**Riding the Devil**

**Scene 1, A Bucking Bronco**

Narrator (José) 1 Narrator (José) 2 José

Chaco Don Rafael Pedro

Gogo Eduardo

Narrator 1: Even though it was mostly brown and black, all I saw was the white. The white of the foaming slobber from its mouth. The whites of its eyes, ringed with fear.

Narrator 2: Sun shone through the puffs of dust that flew up behind his hooves.

Narrator 1: Some people said that unmatched white socks above a horse’s hooves were a mark of the devil. This horse certainly seemed possessed.

Narrator 2: A rock flew past me and hit the horse’s body. My eyes jumped to another white: the white that ringed the horse’s eyes. You can’t usually see that part of a horse’s eyes. The whites of horses’ eyes only show when they are scared. My stomach lurched as the ground reverberated beneath my feet.

Narrator 1: Another rock struck the horse just below the white-ringed eye. A squeal of anger came from the horse. He looked for escape from the tiny pen he was held in. Following the horse’s eyes, I knew his fear like I knew my own.

Chaco: What are *you* staring at, José?”

Narrator 2: He threw another rock, but missed.

Chaco: Take that you devil!

Narrator 1: Chaco was mad because the horse bucked him off. What did he expect? Breaking horses meant vaqueros were bucked off regularly.

Chaco: Take that!

Don Raf: Chaco! Enough!

Narrator 1: Don Rafael Garcia de Rodrigo was walking towards the bullpen with his son, Pedro Garcia de Rodrigo. With the Don nearby, I inched behind one of the posts, hoping that Don Rafael wouldn’t notice I was just standing around watching. He walked up to Chaco and put a hand on his shoulder.

Don Raf: Throwing rocks is not part of breaking a horse, Chaco.

Chaco: I wanted to tire him out, Señor. Then he won’t have the strength to get rid of me.

Don Raf: I see. But throwing rocks is not the way to tire him out. Let him settle down a bit; then you can get back on him.

Chaco: (unenthusiastically) You’re right, Señor. He’ll get tired soon.

Don Raf: (looking around) Where’s Gogo? He’s supposed to be helping you with this horse.

Chaco: (coughing nervously) I didn’t need the Dummy, Don Rafael.He saddled him and brought him over. That’s all the help I need.

Don Raf: But it is not safe. Let’s find him so he can hold that devil while you get on again. José! Run and get Gogo for us. He’s probably helping his papá in the smithy.

José: Si, Don Rafael.

Narrator 2: I ran to bring Gogo to the small ring.

Narrator 1: When we got back, the horse was no longer jumping and thrashing. He was just pacing back and forth as far from Chaco and the others as he could get. When Gogo walked up to the railing, the horse turned and walked right up to him.

Don Raf: Gogo, I want you to hold onto this horse while Chaco gets on him again. And stay here to help him get back on if he’s thrown.

Gogo: Y-y-y-es, D-d-d-don R-raf-f-fal.

Chaco: Don Rafael, I don’t really need The Dummy’s help. He’ll just make things worse.

Narrator 2: Gogo looked down. He slowly climbed over the fence and easily caught hold of the horse’s reins.

Don Raf: His name is Rodrigo, or Gogo, Carlos. He won’t make things worse. Go ahead, get on the horse again.

Narrator 1: Gogo’s big head looked even bigger because of his short, but big hair. It was so thick and straight it almost stood straight out from his head.

Narrator 2: Chaco climbed over the rails and marched up to the horse. When he saw Chaco coming, the horse’s head jerked up and those white socks started jumping up and down as he tried to move away from the cruel vaquero. But Gogo held the reins firmly, looking down, shaking his own head the whole time.

Chaco: (quietly) Hold him still, Dummy.

Narrator 1: Gogo just kept looking down and shaking his head. Chaco gathered the reins near the saddle horn, lifted his left foot into the stirrup and swung easily into the saddle. The horse tensed up and danced around Gogo while Chaco got his right foot in the other stirrup.

Chaco: I said, ‘Hold him still, Dummy.’

Narrator 2: Gogo kept looking down, shaking his head slowly.

Chaco: Okay, Dummy, let him go.

Narrator 1: Once Gogo let go of the reins, the horse exploded into action. He leapt into the air, tossed his head, and came down hard on all four feet at once.

Chaco: Oof.

Narrator 2: The horse put his head down low and kicked out violently with his back feet. Chaco flew in a neat arc over the horse’s head and landed in the dirt with a thud.

Narrator 1: I looked away to hide the smile on my face. Gogo was already outside the bullpen by the time Chaco got to his feet and climbed out too.

Pedro: Ay, that horse sure got rid of *you* fast, Chaco.

Chaco: The Dummy let go of his bridle too soon. I didn’t get seated right.

Don Raf: (sternly) Carlos, Chaco. His name is Rodrigo, or Gogo. No one could get seated on *that* horse. I warned Carlos when he was brought in. Horses like this one have the devil in them.

Narrator 2: Watching his wild jumping and twisting, I thought Don Rafael might be right.

Gogo: H-h-he n-n-n-o d-d-d-debil.

Pedro: (importantly) Those socks are a sure sign of the devil.

Narrator 1: Usually, if a horse has two white socks, they are either both in back or both in front.

Gogo: (still shaking his head) H-h-h-he n-no d-d-d-debil,

Narrator 2: Something was bothering him. He was upset. Gogo’s strange behavior scared me; I moved a little closer to Don Rafael and almost tripped over someone half my size. Looking down I saw Eduardo. Six-year-old Eduardo was the youngest boy on the rancho.

Eduardo: What does the devil look like, José?

Narrator 1: The skinny little boy always seemed to be nearby, like my shadow. And he was full of silly questions.

Gogo: He n-no d-d-d-d-debil.

Eduardo: What does the devil look like?

Chaco: (He putting two fingers up behind his head) He looks like a man-horse, but with horns. And he’s all red and eats little boys!

Narrator 2: Eduardo shrieked with glee and ran behind Don Rafael.

Don Raf: Gogo, get him settled again so Chaco can get back on.

Narrator 1: Still shaking his head, Gogo obediently climbed into the bullpen. The horse came straight to him and nudged him with his nose.

Narrator 2: Chaco followed. Gogo tightened up the reins and moved the horse up against the railing so he couldn’t dance away when Chaco approached.

Chaco: Make sure you don’t let go too soon this time, Dummy.

Narrator 1: Gogo never stopped shaking his head. He looked into the horse’s eyes instead of at Chaco.

Don Rafael: Chaco, he’s called Gogo.

Chaco: Make sure you don’t let go too soon, *Gogo*.

Narrator 2: This time Chaco made a big show of getting settled in the saddle, checking the reins, and clearing his throat and spitting a couple times before saying,

Chaco: Okay, *Gogo*, you can let go now.

Narrator 1: In one motion, Gogo released the reins and climbed the railing to get out of the way. The horse spun around on his hind feet, then launched itself into the center of the bullpen. Once again, he made a violent crow-hop, landing on all four feet, followed by a violent thrashing out with his hind legs and somehow twisting his body. It looked like the horse was going to throw itself onto the ground. But at the last moment, he righted himself, sending Chaco to the ground instead.

Eduardo: Why does he keep throwing Chaco? Isn’t he broken yet?

José: I don’t think he likes Chaco.

Chaco: (laughing) You are so wise, little *Josephina*. He doesn’t like me! Ha! Horses are too dumb to like or not like anything. You’re almost as wise as *Gogo* there.

Narrator 2: My face burned with shame whenever Chaco turned my name, José, into the girl’s version, *Joséphina*.

Chaco: He just doesn’t know who’s the boss yet.

Pedro: (fake laughing) No horse knows who’s the boss at first, Eduardo. This one will learn soon enough; just like the others.

Eduardo: We could shoot him if he doesn’t.

Everyone laughs

Chaco: I don’t think that will be necessary.

José That’s stupid, Eduardo. … He’ll learn, it’s just that…

Chaco: No, Eduardo. It’s just that *Joséphina* is afraid of the big horsy.

Pedro: (sarcastically) José is afraid the horse won’t be happy.

Narrator 1: I wondered, *When did Pedro start taking Chaco’s side?*

Don Rafael: Boys, that’s enough. (to Chaco) Maybe you’ve had enough for today?

Chaco: (standing up taller and prouder) Don Rafael, I’ll ride him as many times as it takes. That’s what we vaqueros do.

Eduardo: (imitating Chaco) That’s right, Don Rafael. That’s what we do.

Don Rafael: (more to himself) Yes, yes, it is. Horses are here to work for us. … They are animals and don’t have emotions like we do. But once in a while there is a horse that refuses to be broken.

Narrator 2: Looking at the horse, it was clear he was no longer a proud stallion with a free spirit. He trotted nervously around the tight confines of the bullpen, his coat sleek, almost black from the sweat.

Narrator 1: I wondered again, *Why does that crazy horse make my stomach so tight if he has no emotions?*

I looked down as my own feelings ran wild inside me. The ground vibrated again as the horse hopped near where we stood. Stiff legged, he jumped again and again, trying to shake off the cursed saddle strapped snugly to his back. My stomach bucked right along with the horse.

I looked to Pedro for understanding. I thought we felt the same way about everything, but now he looked pleased by the frantic fight of the stallion. When we used to play together, I told him how I hated to see the animals treated so roughly. He knew I hated seeing panicked animals. But Pedro wouldn’t meet my gaze now.

He had changed in the last year and a half since his training started. It wasn’t just that he grew taller than me. When Pedro turned ten, his mamá and papá no longer allowed him to play with the rancho children. His lessons began. He was learning what was needed to be a Don. He’d become heavier and softer because he no longer ran and played with the other children. He was learning to read and write and given his own horse, Duque de Oro. Oh, how I wished I had my own horse.

“José, I believe you have a job to do,” said Don Rafael glancing at my water bucket as he turned away from the bullpen. To Pedro he said, “Come along, Mijo, your study break is over and your mamá is waiting for you.” Pedro tore his eyes from the frantic horse, smiled at his handsome papá, and followed him without a backward glance. My heart fell into the deep pit where my stomach used to be.

Finally, the horse stopped running around the small pen, and just stood, head down, breathing heavily.

“See? It’s going to be okay, José, I promise,” said Eduardo, reaching up to pat my back.

*Now the little one was telling* me *it would be okay?* “What do you know, Eduardo?” I spat out. I spun around and walked away,

*Why do I watch the humiliation of another proud animal?* Even though it was good to see Chaco thrown to the ground over and over, somehow the horse’s humiliation had become my own.

“Hey, *Joséphina*! I thought you had a job to do,” said Chaco. I blinked my eyes and swallowed hard.

Eduardo looked back and forth between Chaco and me. Chaco grinned widely as he put his hand on Eduardo’s shoulder. Eduardo’s eyes lit up because the god he worshiped had noticed him. Chaco acted brave and strong, but he didn’t follow the vaquero’s code of honor. He treated people differently depending on who they were. If you were older than him, or a member of the Garcia family, he was kind and polite. But if you weren’t, watch out. Anyone younger than Chaco was supposed to worship him like Eduardo did.

 I turned and walked away. My feet took me towards the barn, to the place where I never felt afraid or wrong. I headed for the cool quiet of Papá Joaquín’s workshop in the big barn.