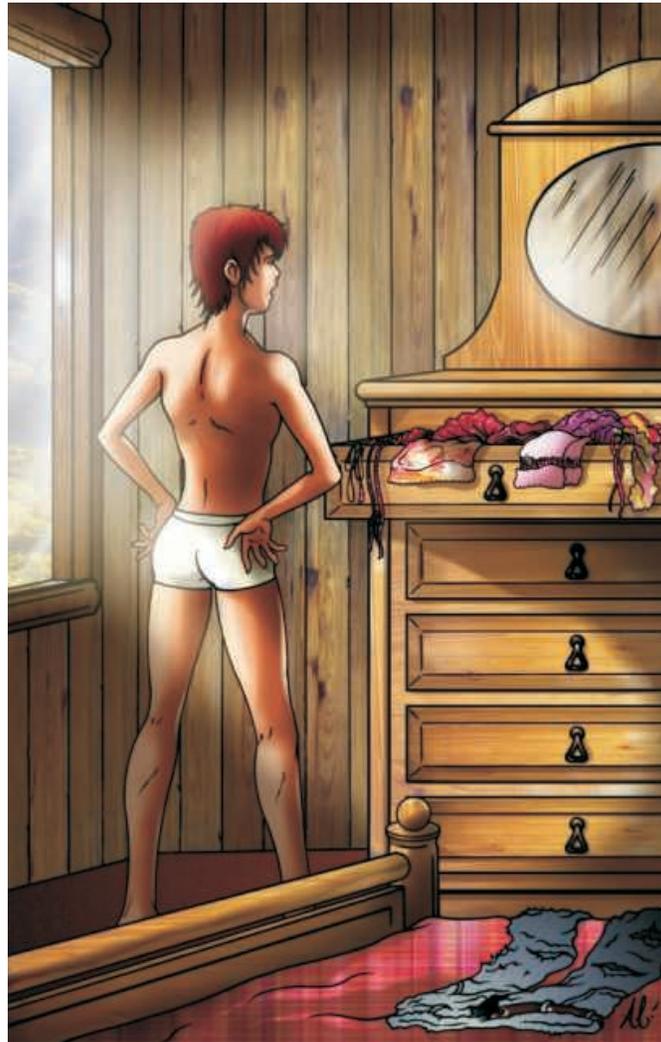




Reluctant Press presents:

ACCIDENTAL COWGIRL

ANNIE WARREN



A 'YOUNG ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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ACCIDENTAL COWGIRL

by Annie Warren

Angie knew what it meant when she looked up and watched Jason's old pickup pull in the gate and drive up the long, dusty driveway up to the house. It was followed not long thereafter by the expected knock at the door. The boy had arrived. Jason had agreed to pick him up, as Angie was too busy to be bothered with dealing with the mere stripling.

Angle's sister Martha was the antitheses of Angie. Angie was slender almost to a fault, somewhat angular, black haired and strengthened by the toughness of running her ranch, though she was still beautiful with a solid strength in beauty. On the other hand, Martha had been citified and softened. Both had married but Angle's had been measured in hours. Martha's marriage had lasted longer but had ended shortly after the boy was born. Angie had ended up, however, with the ranch she now ruled with an iron fist. She had recently received a letter from Martha asking her to see if she could make a man out of her son. After some more correspondence, with a good deal of reluctance, Angie had finally agreed to give it a try. So Martha's son, Marion, was now standing there waiting on her very doorstep. But she was busy, so, she headed for and opened the door.

There he stood. He was the same height as her but somewhat skinnier and definitely less muscular. He wore badly worn, threadbare sneakers, faded jeans that were on the verge of falling apart with large holes at the knees, and a thin, plaid shirt with holes at the elbows. His long, flaming red hair was almost clean but was very unruly. It was a lot longer than her much more practical short cut. At his side was a large, apparently new suitcase of a very generic kind. In his hand was a plastic shopping bag holding what looked like books in it.

"Aunt Angela?" he asked in a soft, almost apologetic voice.

"Call me 'Angie', boy, and come on in. I got work to do but I can spare the time to get you settled. Then you can help me. Come on, time's a-wasting. Grab your bag and let's get going."

She turned on her heel even before she finished talking. He picked up his suitcase and hurried after her down a hallway and into a small bedroom that was sparsely but adequately furnished. She opened the closet and pulled out some hangers. She opened the top drawer of the dresser, then took the suitcase from him and put it on the bed next to the hangers as he put his bag of books on top of the dresser.

"I'd better unpack you or we'll probably never get anywhere." With that, she cracked the bag open. She stopped, looked at Marion, then looked back at the bag. Marion was just staring at it, open-mouthed.

"Marion? Are these things yours? They're hardly what I would have expected for a cowBOY to be packing."

"I... I... I don't know where that came from. The bag is mine, but...that's not what I took with me on the train or the bus... I... I... Jeeze, where'd all of that stuff come from?" He then broke from staring at the case contents and looked up at her as if she had the answer.

"No time to ponder the unknown just now. We'll just get it unpacked and hang it all up so that it won't get any more wrinkled than it already is."

She reached into the bag and pulled out a short, slim, bright red skirt, put it onto a hanger and into the closet. Two frilly, white satiny blouses with zippers up the back and a black skirt followed it, along with a cream-coloured translucent nylon blouse with a zipper up the back. When she found a short dress, she also put it on a hanger but held it up to the boy. He had stood by speechless without moving, staring with his mouth still hanging open.

"Looks like it could fit you, boy. I wonder what your mother was thinking when she packed these things."

"She didn't pack them. I know what went into my bag and that stuff was not there when I left home. I had some new jeans, sneakers, shirts and underwear, honest!"

She looked for any identification tags on the bag but only found generic routing tags that matched where it had gone along with Marion. Beneath the dresses was lingerie: several lacy pairs of white panties, some bras, two slips, some hose, even two pair of stylish shoes, one in black and the other in red. Both had very high, slender and elegant heels and very graceful forms. She put those under the bed where they brightly winked out at them.

There were also some lace hankies that he did not want to acknowledge as there was an excessively fancy femininely scrolled "M" monogram on the corner of each.

"Well, boy, if this stuff is not yours, you can still use these." she said examining the monogrammed hankies. We'll see what we can do about finding your stuff later."

Before putting the lingerie in the open dresser drawer, she examined the bras, looking at the size. Then she looked at Marion, making a mental note that it looked like they could fit him too. All in all, it looked as if all of these feminine things were really his.

Then came two small flat cases. One held a small makeup kit and the other had toiletries such as perfumes, a douche, some tampons and a smaller bag with some jewellery in it. She put these on top of the dresser, deciding that he had brought with him a rather ade-

quate, though small, woman's wardrobe. After removing yet even more lingerie, she lifted out a filmy baby doll set, and the bag was finally empty. There was no identification in it of any kind. The bag had probably been bought new just like the boy's should have been; the possibility of mix up was large. She emptied the last items into the dresser, closed the drawers, then put the empty suitcase into the back of the closet.

"Enough gawking at your finery, we got work to do."

"It's not MY finery. I don't know who owns it..."

Angie closed the closet door, removing the dress, skirts and blouses from sight, then moved towards the door. "C'mon, boy".

He followed dutifully as they went through the house towards the back. She made a few comments like "That's the kitchen" and "That's my study", but for the most part they passed through in silence. At the back door she paused and grabbed her broad brimmed hat off a hat rack by the door. Looking at him, she gave her "alternate" hat to him, a grey cowboy like hat that had seen better days; it now had almost too much "character". He put it on and it fit, so she led the way out the back door in the direction of an out-building that she called the barn, though it did not look like any barn he had ever seen. There were corals around it in which he could see some horses and cattle.

She was obviously a no-nonsense woman, he decided, for he had to really move to stay right behind her. He took in her backside, noting the zipper of her close-cut jeans, realizing that they were not man-cut. Then there were the muscular arms; she wore a sleeveless shirt that let the fact that she wore a bra show through along with an errant bra strap peeking out of one side at her shoulder. He wondered as he caught up to her if she was tall for a woman or if he was short for a man. These thoughts were abruptly interrupted.

"Know anything about breeding cattle or surrogates?" She looked over at him and saw a blank look. "Hmm, thought so. You know about the birds and the bees then? How reproduction works? In humans, maybe?"

"If you mean how babies are made, yeah I know that much."

"How babies are made!" she almost snorted, "Well, it's a start."

The building they approached was low and of what appeared to be rough hewn wood. There was no barn as he would have expected on a farm, especially a breeding farm, if that is what this was. The sun was bright and, in spite of the hat he wore, he was glad to get in out of the glare as they went in through a door. He was surprised, however, by what he saw.

From the outside, the building had looked rough, but inside it looked as if he had walked into his doctor's office. The room was clean, white, with refrigerators, a stove and what looked like a chemistry lab with a microscope and all kinds of glass jars, bottles and test tubes. There were also things that looked like chemical equipment that he could not recognize; his experience had not yet included such tools as a centrifuge. She went to a cabinet and got out some things, then went to a fridge and got out some more. She put the lot in a small bag that reminded him of the doctor's bags he had seen in westerns and movies about the early century. When all was ready, she stopped and looked at him.

"All right, Marion, here it is in a nut shell. When a cow is ready to put out an egg, it goes into heat. It emits pheromones that the bull senses so they have sex to make her pregnant. We don't have bulls on this ranch; we do the fertilization manually; it's called artificial insemination."

"Is that what happened to Mrs. Johnson? She wanted a kid but her husband couldn't give her one so she had the doctor give her something to knock her up."

"Yes, that is probably what happened. There are also some women who decide to become single parents so they can have a family. That's also artificial insemination. The advantage of artificial insemination is that you can choose who the father is. In the case of cattle, you choose a championship bull, take his semen, then sell it to whoever wants to have calves by him."

He grinned a silly grin and noted with just a touch of wistfulness, "Gee, he misses out on a lot of sex, doesn't he?"

"I suppose you could look at it that way, but he does get to have a lot more offspring than he'd get even if he were in with a large herd."

"Are we going to knock up a bunch of cows now?" There was almost eagerness in his voice.

"No, boy, we're going to prep 'a bunch of cows' that will become surrogate mothers."

"What is a surrogate mother?"

She picked up her stuff and headed for an inner door. "Artificial insemination mixes the qualities of the bull with the cow you inseminate. If you want to raise a 'superior' calf, you can have the egg of a high quality cow be inseminated with the semen of a high quality bull. Then you put the now fertilized egg into another cow and let her carry and bear it. For humans, it's called 'in vitro fertilization'." She opened the door and headed out, with him right behind her.

"In order for it to work with cows, the surrogates that are to be implanted with the fertilized egg must have their ovulation cycle in synchronization with the donor of the egg. Women who live together will develop synchronized periods, but not cows. We give them a strong hormonal implant that sort of resets their biological clocks so we can implant the fertilized egg. Even then it is not a sure thing. Harry brought in 5 cows that need to be 're-set' so we can have 10 for next week's visit by the vet. He has the embryos and will do the implantation. We can prep the cows."

Marion, who had never been this close to cows before, shied back when they neared an iron rack that was the outlet of a small pen with 5 cows in it. Their backs were mysteriously marked up as if someone had drawn on them with an enormous crayon. A tall lanky cowboy was standing nearby. As they approached the rack, he opened a gate at one end and drove a cow into it, then closed it behind her. The cow was essentially immobilized. Angie calmly set up her kit on a nearby table, then climbed up on the rack, manipulated some rods and immobilized the head. The cow was wild eyed and thrashed as much as she could in those confines. Marion moved a bit further back. Angie calmly grabbed an ear and pressed her injector home. It almost simultaneously made a slit in the surface of the

ear as it inserted a small tube into it. She then closed it back up but not before it bled just a bit.

The cow bellowed but could do no more. Sure that the implant was in place and secure, Angie released the head and then pulled a handle that released the front of the cage and the cow 'thundered' out into the holding coral. It had only taken a minute, but it frightened the boy; both the size of the animal and quick surgery, even if minor, had him almost shaking. In his sheltered city life, he had hardly skinned his knee much less really cut himself and the sight of blood was devastating to him, even animal blood.

"You cut him" was all that he could say as he stood off to the side and trembled slightly.

"It's a her, boy. That was a cow. And of course, I cut her. I had to make a place to insert the implant. When the time comes, I'll have to really cut her again to remove it. It's a necessary part of the process." Angie was again on the ground moving to the table to get another pre-loaded insertion tool as Harry drove a second cow into the rack.

Harry had said nothing, and nothing was said to him, but he had seen the reaction of the boy and smiled. It looked like the boss' nephew was going to have to learn a whole lot and get over some very basic hurdles in order to become what his mom had asked of Angie. She had read a part of the letter to him and Jase. They had voiced their reservations and now he saw that at least some of them were true.

Angie glanced over at him and then approached the second cow. "Come on over here, boy, and see how it is done."

He took several steps in her direction as she mounted the rack and immobilized the cow's head. When this cow kicked more than the first cow, Angie took it in stride and continued with the minor operation. Marion, however, backed off to where he had been. When the implant was in, Angie looked over and saw where he had retreated to. She released the cow and looked more sternly at him.

"Marion, your Ma sent you here to try and beef you up. It is healthy to have respect for what a cow is, but dangerous to be frightened of them on a ranch. You come on over here."

He came to the table as she reloaded the injectors, but was pale. He saw some blood on her hands and grew a bit more ashen. He stood there staring at her hands. When she saw it, she pulled out her bandanna and wiped them off.

"What's eating you, boy? This is merely setting their clocks, or putting them on hold. It's gotta be done."

He looked into her eyes, "But you're cutting them, hurting them. How can you do that?"

"It doesn't hurt them that much. It is more like a bee sting to you." She got the supplies for the next one and heard the gate shut when it was caged. "Now you stand here and see what I do. You can do the next one."

His jaw worked but nothing came out. She could see he was about to run and chided him, "You watch from here, boy, and see how it is done. Don't you dare run off!"

Angie fixed the third cow, then turned to look at him at the table, but he had turned away. She climbed down and went over to him and turned him around; a bit of blood got on his shirt. "Marion, you are here to learn something. Now get a hold of yourself." The gate clanged shut and she got her materials. "You watch this time! I want you to do the last one!"

She pulled him halfway to the cow but he was resisting. As she climbed up, she looked over at him. He was still there but was looking to the side. At the top, she got ready to inject the capsule. He was still looking to the side.

"Marion! You watch this now!"

He looked but there was a strain of almost horror on his face. He watched the process through, then turned away when she was done. Angie took the couple of steps down and walked over to him.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"You cut her! She bled! You hurt her! How could you?" She walked by him silently wondering what kind of a man could be so skittish about such a simple job. He followed her back, silent, as if waiting for an answer. Angie got ready for the last one and handed the tools to him just as the sound of the closing gate echoed through the room. He stared at them but refused to take them.

With a free hand, she grabbed his shirt and pulled him over to the cow. The closer they got, the more he resisted until he wiggled out as his shirt tore and she lost her hold.

"Golly, Miss Angie, if Miss Marian doesn't want to do it, you can't force her." It was Harry. His herding duties done, he had come over to them and now stood by looking at Angie and at the long haired boy whom he had assumed was a girl.

"No, I suppose not." she said and did the final animal and released her. Harry walked off to check the animals. Marion stood by the table, eyes down, his torn shirt showing white skin underneath. Her cool exterior, however, hid a seething temper. At the table, she automatically reloaded the two injectors with fresh implants, then knocked off a sheet of paper. Figuring all was done, Harry left the room.

"Pick that up."

He bent over to pick it up and his butt went high in the air. Just as she had expected, it was soft and fuller than most boys. No wonder Harry had said what he said, what with the boy's long hair and still high voice. In an easy move, she moved over to him and pinned him against the wall.

"I should spank you for being a scaredy-cat spoiled brat, but I won't. I'll just let you know what the cow feels like. It won't hurt as much as you thought."

With practiced hands, she hit his butt with both injectors that easily passed through his thin pants and inserted two capsules deep into his inviting cheeks, venting her anger on him and his scared ways. The boy screamed, but the sound was muffled due to his position. Angie then moved back to the table and packed up the gear as he fell to the floor, ignoring his plight. He was slow to get up.

"That hurt! What did you do that for?" He reached back and felt the torn holes in his pants, then felt a warm dampness. He pulled his hand around front and saw the redness and almost fainted, staggering into the wall.

"That was instead of a spanking, Boy. Goodness gracious, but don't you take the cake?" She grabbed her bag that was packed, then him and walked back to the lab. There she laid him down on a bench, butt up. Once she cleaned the instruments and put away the supplies, she turned and looked over at him.

His pants were torn and bloodied in the back, not a heck of a lot, but the blood had clotted and started to dry in two red spots on the back of this jeans. His eyes were almost glassy so she put a blanket over him. No need letting shock do damage, though any shock he had would soon be past. Then, as she gathered what she needed, she thought it was time to "wake him up" and be doubly sure about infection though the tools had been clean. She got some hydrogen peroxide, bent down and cleaned the wounds. The holes in his jeans were larger than Angie thought and access was almost too easy. Of course the stinging woke him up, but other than some loud "Ow"s, he said nothing. He just glowered at her.

Angie then put a large Band Aid over each of the holes in his butt, already healing since he was so young. She then pulled him to his feet. "Time to go do the paperwork, Boy. Let's go." He came along unresisting as they went back to the house. In one hand she had a sheaf of papers; in the other hand she had him.

When they came back into the house, she took him into what looked to him to be a regular business office. There were some books in a book shelf, a couple of file cabinets, an office-like desk, and to one side a computer with a printer and some other peripherals. Angie sat him down on a soft chair with a dark leatherette covering, went behind the desk and turned on the computer. She muttered to herself as she looked at the screen, then at the keyboard where she punched a few keys. The screen would change and it would be repeated over a number of times, always accompanied by muttering and griping.

Marion forgot his pain when he saw the computer and got a bit of glee watching her grumble at it with a sort of turnabout-fair-play attitude. He knew a good bit about computers and could usually work with them with ease. At this time, however, he certainly was not going to volunteer to help her, not after her giving him what amounted to a painful spanking.

Finally, after what appeared to be at least one false start, she got what she wanted. With much looking back and forth and single-finger poking, Angie worked her way through the documents she had brought in with her. Once or twice, she looked up at him, noting the smug look on his face, not the pained one of just a short while earlier. She figured that he must know about how computers worked and was having fun at her expense. She reasoned that he didn't like going near cows and she didn't like working with this electronic torture machine. She felt he could, but it was her turn NOT to ask him for help. He had obviously forgotten, or at least set aside, what she had done to him.

After a while, he began to get fidgety, but she was just wrapping it up and so let it be. Angie finished up and closed the program, then looked over at him as the printer began buzzing and whirring out a report of her actions.

"I suppose you know all about these machines, eh?"

"I have worked with some of them at school and at home. You have any games on it?"

"Games? Whatever would I want with games? I have enough trouble working on the programs I have to use in order to keep this ranch going. Maybe later I'll let you try it out. For now, there are no games and I don't want you playing with it without my permission. You could mess things up badly."

Angie paused and thought a bit, then added, "And even if you did, it would not get you home any earlier. Your Ma wanted you to learn ranching and to stay for the summer. So you're here to stay for a while, like it or not."

"Games are great for relaxing, and I just thought. . . ." Marion's voice trailed off and he dropped any further argument. Besides, it was getting towards late afternoon and his stomach was beginning to make low rumbles. "Uh, when do we eat?"

She looked at her watch. "In about an hour. Cook should be starting up any minute now."

"Gee, a cook too? How many people work for you, Angie?" He did not know if he should still call her Angie after this afternoon's escapades. As he said it, he watched her closely and saw no adverse reaction and relaxed a bit.

"Well, there's Jason and Harry that you've met. You may see Jim if we do any field work. He works most of his time out checking herds in the pastures, mending fences and the like. Then there's Melanie. She's my cook and housekeeper. That doesn't mean you can get away with not making your bed, young man," Angie said in a sterner voice, "but you don't have to worry about changing sheets or sweeping up. You'd better keep your things in. . . ." She paused a bit. "I guess you don't have many things yet to get out of order, but when you do, you'll be expected to keep them in tip top condition." She smiled a bit to herself, wondering if Melanie had done his room and what she had thought about what she had found. . . That could be quite amusing.

"But, enough of work for the moment. I'll show you more of the ranch."

As he walked out of the room, Angie noted that he was going to be in dire straits for clothes. His pants were ruined and his shirt was too. They were close to the same size, so there would be no problem there, or so she thought. She followed him out and took him on a semi-grand tour of the buildings of her ranch. By the time they got through, it was dinner time. They went back into the house to the dining room where a table was set for four. Jason and Harry were already there, waiting.

Both of the men were quiet but prodigious eaters. By contrast, Marion nibbled at his food, though he ate a reasonably hearty meal. Both of the men eyed the boy quizzically. Harry had apparently told Jason what had happened in the barn and so, when Harry finally left, he made it a point to walk behind Marion. As he did, there was a chuckle and a suppressed guffaw or two.

Finally Angie and Marion finished. As Melanie, a plump good-natured woman cleaned up the table, they retired to the living room where they sat facing each other.

"I'm afraid it wasn't much for a first day. Sorry I lost my temper and spanked you. You really afraid of cows?"

He looked down at the floor. "I never realized they were so BIG. I only saw them in movies and such. We never visited a farm and they're not in any of the zoos we ever went to. I'm afraid they just scared me silly. I still shake a bit thinking of them."

"Well, we'll see what we can do. Maybe we should work up from calves and such. Ever ride a horse?"

"When I was a kid, I once rode a pony around a ring several times. I've never been near, much less on, a real horse."

"Tell you what, boy. I have a gentle mare that is much larger than a pony but smaller than a real horse. She is so gentle that she even let some kids mount her on the wrong side. We'll give her a try tomorrow. Today was all shot to hell because I had to do those cows. But they are fixed and I shouldn't have any more for a couple of days; that's when the vet comes by and he will implant them. In the meantime, we'll see about getting you on my horse so you can learn to ride."

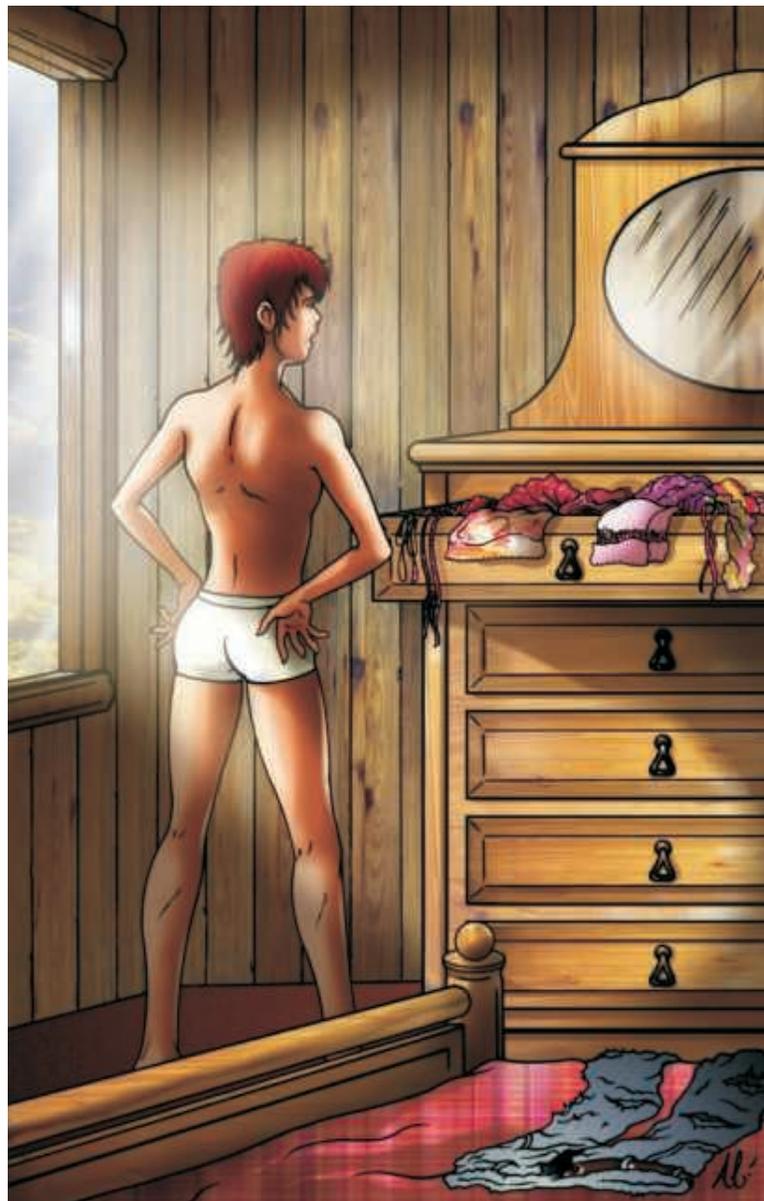
"What was that about a wrong side? Don't you just get on? Some of the trick riders even vault on over the rump."

"That may be well and good for trick riding, but all cow horses are trained for the rider to mount them from the left. That means to start, the left hand goes on the pommel of the saddle... You'll see."

He looked around the room. "What do you do here at night? Listen to music, go into town or watch TV?"

Angie said, "Town is just too far away for a nightly visit. It is for special occasions. Mostly I read or listen to music. I have a TV if you want to watch. The selections are somewhat limited, but it's workable."

Marion turned on the set, browsed, found no MTV so he watched some sitcoms and a movie, semi-oblivious to his badly torn shirt and pants which were now also badly



stained. Around 10, Angie came in and told him to get to bed, they'd be getting up early.

In his room, he stripped off his shirt, only then really noticing how badly torn it was. After taking off his shoes and socks, he pulled off his pants. The blood was now dried and not so threatening, but he was aware of the two gaping holes and the lack of any functional back pockets. In his shorts, he padded over to the dresser but found only the stuff from the suitcase. Since he wasn't about to wear any of THAT, he just got into bed. His rear end was still a bit sore, so he turned over and slept on his stomach. At least one of his dreams, however, involved a huge cow that was chasing him around an incredibly small cage, repeatedly jabbing him with long and exceptionally sharp horns in his sore butt.

In the morning, he awoke to someone knocking on the door and calling his name, telling him to get up. He wondered briefly where he was. Then the events of the previous day came back to him and he felt his sore butt. He got up and put on his clothes, holes and all. He went off to the bathroom and then out towards the kitchen where he met Angie. She looked him up and down quickly.

"You can't wear those clothes any more. They've been ruined. Did you take a shower?"

"I don't have any other clothes to wear so what good would a shower do?"

"You'd at least have a clean body. Come on; let's see if I have anything that you can wear."

She took him in tow to her room. Her wardrobe was more than adequate so she took out a pair of pants and tossed them to him. Then, looking at his shirt, she pulled out one of her nylon work shirts. It was man-cut but was actually a blouse, darted and all. Lastly, she rummaged in a drawer and pulled out a pair of plain nylon briefs and gave them to him. He stood there without a word, accumulating these things.

"I can't wear these things, Angie, they're women's clothes and I'm a man."

"Hold on there! You are a boy. After yesterday's escapade, I'd say you're hardly a man. You can't go naked and this is all I have. Of course, if you want to wear some of the duds that you brought here with you, that would be all right with me, but they are hardly appropriate for riding."

Marion blushed and beat a retreat to the bathroom where he stripped down and took a shower. Coming out, he dried off, then put on the panties, getting them right on the second try. They felt odd after only having worn cotton. The feel of them being drawn on was strange, and it also felt strange when they were snuggled up tight. There was no fly, of course, but it felt nice to run his hand over them and feel their softness, a softness he liked but did not know why.

The shirt also fit him well, but the buttons were on the wrong side. The pants also fit, but he felt strange with no fly in front and the zipper and button in back. They were slightly tight in the waist and the crotch and loose at the hips and seemed to ride higher than his had, but they too were adequate. After pulling on his socks and decrepit shoes, he left his old clothes in the bathroom, not sure what to do with them. This time when he met Angie, she checked him out and pronounced him dressed.

Harry and Jason had already eaten, so Melanie served them up a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast and juice. Marion ate well and got his fill, but only after some seconds.

Melanie smiled at the way he was dressed, and then even more when she saw his appetite. This was one strange house guest Angie had invited. These feelings would increase when she saw the bloodied and torn clothing in the bathroom and the discolorations on the sheets of the boy's bed (which he had not made). Then she shook her head in dismay.

After breakfast, Angie was about to take him out to the corral when she noticed his sneakers.

"If you're going to ride any distance, you'll need some new footwear. Sneakers just won't make it in stirrups.

"But I don't have any other shoes, Angie."

She came over to him and put her foot down next to his. The match was close enough, his foot being a bit smaller than hers. She wondered if he had done all of the growing he was yet going to do but said nothing.

"I think I have something that will fit you. Come along."

She led him again to her bedroom. There she rummaged in her closet and came up with a short boot that was square-toed and high-heeled. It wasn't the chunky cowboy's high heel, but neither was it the slender heel of the spikes. With its tapering heel, it was in between. She handed them to him, then looked further. When she again came up empty handed, he was still standing there holding the boots.

"Go ahead, put them on. They got a bit tight on me but they should fit you fine."

"But they're high-heeled women's shoes. I can't wear them. Don't you have any real shoes?"

"Of course they're high-heeled. You don't want your foot slipping in the stirrup when you ride. They may be fancier than a cowboy's boot, but they'll work just the same. They did for me, and they will for you. Put them on or we can get the shoes you brought with you. They also have a heel that will serve the same function, though I think they are higher."

It did not take much persuasion. When he thought of the shoes that he imagined were winking out at him from beneath his bed, he shuddered a bit, pulled his sneakers off and put the boots on. The fit was passable but also just a bit tight. As he was doing that, Angie left the room.

Marion caught up with her in the living room as she was talking on the phone with the bus company. No one had reported a missing suitcase and there were none in the lost and found that fit the description. They said they would put out a tracer and let her know if such luggage showed up or a report came down the line. They also said that it would be unlikely since they had just a small depot with so little traffic that they were usually ignored unless there was something in the case to identify the address of the owner. When he thought about it, he could think of no such identifier and his heart sank as to getting his clothes, books and several CD's back.

She looked him over. It was similar to looking at herself in a mirror, though he was decidedly flat-chested; the extra cloth just hung there where her adequate breasts usually pushed out her blouse, just like her sister's did. He also had longer hair than she did. He was a bit awkward in the boots but seemed to move OK, so she took him again out to the

“barn.” This time they went to the tackle room where there were a number of saddles and other riding gear.

“This is what is called the tackle room. It contains all of the saddles, reins, and other gear necessary for riding on the ranch. You see those two empty spots? One is for Jim’s saddle. He’ll put his saddle there when he brings his horse in and the other is Harry’s. He’s out checking our cattle now. That saddle’s Jason’s, but he really prefers his truck as you already saw...”

She grabbed a bridle from the wall and a horse blanket and gave them to Marion. She then opened a door, grabbed a saddle and headed outside. He followed behind, trailing her out to a corral where several horses were kept. When they showed up, several of the horses came over to them. One, a light tan, was considerably smaller than the others. She threw the saddle up on the top of the log fence of the corral and climbed up on top next to it. She then took his stuff and encouraged him to do the same. At this height, he was above the horses and was not as threatened as before.

“Well, boy, you ready to learn to ride?”

“Gee, I don’t know. These horses look awful big.”

The smaller horse had come up and was nuzzling Angie. She reached into a pocket, got some sugar and gave it to the horse that crunched on it as she patted it and scratched it around the ear that she murmured into. Marion reached out tentatively and patted it on its nose with no adverse effects.

Angie then lead the horse out of the corral and back to Marion. She then proceeded to put the blanket on it and saddle it up, explaining what she was doing and why to Marion who was obliged to climb down to check how tight the cinch was and such. She then tied the horse to the fence while watching Marion’s actions.

After she had saddled and bridled the horse, she went back into the tackle room and brought out a second saddle, blanket and bridle and repeated the action on another, larger horse that she also tied to the fence. She then showed him how one normally got on. She could see the hesitancy in him and so got off and had him climb up the fence again. She led the smaller horse over to him and had him get on after a bit more coaxing. There he finally sat astride the horse quite nervously as she again mounted hers.

“Marion, that is Jessie. She’s as sweet a little mare as you could want. Don’t give her a rough time and she’ll take you wherever you want to go. Now, this is how you control the horse. Watch first and then you can try it”

She showed him the play of the reins, along with the simultaneous action of the knees, legs, and heels. She emphasized the gentleness that you can treat a horse with to get it to do what you want. She did not go into running or wheeling, just the basics. If he could do that, then there was hope.

The morning passed quickly for them. He made many mistakes in starting up and turning, but gradually learned the reins. By noon, he knew how Jessie reacted to the simple commands and was well into learning how to move with her. Angie was proud of the boy.