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Straight to Heaven

by Mary F. Casey

It says they take orphans. Pa, he don't like me ridin' none. Samantha Eloise! You come on in here, c'mon out 'a there, in here, you hear? You come on inside and sit real pretty at that piano your mama used to play so nice, God rest her soul, and play me that nice tune 'a Mr. Foster's, the one about the river.

Pa, he don't like me ridin' none. Don't like it for hisself, neither. Don't like swingin' up back of a fine hard neck full 'a the smell 'a sweat and willow trees and leather and the creek south a' St. Jo.

Pa, St. Jo! Sign says they take orphans, orphans who love to ride and they throw 'em a sack a letters and parcels and such and give 'em a fine, strong pony and slap its rump and they're off outta St. Jo, hooves smackin' rock into dirt into hooves over miles of I don't know what 'cause I never been west 'a thirtymiles east of St. Jo.

Ridin' ain't no life for a girl, Pa says, whupping the wagon wheel into shape over the anvil. You go make your brothers' supper. Make them some fine chicken and collards and some 'a that apple spice pecan pie like your mama, God rest her soul, made. You go on.

Old buzzard colonel down at the store won't let me sign up for the Express. Don't take no pretty young ladies, he says, tobacco creeping outta his mouth like a loose bit. You lookin' for a husband, tho, I got some ideas for you. Some thoughts, maybe.

Pa, he won't let me ride none and I'm startin' to wake up middle of the night thinkin' how am I gonna do it? How'm I gonna get me on that pony headed west outta St. Jo toward Sacramento California heaven?

I'm tryin' Pa one more time out behind the barn as he's tarring up the wagon wheels, silver tongue of a knife flickin' back and forth 'cross that old anvil and I'm watchin' it flick and flit like a slithery old snake and seein' out the corner of my eye eight big old brothers walkin' toward the house sayin' whaddy a think? more 'a that apple spice pecan tonight or maybe a truffle cake, maybe a rhubarb pie with some cream or a couple cherries or something and I feel my face goin' hot and pretty soon my hand's movin' toward the flit, flicker, snake knife and Pa he's lookin' up and I'm sayin', but you won't let me ride none and then it's done.

It says they take orphans. With my hair up under my cap and some big old baggy breaches and Pa's shirt, they don't know I'm a girl. Now I can jump on the finest, strongest, fastest pony you ever did see, mail bag over its rump, and with my back to the wind I can ride the Express outta St. Jo straight to heaven.

