

Six-Year-Old Horse Thief

AUTHOR

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TAG LINE

Return to a simpler time with no cellphones, no VCRs and only one Starbucks.

SYNOPSIS

Hopped up on sugar and cowboy movies, I tried to steal a horse from the Catskill Game Farm.

SETTING

1968 Springfield Massachusetts and Catskill Game Farm

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Page One: 2 Panels

Panel 1

Medium shot of a fenced off area in the woods. This is a "teaser" panel of future events. A horse with DAVE on it, running full speed towards us. DAVE's facial expression is happy, wild and frightened. OLD MAN is chasing DAVE from about 30 feet behind, angrily yelling at DAVE.

NARRATOR (CAPTION A)

"Can you remember a time when you couldn't record television shows, couldn't save phone messages, and there was only one Starbucks? This true tale, which takes place back on a Spring day of 1968, is how I became a six-year-old HORSE THIEF."

OLD MAN (SHOUT BALLOON B)

Come back here, you little bastard!

Panel 2

Overhead shot, bringing us back to current time. It's a first-grade classroom in 1968. The wooden desks have ink wells and are nailed to the floor with their iron legs. The kids are listening to MISS PELIGRINI describe their next field trip. The only bored kid is DAVE, who is dozing. He suddenly wakes up when he hears about something he likes.

NARRATOR (CAPTION C)

Guess this story begins on a special morning in Glenwood Elementary School of Springfield, Massachusetts. Our school was going on a field trip to the Catskill Game Farm in two weeks. Even though it meant a day off from school, I wasn't really that into it. Miss Pelagrini, my first-grade teacher, read off the list of stuff we could do there. Most of her list put me to sleep, until she got to ...

MISS PELIGRINI (WORD BALLOON D)

... horseback riding ...

NARRATOR (CAPTION E)

This woke me up.

Page Two: 3 Panels

Panel 1

Medium shot of same classroom, only from the front (facing the students). The view should be at kid's eye-level. The kids are excitedly talking to each other, while DAVE is daydreaming about being the Lone Ranger.

MISS PELIGRINI (WORD BALLOON A)

"... ride an elephant, go to the petting zoo with over 2000 animals and birds ..."

NARRATOR (CAPTION B)

She prattled on about all the other stuff, in addition to the homework we'd have to do about the trip. However, I couldn't stop thinking about the idea of riding a horse. Something about the "wild west" ignited my imagination.

NARRATOR (CAPTION C)

To the few of you how know me, this probably sounds strange from a currently self-proclaimed "urban snob." Perhaps if I show you where I was living at the time of my crime, the fascination for swashbuckling fantasy might not seem so odd.

Panel 2

Long-distance shot of a ghetto tenement building on the corner of Cedar and James streets. The street is barren, but has a few people walking. The area should look run-down and neglected, but not horrible.

NARRATOR (CAPTION D)

This is 110 Cedar Street, deep in the Winchester Square area of Springfield. This broken-down tenement was over-crowded, mostly with single Moms trying to raise too many kids on Welfare. Things probably weren't as hard here as in other black ghettos across America. Still, living was noticeably worse than in other parts of town, especially the neighborhood of Glenwood Elementary School.

Panel 3

A bird's eye view of the same neighborhood from a different angle, drawn in a Bill Keane "Family Circus" style. DAVE - rendered like Kean's Billy character - runs a dashed-path home, evading a child bully (wearing a Free Huey shirt) and an adult drunk (wearing a Marvel Comics "It's Clobbering Time!" sweater).

NARRATOR (CAPTION E)

Once I got home, things were okay; I would chill in my bedroom alone with my TV and comic books. Or alone as possible, since I had to share that bedroom with my two-year old sister. However, simply getting from the school bus to my front door took the navigational skills of a cruise missile or a Barry Sanders run.

NARRATOR (CAPTION F)

The day-to-day, moment-to-moment elements of this life were something to escape from. Movies and comics were my getaway car of choice. Which brings us back to my imagination and all things coming from media-produced fantasy: superheroes, space ships and the wild west.

Page Three: 6 Panels

Panel 1

Wide panel, medium shot of DAVE in his mother's bedroom. He's standing, looking right at us, holding a toy. He's standing in front of a dresser with a small TV with "The Wild Wild West" on. There are collage elements of various comic book covers, toys, TV Guide pages with 1968 western themes.

NARRATOR (CAPTION A)

The western heroes always seemed so fearless in the face of adversity. With no ray-guns or x-ray vision, good always triumphed over evil. This struck a powerful cord with me. Not only that, they got to shoot pistols, ride horses and hang out in saloons. And the terrain was magical ... no junkies, no parking lots full of broken beer bottles and Haffenreffer bottle caps. And, while there was the occasional town drunk in these movies, he was always funny and harmless.

Panel 2

Close up of someone printing permission slips with a mimeograph machine. A motion line jumps from the machine off the right side of the panel.

Panel 3

Close up of DAVE holding the permission slip. The motion line from PANEL 1 is continued from the left side of this panel. DAVE is extremely happy.

NARRATOR (CAPTION B, OVER PANELS 2 - 4)

Back then, we had to get our parents to sign a mimeographed permission slip in order to go on any field trip. I'll never forget the look and smell of that cheap, magical printing format. Mom normally didn't like me being too far from home. But after a series of calm, rational negotiations, she finally relented. Through the power of dialog, we established a bond of mutual trust. I finally got her to see that her fears were unfounded and that I was going to come back home safe and unharmed.

Panel 4

Close up of MOM in their living room. The place should look old, but not horrible. In the distance, DAVE is jumping around like a crazy person because MOM signed the permission slip. MOM looks tired, rolls her eyes up hoping this was a good thing to do.

MOM (THOUGHT BALLOON C)

"Maybe I'll finally get some sleep this weekend..."

Panel 5

Close up of DAVE tied to his refrigerator with laundry rope. He's frightened out of his mind, just about to shout for help.

NARRATOR (CAPTION D)

I was so excited about my diplomatic triumph, that I tested my rodeo techniques on the refrigerator that next weekend. This didn't work out quite according to plan. Let's save that story for another time.

Panel 6

Long distance shot of Glenwood Elementary School's parking lot. It's morning, and the kids are boarding the school bus for the field trip. MISS PELIGRINI is in front of the bus with a clipboard, making sure all her kids are accounted for.

NARRATOR (CAPTION E)

The next two weeks were spent dreaming anticipation of riding a horse into or onto the sunset. Finally, the big day arrived. I didn't fully allow myself to think it was going to happen until the busses strolled up our driveway. We lined up in the schoolyard by grade, then room, then in alphabetical order. After the teachers made sure the school wouldn't get sued for losing a kid, we were on our way!

Page Four: 6 Panels

Panel 1

Long distance shot of the Catskill Game Farm entrance from the parking lot. School busses unload, families take pictures, parents try maintaining order in the chaos of happy children. Elderly folks bring their grandkids. The mood is warm and happy.

NARRATOR (CAPTION A)

It was a pretty long bus ride, but it was worth every minute. The vast majority of the 914-acre Catskill Game Farm meant nothing to me. The scimitar-horned onyx, mountain zebra and other endangered ungulates might as well have been the girl's section of Sears.

Panel 2

Bird's eye view: Kids are running at us, along grassy hills and trails -- ahead of their adults. There's a wooden fence in front of us; the kids are behind it from our view. While the kids furthest away from us look happy, the kid closest to us - touching the fence - looks shocked.

NARRATOR (CAPTION B)

When we finally got to the horse ring, it wasn't what I expected.

Panel 3

Inset: Close up of DAVE'S shocked face.

Main Panel: Establish the horse riding area, surrounded by tall trees and clear sky. From a distance further than PANEL 2, we see the fenced-in area is a 40-foot square. It should look small and cheap. Visibly disappointed parents and children gasp outside the fence. Inside, OLD MAN guides the horse around a circular path. There's a little girl on the horse.

NARRATOR (CAPTION C)

The grounds were tiny, confined and filthy. The "horse" was really an old pony from a circus. The old man brought the old pony to the gate, took the first kid in line, put him on the pony, walked them around the yard once, deposited the kid, replaced him with the next kid, and started all over again. This

was a shock.

Panel 4

Close up of OLD MAN: He's tired of doing this, but has to stay "in character". He likes the kids, but hates this job. The newcomer's disappointment doesn't mean a thing to him.

NARRATOR (CAPTION E, PLACED OVER PANELS 4 + 5)

The teachers always lined us up in alphabetical order. This means that while the kids ahead of me were busy complaining ...

Panel 5

Group shot of kids, with the camera slightly towards our right (making 3/4 angle of kids looking at the left side of the panel). The kids heckle OLD MAN.

KID 1 (WORD BALLOON F)

Hey old man! Roll up your sleeves so we can play "Connect the Age Spots"!

Panel 6

This is a visual continuation of PANEL 5. Behind the row of heckling kids, DAVE ponders with an evil smile.

NARRATOR (CAPTION F)

... I had time to plot.

Page Five: 7 Panels

Panel 1

Long distance, bird's eye view: Show the orderliness and routine nature. Kids stand in long lines, waiting their turn for something a lot of them don't want, guided by adults, one after another. A disappointed KID completed her ride. She heads back to the group - muttering under her breath - passing DAVE on his way to the horse and OLD MAN.

KID (MUTTERING WORD BALLOON A)

Gee, that was fun.

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON B)

All right, next cowboy.

Panel 2

Medium shot: OLD MAN lifts DAVE onto the horse. Show how a child this age doesn't properly fit in the saddle.

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON C)

What's your name, buckaroo?

DAVE (WORD BALLOON D)

Dave.

Panel 3

Worm's eye view of DAVE sitting on the horse, looking frightened. He's stunned by how high he is off the ground, and how powerful this horse looks from this point of view.

DAVE (THOUGHT BALLOON E)

Bessie's a lot bigger up close.

DAVE (THOUGHT BALLOON F)

Am I really gonna do this?

Panel 4

Medium shot of OLD MAN next to the horse: Having finished putting DAVE on the horse, OLD MAN grabs the reins. He's about to walk another kid around a circle, like he's done a million times.

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON G)

That's a good name, son. Old Bessie here is gonna take good care

--

Panel 5

Close up of DAVE'S hand snatching the reins from OLD MAN'S hands.

DAVE (WORD BALLOON H)

This horse ain't no Bessie!

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON I)

-- Hey!

Panel 6

Close up of DAVE yanking the reins backward with all his might. The smile on DAVE'S face is that of an evil prankster.

DAVE MAN (WORD BALLOON J)

Her name is Silver!

DAVE MAN (WORD BALLOON K)

As in "Hi-ho..."

Panel 7

The horse rears, knocking OLD MAN to the ground. DAVE looks frightened now.

DAVE MAN (SHOUT BALLOON L)

"...SIIILLLL-VEERRRR!"

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON M)

Don't do it, kid. You'll spook the -

OLD MAN (SHOUT BALLOON N)

Ahhh!

Page Six: 5 Panels

Panel 1

Panel 1 of Page one, this time from behind the OLD MAN. In the distance, we see DAVE and the horse riding away from us.

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON A)

Come back here, you little creep!

Panel 2

On the outside of the fence, the line of kids happily comment. The adults look on in disbelief, amusement and worry.

KID 1 (WORD BALLOON B)

Who'd've thought that old nag could move so fast?

KID 2 (WORD BALLOON C)

The horse ain't so slow, either!

KID 3 (WORD BALLOON D)

She'll through him off in seconds!

Panel 3

Close profile view: DAVE dropped the reins, and is holding onto the saddle in sheer panic, almost falling off as the horse goes top speed.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON E)

Who's got a watch? I say four eyes'll stay on for at least one minute.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON F)

No way. He's barely on the saddle now. Bookworm's getting stomped!

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON G)

That'll be better than facing his mom aft-

Panel 4

View from just behind silhouetted fence. Frightened horse looks like he's

going to go head first into the fence at full speed. OLD MAN -- about 10 feet behind -- is catching up, yelling.

KID (OFF-PANEL SHOUT BALLOON)

They're heading for that fence ... at top speed!

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON)

Think the horse'll jump it?

Panel 5

This is a wide panel, with a near profile view of the left-to-right action. The running OLD MAN is catching up to the horse. The chase kicks up a lot of dust.

KID (OFF-PANEL SHOUT BALLOON)

Hey, the old man's gaining!

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON)

Darn, I was hoping to see Dave get bucked off at least.

Page Seven: 6 Panels

Panel 1

Close up of horse running right at us. OLD MAN is closing in on the horse's left, judging exactly when to make his leap for the tangling reins. DAVE is scared, but doesn't want this to end. Figures he knows what's going to happen when he's caught. He's still having a tough time not falling off, still hanging on by the saddle.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON A)

Might still get your wish. See how hard cowboy's breathing?

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON B)

Look again, Clyde. Old guy's hauling ass!

Panel 2

Close up of OLD MAN from behind, about to grab the reins. DAVE'S head is turned in the direction of the OLD MAN. The horse, seeing the fence about 20 feet in front of him, begins to slow down. OLD MAN is gasping for breath.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON C)

Awww ... that old nag's slowing down so's not to hit the fence.

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON D)

GOT you, you little--

Panel 3

Kid's eye view: OLD MAN makes a leaping grab for the reins. DAVE snatches the reins just inches in front of OLD MAN'S outstretched hand, pulls hard right, causing OLD MAN to stumble. Through the panic, DAVE still manages to yell out a taunt.

DAVE (WORD BALLOON E)

Nice try, Festus!

OLD MAN (SHOUT BALLOON F)

Yarrrrrrgh!

Panel 4

OLD MAN hits the dirt fact first, producing a huge cloud of dust. Kids laugh uncontrollably.

CROWD OF KIDS (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON G)

Ha ha ha!

OLD MAN (WORD BALLOON H)

Ummph!

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON I)

Ha! Told you he was too old!

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON J)

Bet you'll feel that in the morning!

Panel 5

Close up of OLD MAN, with an angry face covered in dirt, determined to try again.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON K)

Uh-oh.

KID (OFF-PANEL WORD BALLOON L)

He looks maaad.

Panel 6

Two security guards watch from a distance. YOUNG GUARD wants to help. OLD GUARD says no. Both look calm.

YOUNG GUARD (WORD BALLOON M)

Looks like Hank's in trouble! Shouldn't we do someth--

OLD GUARD (WORD BALLOON N)

--Trust me, kid. We're all better off letting him handle this on his own.

Page Eight: 5 Panels

Panel 1

Bird's eye view of OLD MAN throwing DAVE off the horse and into the ground with his left hand, about to punch DAVE with a clenched right hand. Security guards come from behind, grabbing OLD MAN'S right hand before it lands.

NARRATOR (CAPTION A)

After three more tries, he finally got me. It took a few grownups to keep him from killing me.

Panel 2

Fantasy shot of Dave being yelled at by angry heads.

NARRATOR (CAPTION B)

I got even more yelling from the game farm's security staff, and even by Miss Peligrini.

Panel 3

Close up of angelic, smiling DAVE.

NARRATOR (CAPTION C)

None of that mattered. For a brief time, I was a hero in the eyes of my fellow students. More importantly, I turned a dream into reality and faced down my fears in order to make it happen.

Panel 4

Long distance shot of a bus leaving the Catskill Game Farm.

NARRATOR (CAPTION D)

When I got back to Springfield, I still had to run through another disciple gauntlet of teachers, the principal, the guidance counselor and my Mom.

Panel 5

Long distance shot of school bus on highway back to Springfield.

NARRATOR (CAPTION E)

After that was all over, I was told that -- in addition to getting a sore butt and grounded "until further notice" -- I was also banned for life from the Catskill Game Farm.

THE END