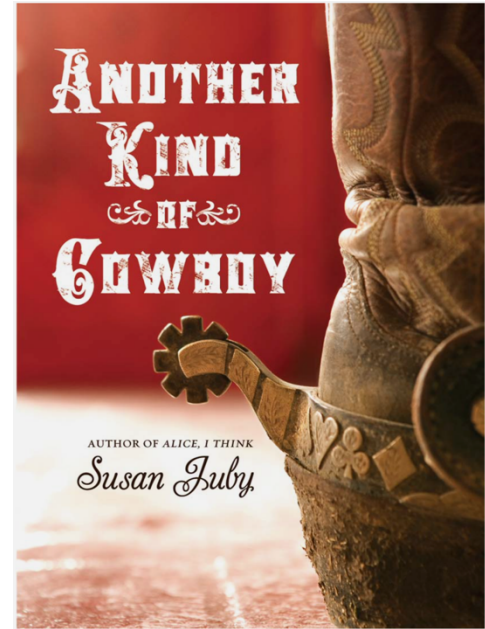


# BOOK REVIEW *Another Kind of Cowboy* By Susan Juby

## PARENTAL ADVISORY – EXPLICIT CONTENT

## SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT AVAILABLE AT TEXAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

## BOOK REVIEW *By Susan Juby*



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I followed Jenny's directions and drove us out of the south end and up toward Westwood Lake. We parked in the driveway of a house in the middle of a subdivision so new that the front yards were just dirt. All the houses looked identical in the dark. It was only about seven o'clock, but felt much later. There was only one other car in the driveway of the house.

I followed Jenny and Frieda up to the front door, wishing, as we went, that I was somewhere else. Anywhere else, actually. I comforted myself with the thought that maybe Cameron would be here. He was cute and he made me laugh. He didn't say much, but I knew he was into me and that was enough. I had already planned how I would tell him what Alex had said and how he'd reassure me that Alex must be on the pipe even more than my companions. Then we'd make out.

A woman wearing tight jeans and a lot of eyeliner answered the door. Her face was tense and hard and her bleached hair was tangled up in a banana comb.

From what I could see, the house was basically empty. One little love seat sat by itself in the middle of a beige, carpeted living room. There were no pictures on the sand-colored walls. Most of the lights were off. I saw no sign of a party.

Jenny stayed upstairs to talk to the woman and I followed Frieda downstairs. The cat pee smell I'd detected on Jenny and Frieda was even stronger in the basement. It was making my eyes water. A couple of candles gave off the only light. As my eyes adjusted I could see kids sitting on couches, sitting on the floor, leaning against the walls.

I've watched enough TV to know a drug den when I see one, and this was definitely a drug den.

I stood like an idiot, staring at the people on the couch, who were passing something back and forth. It looked like a glass pipe. I wondered what they were serving for dinner at school. I wondered how I was going to get out of here.

"Here," Frieda whispered like we were in church. She put a beer into my hand and pushed me in the direction of an empty chair.

"Is this the party?" I whispered back.

"Shhh," said Frieda, and then she moved away from me and knelt down in front of a group of people on the couch who were all staring at something on the coffee table. Drugs. They were staring at drugs.

I wondered if the drug lord guy would keep my iPod and listen to it. If he did, would he like the songs I had on there? Was he a Jack Johnson fan? He didn't look like one, but you never know.

To stop myself from (a) dying of hunger and (b) wondering anything else, I drank my beer as fast as I could. I just wanted to relax, get into the party atmosphere. Well, maybe not *completely* into it. I wasn't going anywhere near that pipe. At least not right now.

Frieda got up and gave me another drink and pointed to a wall against which several cases of beer were stacked. No one else seemed to be drinking. I got the third beer for myself because Frieda was busy at the coffee table.

A light opened up at the top of the stairwell and blinked out again when the door closed. A few seconds later Jenny crouched down beside me.

"You find him?" she whispered.

"Who?"

"Your guy. He's supposed to be here."

I shook my head, feeling dizzy.

When I got up to get another beer, I tried not to stare at Jenny and Frieda as they huddled around the coffee table with the other couch people. Jenny's breeches shone white in the candlelight. There was some electronic music playing, but it was very faint.

I had to go to the bathroom, so I got up and went looking in the direction I'd seen a couple of other people head. One door opened to small room containing a washing machine and dryer.

The second door opened up to a bedroom. There was a twist of movement in the darkness as I opened the door. Two people. I couldn't see their faces, but I knew instantly that one of them was Cameron. The other was some man. I stood, frozen in the doorway. Then Cameron picked something off the floor to shield the whiteness of his body. The man stared back at me, his eyes the only true black in the room.

"Oh," I said. Then I turned and ran.

I went up the stairs two at a time. Jenny called after me, but I didn't slow down.

I crossed to the front door of the house in about two strides. Then I was puking on somebody's lawn. When I finished, I got in the car, but couldn't get the keys to work because my hands were shaking and my eyes were watering. From the fumes. From the dark.

Finally the stupid Soccer Mom Mobile started and I took off. From the corner of my eye I saw a family come and stand in the brightly lit picture window of a house as I raced the car across their patch of dirt. Then I was gone.

I made it almost all the way down the hill, part of the time on two wheels. I might even have managed to make the turn-off to Jingle Pot Road if the telephone pole hadn't gotten in the way. One minute I was flying through the dark in the Soccer Mom Mobile and the next there was a pole buried in the hood of the car. The shriek of crumpling metal seemed to come a second after the impact and the soft boom of multiple air bags hit me with satisfying violence, leaving me suspended between them, my nose dripping red all over the white plastic.

Two cops drove me to the station after the paramedics checked me out and realized that my only injuries were a bloody nose and what would soon be two very black eyes. When I was being pulled out of the ruined Passat my first thought was that I'd never had so many good-looking men paying attention to me all at once. The fire department was there, and between them, the cops, and the paramedics I had what amounted to a trifecta of uniformed hotness around me. I was feeling pretty special, at least until I got a look in the interview room mirror at the police station and realized they were just doing their jobs and weren't necessarily overwhelmed by my beauty.

Officers Ray and Gonzales left me alone in the room for quite a while. They were probably letting me cool my heels. I've watched enough cop shows to know that's a very popular interrogation technique. Still, it only took about three seconds before I started to panic. I considered throwing myself on the ground and just lying there but realized that would probably get me a visit to the psych ward. *Equestrienne, Interrupted.*

I attempted to wipe the blood off my upper lip and chin but it was caked on. I used the wall-to-wall mirror to practice my impassive drinking-driver-being-interviewed-by-the-cops face. I tried a tough-unbreakable-repeat-felon face and a cooperative-and-concerned-citizen face before I realized that the mirror was probably two-way glass and officers Ray and Gonzales were probably sitting on the other side watching me audition faces. Not cool.

When they finally came back into the room, I'd decided to act like a preteen Drew Barrymore at her lowest point. The idea was to be as cute and vulnerable as possible. I tried to arrange my face to suggest that I had a great future ahead of me if I could just get through this rough patch.

"Miss O'Shea. Are you still with us?" asked Officer Gonzales.

A trick question? I'd heard about those!

"Well, I haven't gone for coffee," I said, trying to bring some much-needed levity to the situation.

"We need you to focus here. Do you take drugs?"

I tried to look offended. "No!" I said. "I don't even smoke cigarettes." Although I'd been meaning to take up smoking to help pass the time while I waited for my druggie friends.

Officer Ray, a big guy with iron-gray hair and a large chin with a deep cleft in it, settled back in his chair, which groaned under his weight.

"You know that you blew just at the limit, right?"

I said a silent prayer of thanks that I'd thrown up right before I got in the car. Who knows what I'd have blown if all the beers had stayed in my system? The four of them probably added up to a third of my body weight.

"As a minor, you aren't allowed to have any alcohol in your system when you drive. We've taken a blood sample and if we find anything else in there we can charge you with driving under the influence. As it is, you're definitely looking at a suspension."

I smiled at him as winningly as I could. Then I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. With blood all down the front of my coat and blouse and breeches and my two black eyes, I looked like a zombie that wanted to eat him. I stopped smiling and stared back down at the table.

"Where were you going in such a hurry?" asked handsome officer Gonzales.

I looked at him out of one eye. It would have been nice if we'd met under different circumstances. I considered mentioning that, then thought better of it.

I also considered telling them about the house and what was going on in the basement. I considered telling them about Jenny and Frieda. And about Cameron.

"Nothing. I wasn't going anywhere. I was just driving around. I go to Stoneleigh, the riding academy. I was on my way back to school."

"The school doesn't mind you driving around drunk in your parents' car?"

"It's my car."

The cops exchanged looks.

Clearly the wrong thing to say.

"Can I make a phone call?"

They exchanged another look. Officer Gonzales got up and headed for the door. Officer Ray sat solidly, staring at me.

"We're going to call your school. Get someone down here to pick you up."

"But don't I get a phone call?" I really didn't want them calling the headmistress.

"Officer Gonzales has gone to get you a phone."

We sat in silence for a long minute. I tried to casually rub some of the crusties off my nose. My lip was tender and I realized it was probably fat. At least I wasn't hungry anymore.

Officer Gonzales came back and put a portable phone on the table in front of me. The two of them watched as I dialed the number.

An hour and a half later Fergus and Ivan and I sat in Ms. Green's office. Ms. Green looked the same as she always does, even though it was almost ten o'clock at night. For starters to wonder about her relationship with that trendiest

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MARCH 10

25

Cleo

WHEN THE STONELEIGH jumping team went to watch the next class, a good decision maker might have decided it was time to jump ship. A clear-thinking, rational type probably would have thought, *Hummm, it seems that my companions are on heroin and since I don't want to get involved in any movie-of-the-week-type situations, perhaps I'll just head back to school to do homework. Or watch TV. Or take part in any number of safe, legal things.* Unfortunately there were no clear-thinking people around to advise me.

So I pulled a chair in front of Rio's stall and waited for Jenny and Frieda. The longer I sat there, the more hard-core I felt. I started thinking that I knew how homeless people feel. Homeless drug addicts? They are cold. They are friends with criminals and addicts. They sit around a lot, waiting for the shelter to open.

My cheeks even started to feel a bit sunken, drug-chic style. After about twenty minutes I was half-expecting someone to come by and interview me for a gritty documentary about the seedy underbelly of the young equestrienne community.

What I tried not to do was to think about my home, or about Alex or Fergus or Ivan. When Phillips walked by with her parents, I looked away, pretending I hadn't seen her, so she wouldn't come over. It worked. She took a step toward me, then veered back on course and kept going. I felt bad until I realized that that's the kind of thing that happens to those of us in the hard drug scene. We lose friends.

I tried thinking about my life, but it was like diving into murky water. I attempted to draw some conclusions, but the only one that came was that I was so cold it was going to require heroin, PCP, magic mushrooms, and crack cocaine to get me warm again.

"Dude, you waited," said Jenny as she came around the corner of the barn. Even she sounded surprised at how dumb that was. The crowds had thinned out. Most people were loading up their horses or watching the last few classes of the day while they waited to pick up the prizes they knew they'd won. The day felt spent; yet here I was, waiting around for something to start.

Jenny and Frieda had obviously been doing *something*. Their pupils were pinpricks and they were moving slowly. Their skin was kind of pasty and shiny. Whatever they'd been doing didn't help their looks much, but I still wanted to be a part of it.

"So what should we do?" I asked, and felt all my street cred instantly disappear. Not that I had any street cred to begin with, but I should have known enough to at least *pretend* I was indifferent.

Frieda exhaled noisily, as though I'd just asked an extremely complicated question.

Jenny stepped in. "The three of us have been working hard all day. I mean, Cleo and I got up at five-thirty after we went to bed at three. What we need here is some R & R. I thought we could head into town. Maybe check out a couple of parties. You okay with that?"

I nodded, my mind full of thoughts of Cameron. And Alex. That liar.

"Oh, okay. What about Rio?" As I said it, I felt a wave of guilt for abandoning Tandy. Oh well, Alex and Fergus would take care of her.

Frieda exhaled again, even more loudly this time.

"It's cool. I'll leave a note for one of the other girls to load her and put her away at school. She'll be fine," said Jenny.

"Won't Coach Pringle get mad if you don't head back with the rest of the team?"

"Cleo, my friend, you worry too much. Pringle'll just think I got a ride with you and your coaches."

The three of us began walking toward my car. Jenny and Frieda walked like they were knee-deep in mud. I had to keep slowing to let them catch up. Once we were in the car, Jenny turned to me. "Hey, Cleo?"

"Yeah?"

"Have you got any cash?"

"No, my allowance doesn't come until next week."

"What about your credit card?"

"There's hardly any room left because I put a down payment for the car and some other stuff on it. Plus, I'm not allowed to get cash advances with it. My parents set it up like that."

"Shit," she said. "Okay. Then we're going to need to make one quick stop."

I looked from her to me. We were both still in our show clothes.

"Shouldn't we get changed?" I asked.

"Nooooo," complained Frieda from the backseat. "I just want to get somewhere. So we can *relax*."

"Don't worry, Soccer Mom," Jenny said to me. "Everyone is going to love your tight pants."

I turned the heat up as high as it would go, and pulled my new station wagon out of the parking lot.

Jenny asked me to pull over in front of a rundown house in the south end of Nainaimo. I stayed in the car and watched as Frieda and Jenny walked up some decrepit steps to a door covered in peeling gray paint. There were blankets hanging in the windows. It took about five minutes for someone to open up. A skinny guy started shaking his head as soon as he saw Frieda and Jenny. He stepped out onto the landing and looked up and down the street suspiciously.

Frieda and Jenny gestured at him, like they were pleading. Then Frieda turned and pointed toward the car. I ducked down as far as I could.

The thought flashed through my head that my roommate and her friend were trying to sell me into the white slave trade. They were arranging with scary druggies to have my car jacked! Me murdered! I was not half hard enough for this scene. But my faulty decision-making skills again kicked into action and I continued sitting there.

Seconds later Jenny and Frieda were getting into the car.

"Dude. We need to go back to school," said Jenny.

"What? Why?"

"We need that stuff you bought for our room. You know, the leather stool thing and all that."

"And your iPod Nano," said Frieda. "That's sweet."

I couldn't believe it. They wanted to sell my things for drugs. This was even worse than Chad, that turd, stealing our furniture. I mean, at least that was my parents' stuff. This was mine. Bought with my parents' money, but still. I bought it for us.

"Cleo. It's for the cause," said Jenny.

"Take one for the team, babe," said Frieda.

"Look, I don't know."

"We'll get it back," said Jenny, outright lying to me now.

"Think of it like a bargaining chip," added Frieda.

I sighed and started the car.

A half hour later we were back at the shitty old house and Jenny and Frieda had carried my DVD player, my iPod and speaker, and my leather stool inside. They wanted me to give up my laptop, too, but I told them my parents would freak. In truth, all I'd have to say is that I dropped it. My parents would never know the difference. I didn't do it, though. I was worried about how many **drugs** a laptop would buy. I didn't want Jenny and Frieda to OD or anything.

This time they left me sitting in the car for what seemed like hours. Darkness crept down the street and people began to appear on the cracked old sidewalks. A couple of young guys in baggy shorts and oversized down-filled coats sat on low-rider bicycles in front of a run-down convenience store on the corner.

"Hurry up," I whispered. The car kept losing heat, so every few minutes I had to start it up and let the heater run, doing my part to contribute to global warming.

When Jenny and Frieda finally came out of the house they smelled like cat pee, and instead of being all slow and druggy, they were hyper and twitchy. They started talking as soon as they got their car doors open. I had this strong sense of being the woman in charge. The person in control. The soccer mom.

"Okay, okay, Cleo. We didn't forget you. We're going to go to a party."

"It's going to be so fun," said Frieda. "So fun. So, so fun."

Sober and still from sitting in the cold car, I started the engine.

"I really think we should get something to eat," I said in my best Cleo-in-Charge voice.

"Are you kidding?" Jenny squeaked.

"Eww! No," said Frieda, from the backseat. "No, no, no."

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A light opened up at the top of the stairwell and blinked out again when the door closed. A few seconds later Jenny crouched down beside me.

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"Who?"

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When I got up to go to another beer, I tried not to stare at Jenny and Frieda as they huddled around the coffee table with the other couch people. Jenny's breeches shone white in the candlelight. There was some electronic music playing, but it was very faint.

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The second door opened up to a bedroom. There was a twist of movement in the darkness as I opened the door. Two people. I couldn't see their faces, but I knew instantly that one of them was Cameron. The other was some man. I stood, frozen in the doorway. Then Cameron picked something off the floor to shield the whiteness of his body. The man stared back at me, his eyes the only true black in the room.

"Oh," I said. Then I turned and ran.

I went up the stairs two at a time. Jenny called after me, but I didn't slow down.

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"We need you to focus here. Do you take drugs?"

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The school doesn't mind you driving around drunk in your parents' car?"

"It's my car."

The cops exchanged looks.

Clearly the wrong thing to say:

"Can I make a phone call?"

They exchanged another look. Officer Gonzales got up and headed for the door. Officer Ray sat solidly, staring at me.

"We're going to call your school. Get someone down here to pick you up."

"But don't get a phone call?" I really didn't want them calling the headmistress.

"Officer Gonzales has gone to get you a phone."

We sat in silence for a long minute. I tried to casually rub some of the crusties off my nose. My lip was tender and I realized it was probably flat. At least I wasn't hungry anymore.

Officer Gonzales came back and put a portable phone on the table in front of me. The two of them watched as I dialed the number.

An hour and a half later Fergus and Ivan and I sat in Ms. Green's office. Ms. Green looked the same as she always does, even though it was almost ten o'clock at night. I'm starting to wonder about her relationship with that tweed suit.

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APRIL 6

30

Cleo

UNDERGOING A RADICAL personal transformation is no easy thing. Since Tandava colicked and I decided to become a responsible person, I’ve made a lot of changes. I’ve been showing up for lessons on time. I’ve been attending almost all of my classes at school and am on the verge, the very precipice, of catching up. I do almost all of my work around the barn. I still complain quite a bit, but I like to think that’s part of my charm. I’ve also become one of those extremely self-reflective people. Maybe a better way to describe it would be “personally concerned with self.”

Since Jenny got kicked out and I got my room all to myself again I’ve been spending a lot of time writing in my journal. I’m pleased to say that it’s no longer a journal of despair. It’s more of a journal of self-involvement, really. At least that’s what Alex suggested when I read him some of it. He said it in a loving way, though, similar to how he speaks to his sisters and aunt.

On this journey of self-discovery, I’ve discovered that I have a pattern of giving things away, or rather, letting people take my shit. And my parents’

As Phillipa pointed out, my generous impulses are not the problem. It’s the targets and methods of my generosity. I’m choosing unworthy people. Also, there’s been a certain underhandedness to my giving. A certain *inequality*, if you will, what with enabling people to break into our house and allowing other people to sell my stuff to get money for drugs.

It occurred to me that there’s nothing wrong with helping if you can help the right people the right way.

When Jenny came to pack up her stuff she looked just like she always does. You’d never know that she’d been on a tear for over a week. The only sign that she was in trouble was that she was accompanied by the school’s new security guard, Mrs. Mudd’s sister, Barb Mudd-Mulvaney, and Ms. Green herself. Mrs. Mudd-Mulvaney is in charge of keeping Stonedeth students from sneaking out at night. She stood in the doorway making sure that Jenny didn’t do anything illegal while she packed up. Ms. Green, who was driving Jenny to the airport, was presumably there for backup.

“Do you mind if I close the door?” Jenny asked. “I’ve got to get changed.”

“We’ll be right here,” said Ms. Green. “Right outside the door.”

Mrs. Mudd-Mulvaney nodded, frowning.

“You do that,” said Jenny, swinging the door shut.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

Jenny threw herself onto my bed. “I’m fine. Things just got a little out of hand. Everyone is totally overreacting.”

“But you’re kicked out.”

“So I’m told.”

“What did your parents say?”

Jenny slowly closed her eyes. “That’s a very good question.”

“Didn’t you talk to them?”

“Not exactly. I have been informed that I will be flying directly to the finest treatment facility money can buy where my parents will visit me on the very first family day.”

“You’re going to treatment?” I tried to keep the awe and horror out of my voice.

“Treatment centers are excellent places to meet celebrities,” she said, putting her hands behind her head. “I just hope this place has a pool. The last one didn’t. That’s probably why I’m not recovered.”

“What about Rio?” I asked. “Is she going with you?”

Jenny took a hand out from behind her head and wiped shakily at her nose, betraying, for the first time, that she wasn’t completely well. “No. My parents have decided that show jumping is part of the problem. Too many fast people in the jumper world.”

“So what are you...?”

“Sell her,” Jenny said shortly. “I’m supposed to sell her.”

“That’s awful,” I said.

Jenny sat up suddenly and her hair fell into her face in a fine, blond curtain. She nodded and I thought I heard a sniffle.

The knock on the door made me jump but Jenny didn’t react.

“It’s time to go, Jennifer. You have a plane to catch,” came Ms. Green’s voice.

“Is there anything I can do?” I asked.

Jenny pushed her hair to the sides of her face. “Know anyone who wants a nice horse?”

DECEMBER 9

14

Alex

ALEX TIGHTENED DETROIT’S girls one more hole. He imagined the instructor asking him to ride a ten-meter circle and him sliding off to the side and then underneath the horse. *Your seat*, the instructor would say, his accent refined and reflective of the Spanish Riding School, *could use some work*. The crowd would laugh, appreciating the joke.

Alex looked down the row of stalls to see if Cleo was getting Tandava ready yet. She wasn’t. The mare needed a long, careful warm-up to burn off energy so she was able to focus on her work. But Cleo never took the time to do it. *Too selfish*, Alex thought, and then felt guilty. He’d almost forgiven her for inviting his father and Ms. Reed to this clinic because he’d finally convinced himself that they’d never show up. They were probably loaded when Cleo had told them about it and had forgotten. He could only hope.

He checked his watch and realized he had only twenty minutes to warn Detroit up before his lesson with the Spanish Riding School guy. He pulled on his gloves, which he noticed with dissatisfaction were not leather, straightened his helmet, and led Detroit to the outdoor ring.

The instructor may have attended the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, but he looked straight from the Elderly European Gentleman’s Academy of Questionable Taste. The man was old. Older even than Ivan and Fergus. He wore a white turtle-neck and a yellow, ankle-length winter coat. He’d gelled his hair back against his head so fiercely it looked as though he’d just gotten out of the pool. He was deeply tanned and had a cigarette lodged in the corner of his mouth. The expression on his face could be summed up as unimpressed.

Alex entered the ring a few minutes before the previous rider finished. The girl was on a lovely gray horse. From the little bit Alex had seen she wasn’t a bad rider. She wasn’t amazing or anything, but looked as though she had a decent seat and soft hands.

The instructor did not agree. The man stared at the girl, whose face was red with the effort of riding or maybe the stress of riding in front of the small crowd. The instructor’s small black eyes squinted against the smoke that leaked up from his cigarette. The girl kept looking over at him, as though she wasn’t sure whether the lesson was over or not.

She slowed her horse to a walk and gave him a furtive pat.

“That was Phillipa Grant on Hernandez’s Hideaway,” the announcer said into her portable microphone. She, too, was looking around like she didn’t quite know whether the lesson was over or not.

“Do you have any final comments?” the announcer asked the instructor. The man very slowly took the cigarette from his mouth and spoke loud enough for the microphone to pick up his voice.

“She too fat,” he said.

Alex nearly fell off his horse. Every head in the place jerked around. The rider, who was slightly plump but certainly not fat, gaped openmouthed at the instructor like he’d just sprouted horns and a tail.

The announcer tried to smooth things over. “It’s winter. Maybe Hernandez has been getting too much hay,” she said with a weak laugh.

The instructor waved his cigarette around, nearly getting the announcer in the eye. “No,” he said. “I mean the rider. She *flabby*.”

“Holy shit,” muttered Alex to himself as he wondered what he’d gotten himself into.

The crowd murmured nervously. The girl on the gray horse was nearly purple now—her face was a mask of anger and hurt feelings. As she rode past Alex he could see that she was blinking back tears.

The announcer lady forged ahead. “Yes, well, ahem. Next up we have Alex Ford riding Detroit. Detroit is a nine-year-old Dutch Warmblood.” She cleared her throat nervously and stepped quickly away from the instructor just in case he came at her again with his cigarette.

The man rolled his head on his shoulder’s as though about to perform a complicated exercise routine, but he said nothing. Alex felt his body stiffen and his heart rate jump. He didn’t know what to do. He was used to following directions in lessons, not doing his own thing. Detroit’s strike shortened as he picked up on Alex’s nerves. From the expression on his face, the instructor might as well have been watching a three-legged goat limp its way around the dressage arena.

Alex rode past the spectators. Fergus leaned forward from his place in the front row of the bleachers and whispered, “Just ride.”

Alex nodded. *Pretend you’re alone and that this weird little man in the long yellow coat isn’t staring at you, getting ready to tell you you’re homey or your legs are too skinny or your ears stick out*. He pushed Detroit into a trot. He was still getting used to Detroit’s big trot after so many years of riding Turnip’s gentle jog. He reminded himself to relax and try to follow the horse’s movement. Just as he was finding his rhythm, he heard a commotion near the entryway. A flash of red caught his attention. Someone was signaling him. Alex slowed Detroit to a walk and looked, confused, toward the noise.

“Helloooo!” cried Colette Reed in a loud, inebriated voice. Alex closed his eyes for a moment. This was a nightmare. The only thing that would make it worse was if his dad was here, too. Sure enough, his father stood right behind the redheaded realist. Even from the other side of the ring Alex could see that his dad’s dress shirt was buttoned up wrong and he seemed to be swaying in a nonexistent breeze.

“Bloody Cleo,” Alex whispered under his breath. Why couldn’t she keep her mouth shut? This was all her fault. Didn’t she understand the critical importance of keeping the different parts of one’s life separate? This was a dressage clinic, not a beer garden. His father and Ms. Reed had no business being here.

Why couldn’t Cleo have kept her mouth shut? As he rode past Ms. Reed and his father he smiled tightly, then looked over at his coaches. Ivan nodded and Alex was reminded of what he’d said about Alex’s ability to make the horses believe in themselves. Detroit needed him to keep it together. Besides, it wasn’t possible to die of embarrassment or Alex would have been dead a long time ago.

Alex moved Detroit into a trot, sat still for a few beats, and pushed the big horse into a canter. Soon he forgot all about the audience, including the man in the middle of the ring, his father, and his father’s girlfriend.

After a few minutes, the man’s cigarette came out of his mouth and he took two steps toward Alex, who was circling Detroit on the far side of the ring.

“Yes, yes,” he said. “I want to see a bit more straightness.”

*Don’t we all?* said the voice in Alex’s head, but he just nodded.

“Down the long side, shoulder-in,” said the man, puffing vigorously between words.

The yellow-coated man had Alex ride a leg yield across the diagonal, first one way, then the other. He asked for a lengthened stride down the long side at a canter and at a trot. Alex was working so hard, he forgot to worry. By the end of the lesson Detroit had grown lighter in his hand and was swinging through his back. It was a marvelous feeling. Dressage had done it again: blocked out all his troubles.

“This is enough,” said the man as he lit another cigarette. “Your horse is a bit out of shape, no?”

Alex nodded.

“He’s a nice horse, though. It’s perhaps possible do some things with this horse. And you, you have a lot to learn, but it might be possible to do some things with you, also. A bit of natural talent there, I think.”

Alex’s eyes widened and he swallowed.

The announcer was on her way into the ring when Ms. Reed grabbed her arm.

“That’s my horse,” said Ms. Reed into the microphone. Then she turned to the small crowd and continued in a theatrically loud voice, “Oh, Brian, isn’t it lovely to see your son on my horse?”

Alex didn’t hear his father’s reply. Instead, he quietly thanked the instructor and dismounted. On his way out of the ring he passed Cleo, who was leading Tandava in.

“Well?” she asked, her eyes wide.

He pretended he hadn’t heard her and kept walking.

“There you are!” said Ms. Reed, making an unsteady beeline for Alex, dragging Mr. Ford behind her.

“Wasn’t he a good boy?” she exclaimed in a high falsetto. She went to touch Detroit and he flinched away from her hand.

“Whew,” whispered Alex.

## **BOOK REVIEW *Another Kind of Cowboy* By Susan Juby**

### **PROFANITY COUNT AND OTHER SENSITIVE WORDS**

Drinking – 16	Beer – 24	Sex/Sexy – 10
Drugs – 10	Hell – 2	Assault – 1
Smoking – 1	Parents – 45	Shit – 14

### **RED FLAGS**

Drinking  
Drugs  
Language  
Parents portrayed poorly