, AND SHE CRASHES PATCH INTO THE FIRST BARREL.



OH, NO, HOW COULD I HAVE MADE SUCH A BLUNDER!

PATCH'S FORELEG HAS BEEN INJURED FROM STRIKING THE BARREL. BAD NEWS FOR MAX. HIS RODEO SUCCESS DEPENDS AS MUCH ON PATCH AS ON HIS OWN SKILL.



YOU JERKED HIM TOO HARD...AFTER ALL I'VE TAUGHT YOU! DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS IF PATCH IS LAME?

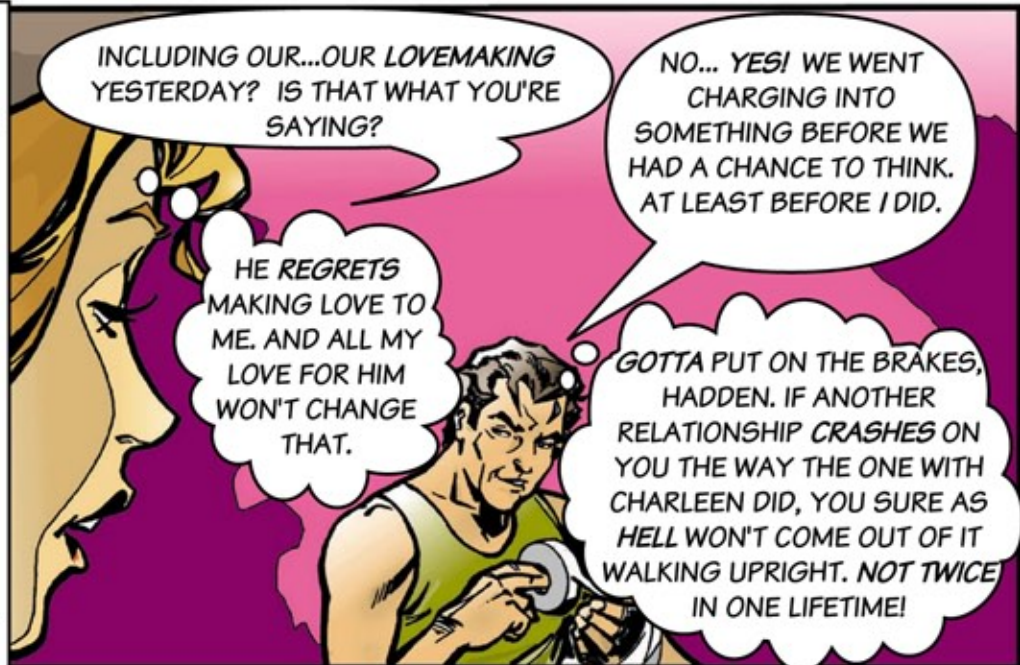
JODY FEELS STUNG. YES, SHE'D MADE A MISTAKE, BUT FOR MAX TO BE SO ANGRY AT HER...



I'M REALLY SORRY. I THOUGHT I COULD HANDLE PATCH, BUT—

SO DID I. BUT YOU WEREN'T READY FOR HIM. MAYBE WE'VE BEEN PUSHING THINGS TOO FAST AROUND HERE...

THE DOUBLE MEANING ISN'T LOST ON JODY. SHE IS SHAKEN BY THE AWFUL POSSIBILITY THAT MAX MIGHT NOT FEEL THE SAME WAY SHE DOES ABOUT THEIR TORRID TAKING OF EACH OTHER IN THE BARN...



INCLUDING OUR...OUR LOVEMAKING YESTERDAY? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

HE REGRETS MAKING LOVE TO ME. AND ALL MY LOVE FOR HIM WON'T CHANGE THAT.

NO... YES! WE WENT CHARGING INTO SOMETHING BEFORE WE HAD A CHANCE TO THINK. AT LEAST BEFORE I DID.

GOTTA PUT ON THE BRAKES, HADDEN. IF ANOTHER RELATIONSHIP CRASHES ON YOU THE WAY THE ONE WITH CHARLEEN DID, YOU SURE AS HELL WON'T COME OUT OF IT WALKING UPRIGHT. NOT TWICE IN ONE LIFETIME!

LATER, A DEJECTED JODY HEADS FOR THE BUNKHOUSE. PASSING OUTSIDE MAX'S OFFICE SHE OVERHEARS HIM ON THE PHONE.

LOOK, THE CIRCLE M ISN'T GOING TO GO UNDER BECAUSE OF LATE PAYMENT NO MATTER HOW MANY OF YOUR VULTURES ARE LINED UP TO GRAB IT, INCLUDING LOATES. NOT ONE CALF LEAVES WITHOUT MY SAY-SO. I'LL HAVE YOUR MONEY AT THE END OF THE MONTH IF I HAVE TO BREAK MY NECK ON A BUCKING BRONC TO DO IT!

HOLY CATS! THE CIRCLE M'S IN DANGER! NO WONDER MAX IS LIKE A BEAR WITH SORE PAWS. HE'S DEPENDING ON A BIG WIN AT THE BLUESTONE. AND PATCH IS INJURED, THANKS TO ME!

FORTUNATELY PATCH WAS ONLY BRUISED AND RECOVERS IN TIME FOR THE RODEO. BUT TENSION REMAINS HIGH BETWEEN JODY AND MAX. MAX HASN'T SAID A WORD ABOUT HIS RANCH TROUBLES—OR ABOUT THEIR FIERY ROMANTIC ENCOUNTER. JODY CAN'T KEEP SILENT ANY LONGER.

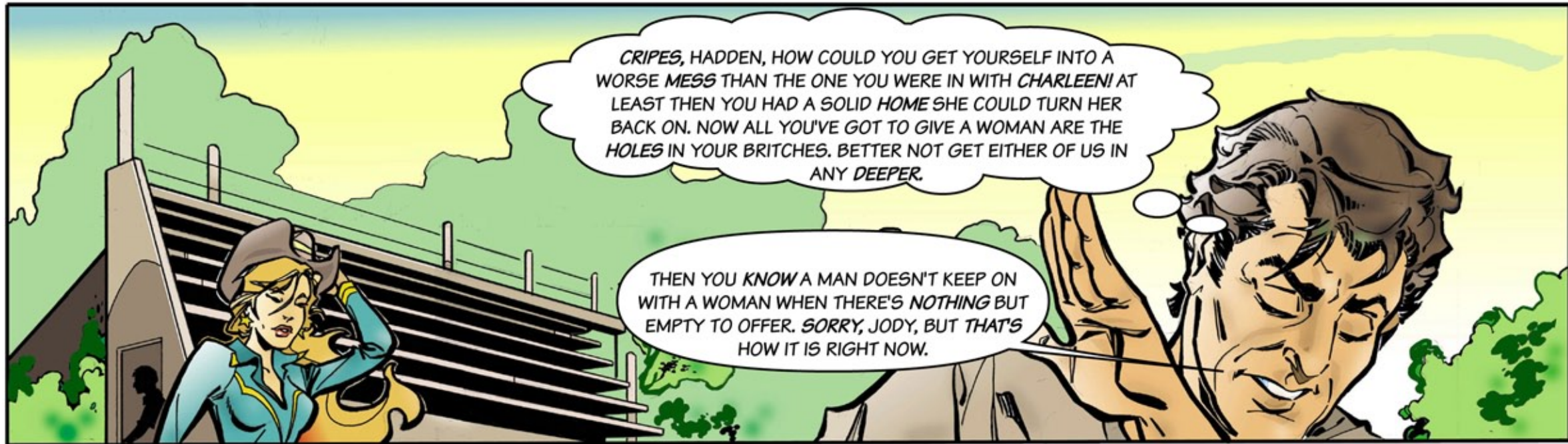
MAX, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SO...SO DISTANT. I HEARD YOU ON THE PHONE.

JODY STRUGGLES TO BREACH THE BARRIER BETWEEN THEM. HER TOUCH FLOODS HIM WITH MEMORIES OF THEIR LOVEMAKING. BUT HE CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE JODY'S GEAR AND HOW SHE CARRIES ONLY WHAT LITTLE SHE NEEDS FOR LIFE ON THE ROAD. JUST LIKE CHARLEEN.

GOD, HOW I WANT TO HOLD HER. BUT SHE'S SET ON THE RODEO LIFE. I'VE SEEN HOW HARD SHE TRAINS. SHE WOULDN'T WANT TO BE TIED DOWN...

TALK TO ME, MAX. I KNOW THE CIRCLE M IS ON THE LINE HERE.

TELL ME OUR LOVEMAKING WASN'T A DREAM. TELL ME YOU CARE!



CRIPES, HADDEN, HOW COULD YOU GET YOURSELF INTO A WORSE MESS THAN THE ONE YOU WERE IN WITH CHARLEEN! AT LEAST THEN YOU HAD A SOLID HOME SHE COULD TURN HER BACK ON. NOW ALL YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE A WOMAN ARE THE HOLES IN YOUR BRITCHES. BETTER NOT GET EITHER OF US IN ANY DEEPER.

THEN YOU KNOW A MAN DOESN'T KEEP ON WITH A WOMAN WHEN THERE'S NOTHING BUT EMPTY TO OFFER. SORRY, JODY, BUT THAT'S HOW IT IS RIGHT NOW.

BEFORE JODY CAN PROTEST, OLIVER LOATES APPROACHES. OLIVER IS THE CURRENT CHAMPION AND MAX'S ARCHRIVAL EVER SINCE CHARLEEN LEFT MAX FOR OLIVER A YEAR PREVIOUSLY, MAX CAN'T STAND THE GUY, AND OLIVER KNOWS IT.

JODY GETS HER ANSWER QUICKLY. TRUDY AND CARLA, TWO MEMBERS OF CHARLEEN'S TRICK-RIDING TEAM, DESCEND ON MAX. THEY IGNORE JODY STANDING AT THE CORNER OF THE TRAILER.



CHARLEEN! IS SHE HERE?

WELL, HADDEN, YOU'VE SHOWED UP TO TRY FOR THE BIG ONE AGAIN. TOO BAD IT'S IN THE BAG FOR ME. JUST LIKE CHARLEEN. BUT DON'T WORRY, THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER GAL WAITING FOR YOUR FAVORS AT THE RODEO!



I GOT NOTHING TO SAY TO CHARLEEN.

MAX, WE'VE BEEN LOOKING ALL OVER FOR YOU. CHARLEEN SENT US. SHE WANTS TO TALK TO YOU.

NOT EVEN WHEN SHE TELLS YOU OLIVER LOATES WAS HER BIGGEST MISTAKE EVER?

JODY HAS JUST BEEN HIT WITH A **DOUBLE WHAMMY**—MAX'S STUBBORN RESISTANCE TO HER AND CHARLEEN'S SUDDEN RENEWED INTEREST IN HIM. AT THE RANCH, JODY HARDLY GAVE THE WOMAN A THOUGHT. BUT NOW...



LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN A FOOL. CHARLEEN'S BACK IN THE PICTURE—AND I'M OUT.

JODY AND MAX ARE SWEEPED SEPARATELY INTO THE **FRANTIC WHIRL** OF RODEO ACTIVITY. JODY SEES CHARLEEN EVERYWHERE, SOMETIMES WITH MAX. AND MAX SEEMS ALWAYS TO BE CATCHING CHARLEEN'S ACT.



SHE'S SO GORGEOUS. MAX CAN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF HER.

MAX HAS JUST BESTED OLIVER LOATES IN THE CALF-ROPING CONTEST. THOUGH THERE ARE MORE EVENTS COMING UP, HE IS PLEASED WITH HIS PROGRESS IN ACCUMULATING POINTS BUT WORRIED ABOUT JODY, WHOM HE HASN'T TALKED TO SINCE OLIVER CONFRONTED THEM.



GOOD LUCK ON YOUR RACE, JODY. COMING TO THE DANCE TONIGHT?

WOULDN'T MISS IT. I HEAR IT'S GONNA BE PACKED WITH GOOD-LOOKING COWBOYS.

I THINK THAT FOOLED HIM. NO MATTER HOW MUCH I LONG FOR HIS TOUCH, I CAN'T LET HIM SEE HOW HURT I AM.



JODY HAS TAKEN CARE TO LOOK HER PRETTIEST, HOPING TO SEE MAX AT THE DANCE TRADITIONALLY HELD IN THE EVENING FOR RODEO PARTICIPANTS...



JODY SEES MAX AND CHARLEEN DANCING. HER HEART SHATTERS.

OH, NO! HE HAS GONE BACK TO CHARLEEN!



JODY WANTS ONLY TO FLEE THE DANCE, BUT BEFORE SHE CAN, OLIVER LOATES SWEEPS HER OUT ONTO THE DANCE FLOOR.



WHILE HADDEN IS OVER THERE MAKING TIME WITH MY WOMAN, I'LL JUST RETURN THE FAVOR AND MAKE SOME TIME WITH HIS.

TIME FOR YOU TO GET LOST, LOATES. AND KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF CHARLEEN, TOO, FROM NOW ON, SHE'S DONE WITH YOU!

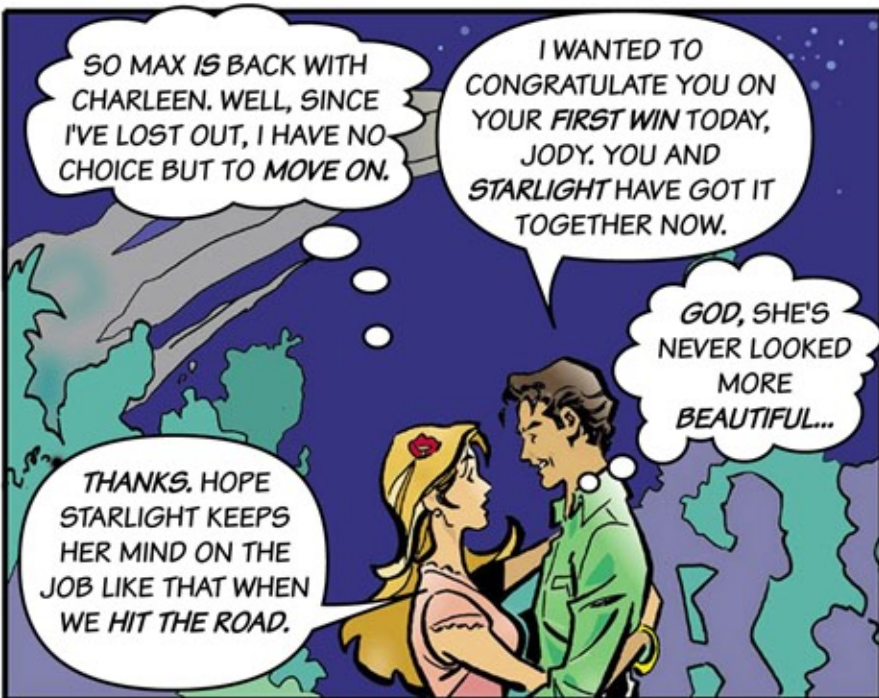


SO MAX IS BACK WITH CHARLEEN. WELL, SINCE I'VE LOST OUT, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO MOVE ON.

I WANTED TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR FIRST WIN TODAY, JODY. YOU AND STARLIGHT HAVE GOT IT TOGETHER NOW.

GOD, SHE'S NEVER LOOKED MORE BEAUTIFUL...

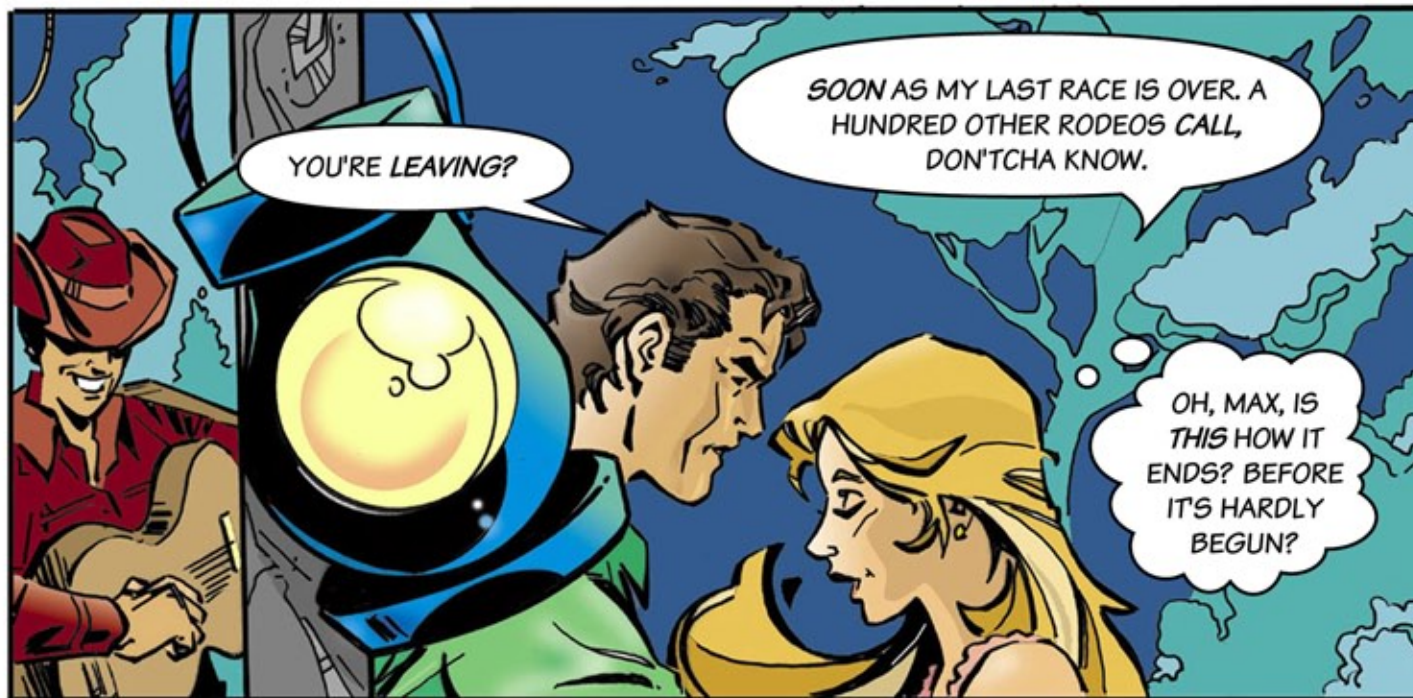
THANKS. HOPE STARLIGHT KEEPS HER MIND ON THE JOB LIKE THAT WHEN WE HIT THE ROAD.



YOU'RE LEAVING?

SOON AS MY LAST RACE IS OVER. A HUNDRED OTHER RODEOS CALL, DON'TCHA KNOW.

OH, MAX, IS THIS HOW IT ENDS? BEFORE IT'S HARDLY BEGUN?

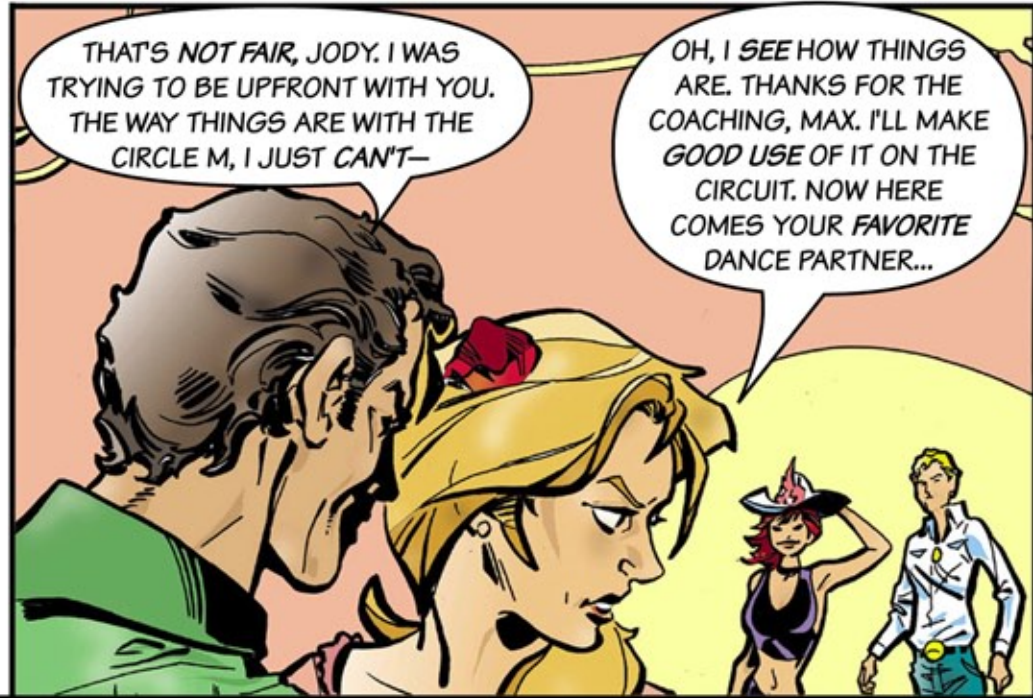




YOU'VE MADE UP YOUR MIND ABOUT THIS?

I EXPECTED JODY TO COME BACK TO MY RANCH FOR MORE TRAINING TO POLISH HER SKILLS. BUT NO, SHE'S TRAVELING ON, AS SHE ALWAYS INTENDED. JUST LIKE CHARLEEN. I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN KICKED IN THE GUT.

ISN'T THIS WHY I TRAINED SO HARD? BESIDES, YOU TOLD ME YOURSELF, YOU DON'T WANT TO KEEP ON WITH...WHAT WE STARTED.



THAT'S NOT FAIR, JODY. I WAS TRYING TO BE UPFRONT WITH YOU. THE WAY THINGS ARE WITH THE CIRCLE M, I JUST CAN'T--

OH, I SEE HOW THINGS ARE. THANKS FOR THE COACHING, MAX. I'LL MAKE GOOD USE OF IT ON THE CIRCUIT. NOW HERE COMES YOUR FAVORITE DANCE PARTNER...

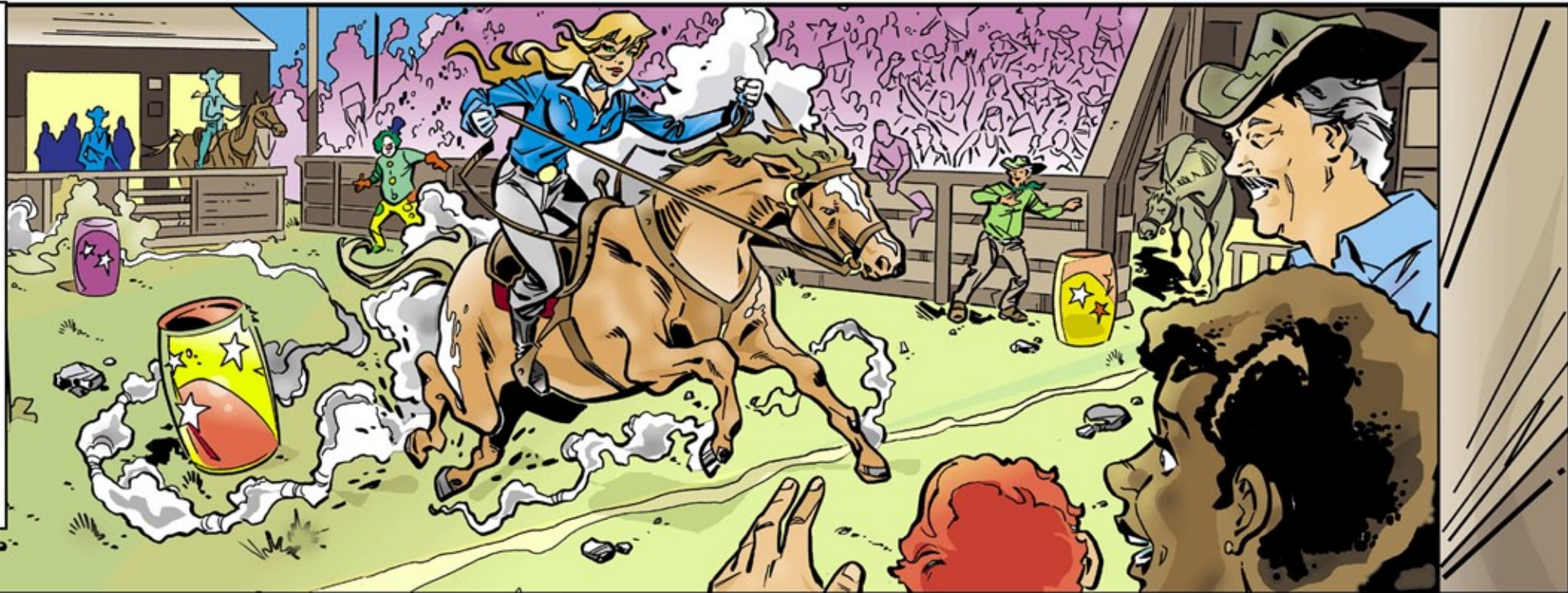


HER HEART BREAKING, JODY FLEES. MAX WANTS TO PURSUE HER BUT...



WHAT CAN I SAY TO YOU, JODY? I CAN'T TELL YOU I LOVE YOU AND WANT TO MARRY YOU WHEN I MIGHT SOON HAVE NO HOME TO TAKE YOU TO. BUT HOW CAN YOU LEAVE SO EASILY? HAVE I BEEN JUST A STOP ALONG YOUR WAY? ARE YOU SO AMBITIOUS? I'M AN IDIOT FOR FALLING SO HARD...

AFTER A SLEEPLESS NIGHT WITH HER BODY TORTURED BY DESIRE FOR MAX, JODY THROWS HERSELF INTO HER FINAL BARREL RACE THE NEXT DAY. HER TIME IS SO GOOD SHE PLACES IN THE TOP FIVE FOR THE WHOLE RODEO. EVERYTHING SHE HAS LEARNED FROM MAX HAS KICKED IN, BUT HER TRIUMPHS ARE HOLLOW WITHOUT HIM.



JODY LISTENS TO THE ANNOUNCER AS MAX SUCCEEDS IN EVENT AFTER EVENT...



OH, MAX, EVEN IF I CAN'T HAVE MY HEART'S DESIRE, I HOPE YOU GET YOURS.

MAX HADDEN HAS JUST WON THE SADDLE BRONC EVENT. HE'S NOW ONLY ONE POINT BEHIND OLIVER LOATES. THIS COULD BE THE YEAR MAX WINS THE BIG PRIZE, FOLKS. WHAT AN EXCITING TIME IT'S BEEN WITH THESE TWO GIANTS FIGHTING IT OUT FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP. EVERYTHING WILL BE DECIDED THIS AFTERNOON. THE PURSE HAS BEEN BOOED UP THIS YEAR TO THE BIGGEST EVER...

WALKING THROUGH THE MAZE OF PARKED TRUCKS AND TRAILERS, JODY IS JUST IN TIME TO SPOT A TEENAGED BOY APPARENTLY STEPPING OUT OF MAX'S TRAILER.

HEY, THERE! THAT'S MAX HADDEN'S TRAILER. CAN I HELP YOU WITH SOMETHING?

OH...OH, NO...NOTHIN'. WRONG TRAILER. THOUGHT IT WAS MY UNCLE'S. UH, GOTTA GO!



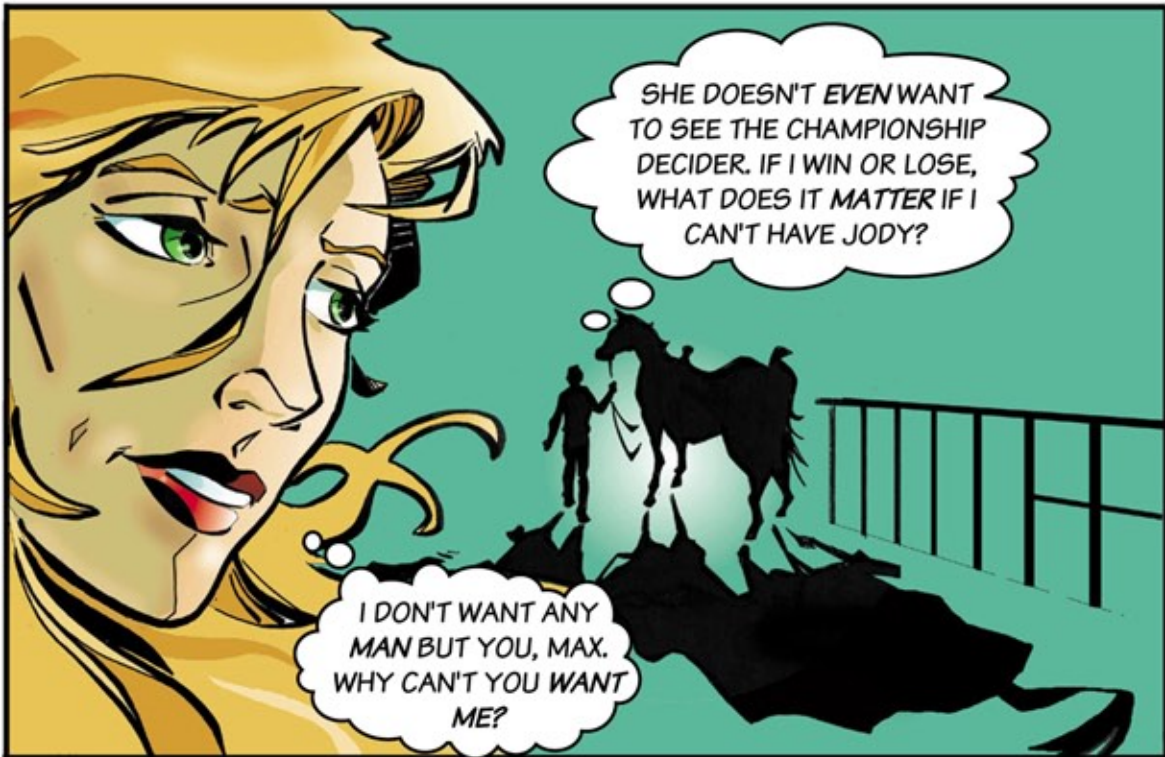
JODY'S EVENTS ARE OVER AND SHE'S LEAVING. SHE CAN'T BEAR TO WATCH THE FINAL EVENT THAT WILL DECIDE THE CHAMPIONSHIP. AS FOR MAX...



GOD, SHE'S LEAVING. SHE'S REALLY LEAVING. I CAN'T BEAR IT.

AREN'T YOU COMING OVER TO THE ARENA?

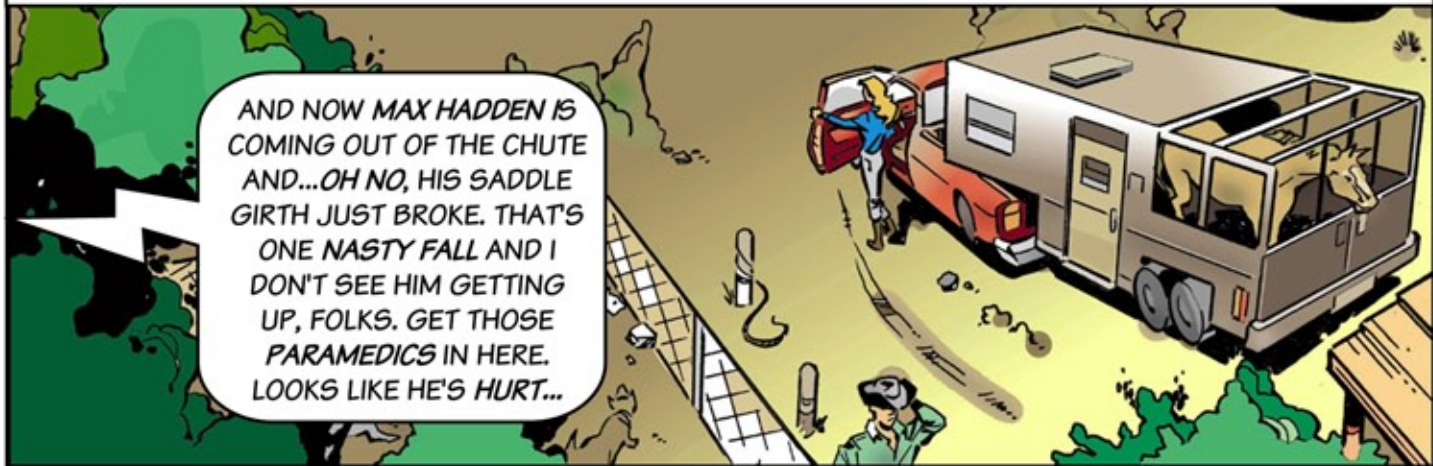
NO...I'M SURE YOU'LL BEAT OUT LOATES JUST FINE. STARLIGHT AND ME GOT TO HIT THE HIGHWAY.



SHE DOESN'T EVEN WANT TO SEE THE CHAMPIONSHIP DECIDER. IF I WIN OR LOSE, WHAT DOES IT MATTER IF I CAN'T HAVE JODY?

I DON'T WANT ANY MAN BUT YOU, MAX. WHY CAN'T YOU WANT ME?

JODY HAS MADE UP HER MIND TO LEAVE THE RODEO GROUNDS BEFORE MAX COMES BACK AFTER THE LAST EVENT. SHE IS CERTAIN HE WILL WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP AND THE PRIZE HE SO DESPERATELY NEEDS. BUT SUDDENLY, MAX'S FORTUNES TAKE A TERRIBLE TURN.



AND NOW MAX HADDEN IS COMING OUT OF THE CHUTE AND...OH NO, HIS SADDLE GIRTH JUST BROKE. THAT'S ONE NASTY FALL AND I DON'T SEE HIM GETTING UP, FOLKS. GET THOSE PARAMEDICS IN HERE. LOOKS LIKE HE'S HURT...



MAX! I'VE GOT TO GO TO HIM!



HEY, LADY, YOU AREN'T ALLOWED IN THE RING! GET BACK HERE!

WELL, FOLKS, THE CHAMPIONSHIP WILL BE AWARDED ONCE AGAIN TO OLIVER LOATES. WHAT A TOUGH BREAK FOR MAX.



MAX, OH MY DARLING MAX! ARE YOU HURT BAD...

LOOKS LIKE HIS LEG IS BROKEN.



DARLING, I THOUGHT YOU'D LEFT, BUT YOU...

NO, SWEETHEART. I COULDN'T LEAVE. I DO LOVE YOU.

OH MY DARLIN--



WELL, LOOK AT THAT, WILL YOU, FOLKS. IF THAT DON'T CURE WHAT AILS HIM, NOTHING WILL.

SUDDENLY THE MOOD CHANGES AS JODY SPOTS SOMETHING VERY WRONG...

WHAT?

YOU'VE BEEN SABOTAGED! CHEATED OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP...

OMIGOD, THE STITCHING IN YOUR SADDLE HAS BEEN CUT! THAT'S WHAT THAT KID WAS UP TO WHEN I SAW HIM AT YOUR TRAILER....

OLIVER PROMISED ME THAT FAST SORREL GELDING HE'S GOT IF I JUST DID THIS ONE LITTLE THING—CUT MAX'S SADDLE. OLIVER WAS MY HERO. I DIDN'T THINK...I NEVER MEANT FOR MAX TO GET HURT. I'M SORRY...



MY BOY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU ALL. HE CUT THE SADDLE, MA'AM.

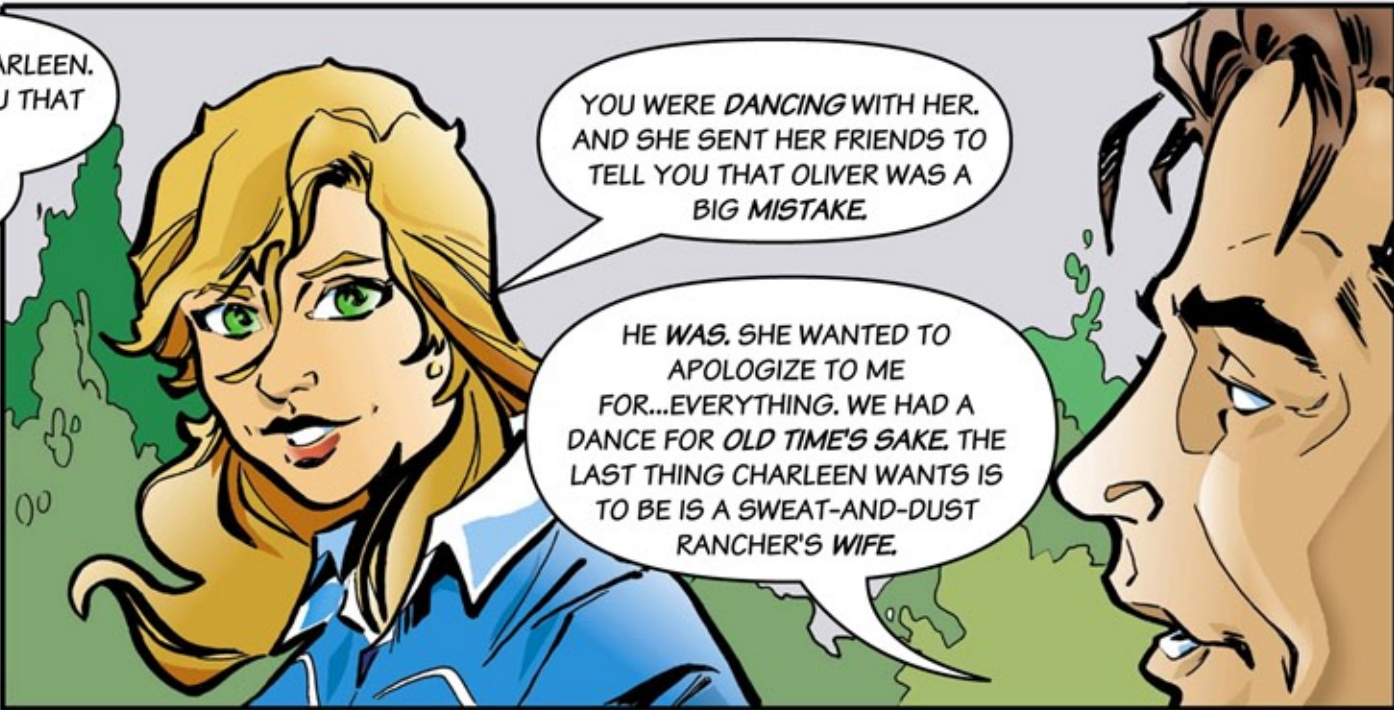
THIS IS ENOUGH TO CALL AN INQUIRY. IF OLIVER LOATES IS DISQUALIFIED FOR CHEATING, THE CHAMPIONSHIP—AND THE PRIZE MONEY—WILL GO TO MAX HADDEN.





I DON'T CARE THAT YOU'RE BACK WITH CHARLEEN...JUST SO LONG AS YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.

BUT I'M NOT WITH CHARLEEN. WHATEVER GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?



YOU WERE DANCING WITH HER. AND SHE SENT HER FRIENDS TO TELL YOU THAT OLIVER WAS A BIG MISTAKE.

HE WAS. SHE WANTED TO APOLOGIZE TO ME FOR...EVERYTHING. WE HAD A DANCE FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE. THE LAST THING CHARLEEN WANTS IS TO BE IS A SWEAT-AND-DUST RANCHER'S WIFE.



I'D TAKE THE JOB IN A MINUTE!

MAX HAS FORGOTTEN THE PAIN IN HIS LEG. JODY IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO HIM NOW.

THE JOB'S YOURS, IF YOU WANT IT, DARLIN'. I WAS A FOOL FOR PUSHING YOU AWAY BECAUSE OF THE THREAT TO THE CIRCLE M. WHAT GOOD IS WINNING HERE IF I HAVEN'T WON YOU?

MAX, DARLING, YOU'VE WON ALL ROUND. JUST TRY AND GET RID OF ME!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO CRY ABOUT IT, SWEETHEART. YOU'VE HAD ME HOG-TIED SINCE DAY ONE.

I'M NOT CRYING, MAX. DON'T YOU REMEMBER WHAT A RAINDROP LOOKS LIKE? IT'S STARTING TO RAIN!

The End

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