

Anthem

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Rain pounded hard on the rusty truck roof, a car took a sudden stop in front of the gate, causing me to hit the front seat. An older man wearing a black cowboy hat made his way around the muddy parking lot towards us, he knocked on the drivers window. My hand slowly pulled the lever in circles. It was raining too hard that I couldn't hear anything that they were saying. The man soon pointed to the far right corner of the muddy parking lot, my dad rolled up the window, and started the truck again. As the truck rolled by, I could see people frantically unloading skittish drenched horses into the outdoor covered stalls. We pulled up right outside the big white covered arena. My dad pointed to the door, I casually slid the seat forward and jumped into the muddy puddles of the rodeo arena parking lot. He stopped the truck, and I ran to the back of the horse trailer. I shoved the lever up and out with all my might forcing the door to swing open. Inside were two

wide-eyed horses, they pulled on their lead ropes as if they were trying to get away, stomping their hooves creating a sound that overpowered the hard rain fall.

I jumped up into the trailer, pulling on the old rope leads until they unraveled. I grabbed the two horses and pulled them out of the trailer, I slammed the trailer door hard, and secured the latch, knocking twice on the door. My dad started up the truck and lunged forward. I stood in the parking lot for a few seconds, fighting the horses' heads bobbing up and down with excitement. I quickly dodged the large puddles making my way to the rodeo stands and stalls. I looked up at the large arena, I took a deep breath and smiled, I had practically grew up here, this arena had always been welcoming to our family especially. With my dad being the lead rodeo champ in our local area, we always had a reserved space for both us, and our horses. Keema and Flik jumped with excitement as they finally released where they were, and what they came to do. I took both of the horses to the tack stall, tying them tightly to the post. I had to warm up both of the horses, before the rodeo started.

I struggled with my father's heavy roping saddles onto the horses, making sure they were tight. I made sure to only bridle Flik,

my father wanted me to pony Keema to the side of Flik, he says he doesn't trust Keema with me, I guess she just gets to worked up sometimes.

"Warm up time is starting now" the announcer called through the microphone. I quickly walked both of the horses, tying Keema's lead to the side of Flik's Saddle. I climbed on into the large roping saddle, feeling so small with my feet not being able to reach the stirrups. I began by trotting, turning, and loping in quick fast patterns. Soon the horses were both hot, and the rodeo was about to begin. I begin to exit the arena causing the horses to jump with excitement. I put the horses away in their stalls ready for the rodeo to start. "Oof."

I shoved the stall door string back with all my might and then swiftly pivoted around meeting eyes with a tall older man. He was wearing a brown western button up and a white cowboy hat. His words were shaky but clear as a starry night sky. "We believe that we have made a decision, please come and join us in the office.

I followed him up the stairs overlooking the arena. He opened the big brown door and my stomach had butterflies as two other men stared back at me. I took a deep breath and looked at the men

standing behind the big wooden desk.

The words slurred out of my mouth. "Have you made your decision yet?" I stood there with shaking hands and cold feet.

The older gentlemen wearing a collared western shirt and a black cowboy hat gestured me to sit in the large red chair. I slowly took a seat, scared of what was to happen next. I reached into my jean jacket pocket shoving my fist in and out making the hole bigger. It was a nervous habit I had discovered I had last year, after my older sister had passed away.

The three men whispered and then finally nodded their heads. They seemed nice but I hadn't had a clue what they were whispering about and it made me nervous. The wind slammed the open window closed and open once more, causing me to jump in my seat. The men stopped whispering and each took a seat around the desk facing me. They looked at me and then back at me over and over again. I shoved my fist back and forth inside my pocket. I ran my fingers through my hair. The taller man stood up and paced around the window. He cleared his throat, and looked at me.

"We have made our decision." Another man stood up and started to interrupt. "We have decided to decline your offer, you are not

allowed to ride in the rodeo tomorrow, but however we will look forward to your performance of the National Anthem."

My body went hot, I started to sweat, tears came close to running down my cheeks but I held them in. I stood up from the chair feeling drowsy and light headed, I quickly found my way out the door and slammed it shut behind me. I didn't say a word to the men, but I didn't even feel bad, I just wanted to get out of there without seeing anyone. I quickly ran down the stairs, my eyes met with the rodeo arena, it was empty. I looked for the closest door, and sprinted towards it. Sunlight shot me dead in the eye, I looked around blinded by the warm spring day. Once my eyes fully adjusted to the sun, I ran towards my bike parked next to the fence.

I stood the bike up and climbed on, I turned the peddles hard and fast, trying to fight back the tears in my eyes. I exited the arena parking lot and onto the road. I was angry so angry, tears kept filing my eyes making it hard to see where I was going without wiping them each second. The more I thought about the decision that those selfish men had made the more angry I became. I found myself caught in a daydream, I was swerving in and out of the main road not thinking

there were any cars behind me. A car honked behind me and I swerved the other way, I fell into the ditch. I sat up looking around, The road was above me, I sat in a muddy ditch washed out by the last few weeks of rain. I looked around and wiped my eyes. "Could this day get any worse?" I muttered. I waited to for the car to come back but it never did.

I stood up and grabbed my bike I walked slowly up the short yet treacherous hill. Once I reached the top I was out of breath. My bike pedals were muddy, but I didn't care, I was too mad to care. An hour later I was home, and sitting at the dinner table. There was a plate of peas and meatloaf. I sat there pushing the peas all over the plate making shapes. I hadn't said a single word to my parents, I wasn't planing on it either.

"How was working at the arena today hunny?" My mom stuttered, trying to make conversation. I looked her dead in the eyes with a blank stare then back down to my plate.

My parents knew what had happened, right before dinner they had gotten a phone call concerning me leaving the rodeo early. I didn't want to talk about it because I knew they would just change topics to me singing the national anthem the next morning. "I'm not hungry,

I'm going to sleep."

My parents sat up in their seats with concerned eyes, "Are you sure" they said eagerly.

"Good night" I cried, I ran up the stairs and jumped into my bed. I laid there thinking about all the things I could have done tomorrow if those people had not made the wrong decision. "It wasn't fair, at all," I thought. It didn't make sense that that my friend Jake could be in it and I couldn't.

The next morning came and I arrived at the rodeo grounds. We walked into the rodeo arena, they pointed to up top at the balcony announcer's booth. Everyone was ready for me to sing, and so was I. They announced my name loud and clear over the . They handed the mike over to me. I opened my mouth and no words came out. I sat down hard into my seat and said, "I won't sing if I cant ride."

