

I HATE MOOBERLY



By M.p Temple

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Episode One

Racer?

Tuesday. May 7th. 1996. 7:30 A.M.

School. Town name redacted.

“I heard you kicked Cassie in the head.” Coach Blinkensberg said while snapping the cap back on a dry-erase marker. The bell had rung, and most of the students were jammed at the door trying to leave the tiny classroom for lunch. The building had been built in the 1920’s and hadn’t been updated since. The agriculture classroom Leonie stood in still had the wooden desks with the folding seats.

“I didn’t kick her,” Leonie said, adjusting the extra credit paper. Her agriculture teacher towered above her. He was a man in his thirties, a little heavier, with a great personality. He had a large nose, thick black glasses, a button-up dress shirt, and never a tie. All the kids loved Coach Blinkensberg, which was why this was shocking to hear from the teacher who held the fate of her summer in his hands.

“What I heard was.” He said. “On the back of the bus? You smacked her across the head with a water bottle there after yelling, ‘I am the water queen?’”

Was this a set-up? Leonie realised Cassie must have made up a story to tell the other kids to increase her chances of getting the Golpher Springs Fire Jr. lookout summer job. That little snicker doodle planned to go all.

“I am the water queen sounds like something someone would make up if they couldn’t think of anything else.”

“Could you not think of anything else?” Coach asked.

The stare coming from the usually charming man alarmed her. She stood straighter and set down the papers.

“I sat on her a little.” Leonie admitted. “To get her to move her feet. I told you not to put us together for group work.”

“That you both failed. Yes. I thought we would make a deal about an opportunity that would make up for that. But now I hear this and I’m not so sure.”

“Ask everyone who saw us, They’ll tell you that didn’t happen. She’s mad about the grade and is trying to get back at me.” Leonie said, tightening her fist. This was an outrage. She was not that kind of person. So what if no one else could handle being as tough as she was?

“The only reason I am still entertaining this idea is,” Coach went on, flipping through papers on his desk. “I have asked around.” He said. “Her story changed when one of the teachers asked. But I see how your fists gets sometimes when you think no one is watching.”

Leonie tried to relax her hands. She looked down. Her black hair fell in her eyes, but she did not bother to brush her bangs aside.

“Is this really about the fight I had with Mooberly?” She asked, looking up frantically. No one could have seen that. That conversation was private, away from all ears. Far from the main school building, in a barn in a field that is far from the school.

“Why do you keep calling her Mooberly? The class cow doesn’t have a name.” He said almost in shame of having the say the words aloud. He leaned on the cluttered teacher’s desk. He looked tired to the girl.

She gasped. “How did you...”

“That is not important.” He said. “I know about it. It is concerning when any student gets in verbal conflict with a creature that wants to cuddle you.”

“It’s true. I don’t get along with that prat Mooberly. That’s not a crime. Otherwise McDonald’s and Dairy Queen would need really good lawyers.” She said.

Coach Blinkensberg moaned as if hearing the worst joke ever. He handed her a flyer that read:

Wanted. After school, cow caretaker. Extra credit available.

Leonie mouthed a bad word. She hated that cow. The smell, the sound she made. The way its nose and lips turned up when it chewed on grass, everything. It’s big brown spot and a white coat of smelly hair. Most of all, she hated how it reminded her that her father, who was working at a cattle ranch in Wyoming. He would not be back to see her for most of the year. If he returned at all. She found herself tearing up.

“I don’t want to stay after school. I hate this place. This entire worthless town sucks. I want as far away from everyone as I can get.”

The coach shrugged. “Do you want the Golpher

Canyon Jr. Fire lookout position? Or do you want to hang out all summer with me? Redoing Agriculture homework?”

“Oh my gawd no,” Leonie said. “Stop, I’ll do it. When do I report in?”

Coach Blinkensberg crinkled his nose. “Show up after school at the barn by the football field. There’s a list of everything you need to do. Do that for two weeks straight, and I will even endorse you for the job. The school needs that cow as healthy come the fall. To show the pride of this town!”

“If the town has so much pride, why do we all call it “redacted” instead of what it’s really called?” Leonie asked.

Coach Blinkensberg hesitated. “It’s um. You know why no one says the name. This area was named something. Bad. Then the town started a few years ago and someone messed up the paperwork. Never mind our questionable town history. Act wisely. Don’t let anything bad happen to the cow.”

“You have my word, Mooberly will live.” She said, “I need this extra credit. I will not fail you.”

He shook his head. “I’m not a Sith lord, and the

cow doesn't have a name. It's a class cow that I donated. Paid for her myself. If I hear any more about you and Cassie fighting. It's over for both of you. Got it?"

Leonie gulped. "Yes. I understand."



School Barn. 5:25

After school, things didn't get much better. The water bucket clunked on the barn floor. Leonie cursed at her wet hands in frustration. The leaky pump always sprayed water in all directions, causing the handle to be wetter than she expected. The large cow munched on grass and "Moo" -ed from its straw-littered pen. Flicking it's tail back and forth. Dust hung in the air.

"Stuff it in a grocery bag, you future cheeseburger," Leonie shouted as she picked up the bucket.

She paused.

"Sorry Mooberly. I don't like messing up." She said. "Why do I have to use a bucket anyway. Can't the school district afford a hose?"

The cow mooed.

“No one asked you.” She sneered.

She refilled the bucket at the opposite end of the barn, trying to ignore the smells of wet hay and rotten wood. Her knuckles and arms burned from carrying it to the cow’s water trough so many times. She trudged past three empty stalls and a tractor parked inconveniently in the middle of the room. The cow stuck her head through the fence when she approached. With her large tongue began to lap up the liquid into her mouth. Making a face that looked ridiculous to Leonie.

Soft crunching of footsteps caused Leonie to turn around. As she did, she felt a cold splash. From her left, she saw Cassie, still in a cheerleader uniform and PJ bottoms, with an empty bucket. She had missed the cow’s water container and soaked Leonie’s shirt and overalls.

The two girls glared at each other.

“What are you doing here?” Leonie asked her.
“Don’t you have cheer practice or something?”

“Who are we cheering for, the cafeteria ladies? We don’t have any sports teams. They cancelled practice

again. I'm here now because I know you are going to screw up." Cassie said, walking to the water faucet in the back of the barn.

Leonie dashed towards Cassie and jabbed her with a sharp poke to the shoulder. She dropped her bucket on her own feet and crossed her arms. Cassie did not back away. They faced each other like boxers waiting for the bell. Leonie stood firm. Cassie glared.

The cow mooed.

"Stay out of this Mooberly! Cassie, why do you have to be into everything I am? Can't you get your own hobbies and interests? You're popular enough you can do anything you want. Go do something else." Leonie pointed towards the big creature, still munching like nothing of interest was happening.

"What I heard when you said that is 'can you stop existing please?' and that's like rude." Cassie said.

"I want you to exist. Over there. Far away from me with everyone else in... this town that we can't say the name of."

"I'm a threat to your little world you like to hide in all day." Cassie gawked. "I bet in your head, you got

your own theme park with posters of yourself all over. Look, I'm not here to solve your problems. You don't even let anyone ride the bumper cars in that world of yours. I'm not here to solve all your problems weirdo." She poked Leonie in the shoulder. Who drew back with a widened-eyed shocked expression.

"Um. Time out." Leonie made a T shape with her hands. "Where are my bumper cars at? Cause I have been living in my head a while, and there are no rides. Just killer clowns and water fountains of crystal Pepsi. No, when the street lights go off in here." Leonie pointed to her head. "It is not a safe place to be. That's why I need to be out there in the wild."

"Again, what I hear you talk is 'I am pathetic and want to run away from all my problems,'" Cassie scoffed. She dropped her bucket. "You want that job to get away. I need that job to connect. I'm not going to stop existing cause we want the same thing. I'm sorry I lied about you kicking me. I was wrong. But I want this. It's not fair that your parents do ranch stuff. Not all of us have that."

"It's not my job to solve your problems," Leonie said.

Cassie's open hand struck Leonie's cheek. Leonie shoved Cassie so hard that she landed on her backside. Standing over her, with a bright red mark on her face, she yelled.

"I was being nice to you!"

They wrestled to the floor like angry alligators having a rolling contest. Punches flew, as they shouted insults at each other at the top of their lungs. Releasing years of pent-up anger and hate towards each other.

Neither of them heard the commotion happening other side of the cow pen.

"Horse face!"

"Edward Scissorhands wanna be!"

The fighting brought them to the back of the barn, where they began to push and shove into tall stacks of hay.

On the other side of the barn, the cow pen door creaked open. And the sound of a large engine revving.

A strong, cold breeze with the scent of rain swept through the room. They stopped and turned in the direction of the wind. A single straw floated towards

them from the outside world. It came from where the cow had once been.

“I don’t hear Mooberly chewing,” Leonie said in a panic.

Loenie ran around the tractor and climbed over the pen fence. A white pickup truck without a license plate pulling away with Mooberly in the back. The vehicle disappeared from her sight, travelling on a dirt road into a blooming dogwood forest.

Leonie exclaimed. “Someone cownap Mooberly!”



Agriculture Classroom 6:30

“I want an explanation. Right now. Starting with how you got that red mark.”

Leonie and Cassie sat in shock in front of Coach Blinkensberg’s desk in the agriculture classroom. He paced back and forth rapidly. They all looked ill. Leonie stared at her white light-up sneakers. The cow was gone. Everything was over.

Cassie shuffled.

“That cow cost two hundred and seventy-five dollars. We are never buying new Wrestling mats now. Those poor kids are going to keep getting ringworm. Why were both of you there? How did this happen?”

Leonie looked at Cassie, who also stared at her feet. Having been so fierce a few minutes ago, she now seemed different. Quiet. Withdrawn. It felt to her like looking in a mirror. You see yourself, but it’s backwards somehow. Her dream had died too. Maybe she did suck as a person, but maybe she was one of those people who have good intentions sometimes.

“I fell. On a door. Knob. I deserved it.” Leonie said, straightening up. “I. Didn’t want to go to the nurse and leave Mooberly all alone. So. Cassie came to help me when it happened. Someone stole Mooberly in the back of their truck. I saw them driving over the hill towards the other side of the tracks. This couldn’t have been prevented.”

Cassie’s eyes darted to Leonie. Like a lion spotting a gazelle. But she nodded in agreement.

“What did you do to Mooberly? ” Coach Blickensberg said, sitting at his desk, out of breath. “You hated her. You said so yourself. You two were the last to see her.”

“No!” Cassie cried. “I would never...”

“I can’t lose that cow. Where did you take her?” He said in a threatening tone.

“We didn’t cownap her,” Leonie said, looking him in the eyes.

“Until you have proof otherwise? Detention. Summer school. Now. I’m going to go lie down in my car until I can figure out what to do. Go tell your parents what you did before I do.”

He walked out of the room holding his stomach, leaving the two girls seated at the front. The door closed quietly. For a long while, they did not speak. It might have been the longest they had sat next to each other without throwing an insult around.

“You lied about the fight,” Cassie said.

Leonie crossed her arms. “The only way either of us can get this junior fire watch gig? Is if we find that cow. And we need to do it together.”

Cassie crossed her arms. “I’d rather chug rotten yogurt.”

“We don’t have time to argue. Every second we stand here playing patty cake, the less the chance she’s ever

found. We work together, we bring her back...”

“Wait, are you serious. You want us to break curfew to go after whoever took Mooberly? My parents would ground me.” Cassie said.

“You said you wanted this,” Leonie stood up. “There’s no police in ‘Redacted’. The adults here are dumb. So it has to be us teenagers. I bet if we go across the tracks, we can find some clue to where they took her. We need to go find her. Weston and Boone from science class. Don’t they live across the tracks? I don’t know them well, but they’d know who’d take a cow.”

Cassie made a frustrated strangling gesture. “If you hadn’t been the reason we failed our group agriculture project neither of us would be here! Fine. But, I will be the Golpher Canyon Jr. Lookout this summer. If I get in trouble because of you, there will be consequences.”

“Me? You are the one who is impossible to work with. That’s why we failed. I told you, there’s no bumper cars.” Leonie headed for the door to find a pay phone.

Episode Two

2 Slow 2 Curious
Country Road. 7:15

“Girls, stop cussing at each other.”

Leonie and Cassie ignored Mrs. Gilbert while shouting in the back seat, which smelled like pine air freshener. Leonie’s mother kept looking into the review mirror at the girls. Engaged in the fieriest of debates.

“You want to fight me over everything! Stop!” Cassie shouted.

“I didn’t even want you here!” Leonie shouted back.

The truck pulled up to the ranch, now stripped of all the trees that used to surround the property. Now, most of the land is red clay and sand instead of usable soil. Cassie turned as soon as the sight of their house came into view. The lower levels were still boarded, and the garage lay bare without a proper door.

Leonie saw her father’s truck, right where he left it months ago. The Gilberts had bought it from a farm

auction before the flood changed everything, as a project car. It ran well enough back when they had cattle to feed.

“Cassie, did you even bring clothes to sleep in?” Mrs. Gilbert asked, with a strong hint of annoyance in her voice.

“I don’t sleep. I trance.” She said.

Mrs. Gilbert parked outside the house in front of the garage. She stopped the engine, which sputtered to a grinding stop.

“Girls, what’s this about. Cause if this is a sleepover, it’s going to be one of those that ends up on Nightline. I don’t want a Ted Koppel interview. Do I need take Cassie home?”

Leonie wondered why her mother was acting so strangely. She didn’t care what she did. Not that she ever brought friends over. Especially with the house still a mess from the water damage.

“We told you, we are best friends now and want to study together,” Leonie said.

“Stop looking at me, I don’t like it,” Cassie said grumbling.

The girls heard a loud click from the passenger side panel. Leonie tried to exit the vehicle, but the door didn't open.

"Ya both think I didn't pull shady things when I was your age?" Mrs. Gilbert said. "What are you two doing? And how illegal are we talking? I have plans tonight, I can not cancel and can not deal with this right now."

"Wait, you did shady stuff as a kid, Mom? Like what?"

"Don't change the subject." Mrs. Gilbert said, looking down and away.

"No, you opened that door, you can't close it down. You're going to tell me you were out stealing cars or something? You get upset if you get too much change back."

"You both are lame," Cassie said. "And this is kidnapping, Mrs. Gilbert."

"Tell me what is happening, or we all sit in this truck until the end of time." Mrs. Gilbert said.

"Someone took the class cow," Leonie said. "We are trying to figure out who did it. It's. A whodunit slumber party."

“People who steal cattle drive straight to sell them. If they don’t butcher them first, and sell them on the side of the road. You’re not going to find the cow, or who did it. Even if you did. I bet you would want nothing to do with that. You understand? You should be finding a way to pass that class; that is what you should be doing.”

“I am,” Leonie said. “Why else would I have Cassie here? I’d rather hang out with Charles Mason.”

“He’d like that.” Her mom said, rolling her eyes. “Why do you feel the need to lie to me then? About you being friends?”

“I have rights, Mrs. Gilbert.” Cassie complained.

“That’s an illusion. Leonie, why don’t you feel comfortable telling me the truth? What do you know?”

Leonie drew back from hearing this. “You’re acting weird, Mom.”

Mrs. Gilbert pressed the child lock button that let out a click.

“Stay in the house. If there’s an emergency, drive to a payphone and call 911. I won’t be back til late. Do not leave under any other circumstances,” She said. “Get out of the truck now. Move it. I have places to be, baby

girl.”

They did as she asked and exited the vehicle.

“Your farm sucks,” Cassie said. “Like your face. Get your keys, We got to get to Weston’s place.”



Across the Tracks. 7:45 p.m.

It had taken a few minutes to locate the keys, but in time, no they were on their way to the backroads. Leonie brake checked the truck again, smiling as Cassie held tighter to the overhead handles. The white truck didn’t need to stop, but sliding on the dirt road was too fun to pass up. That and Cassie flipping out. Wide-eyed at how obstructive the windshield was from all the back country dirt amused her. They had passed the tracks and were on the other side of the rolling hills. The dull headlight lit up the entire distance of barren farm land in the night. The yellow light illuminated the red clay and sand as far as the eye could see. This was part of why Leonie did not mind the obstruction in her view. The memory of what it used to be hurt too much.

“If you do brake check one more time,” Cassie said. “I

am going to tie you up, leave you in the back and drive it myself.”

Leonie pointed. A large cart sat on the side of the road, wooden with a metal roof fastened to the top. It once might have sold fruit, but its shelves sat covered. Two figures stepped out from behind the cart and walked onto the road. They approached the the head lights.

It was two kids. A shorter kid who wore a starter cap sideways, wore a number 14 Carolina Panthers jersey. A taller, thicker kid with a buzz cut, looking like a lineman, wore a red shirt that said “Tell me about the Rabbits.”

Leonie slowed down and came to a smooth stop. Cassie smacked the back of her seat.

“You could do that this entire time!” Cassie shouted, shaking her fist.

“Hush. It’s Weston and Boone.” Leonie said. “What are they doing on the road?”

Weston walked to the driver’s side of the truck and knocked. Leonie rolled down the window.

“Dude. Look who got lost. A future serial killer and a burnout waiting to happen.” Weston laughed.

Cassie rolled down the passenger side window and made a rude gesture towards Boone.

“How about these rabbits?” She said. “We are here for information nerds. Someone took the class cow. We saw them heading this way.”

Weston stood taller, as if trying to make himself look bigger than he was. Boone spoke. “Nope, we’re dumb country boys. Products of our environment, Bro.” Boone said, crossing to the passenger side, giving the cheerleader the stink eye.

“Stop the vaudeville act, dude bros,” Leonie said. “Who might be desperate enough to steal a cow?”

“You know who’s desperate, Bro?” Boone said. “Leonie’s Mom.”

Weston burst out in laughter. Leonie exited the truck, shoving Weston out of the way. She marched to the boy, who backed away as soon as he saw Cassie get out to join her. Weston ran to the fruit stand and started covering its shelves with an old, faded bed sheet. Boone walked backwards

“I was joking.” Boone said.

“I’m not.” She picked up a handful of clay from the side

of the road and flung it at him, smacking him in the chest. “Who took Mooberly today at 4:35? Out in the ag building.”

Weston wedged himself in front of Leonie and Boone. Cassie clenched her fists.

Weston poked Leonie in the arm. “What we know is our business. You’d better back up before something bad happens.”

Leonie kicked the boy’s ankle with a sweeping blow. He let out a cry as he struck the side of the cart. “My wrist! Oh no! I got to race! My Wrist!” He yelled over and over. Boone lifted him up to his feet.

“Touch me and bad things happen,” Leonie shouted. Cassie dragged her back to the truck. She still was trying to get back to Weston.

“Get back in”, Cassie said. “We can’t find the cow like this.”

Cassie threw her in the passenger seat and shut the door.

“You are in for it now!” Boone yelled. “We ain’t letting this one go.”

Cassie took the wheel and began to drive away past the

cart. Leonie leaned out the window, spotting an old-time microphone hanging out of one of the shelves. It must have become dislodged in the fight. The mic's large silver diaphragm spun hanging from a wire. Leonie thought she recognised it from photos she'd seen of people creating radio shows. What would Weston and Boone be doing with something like that?

“Nah. We'll be back for you. Next time, you'd better start talking about how you're able to afford a starter cap. While the rest of the town is searching in Casey's station's dumpster for pizza slices.”

The truck drove off.



Backroads. 8:10 p.m.

They had driven to the top of a hill at Leonie's insistence. There, Cassie rested on a lone stump that once had been a large tree. She kept shaking her head. Leonie rolled her eyes at this. She sat in the driver's seat, fiddling with the radio, switching channels.

“If you keep beating everyone, no one is going to talk to us,” Cassie said. “You need to get it together. We are not

the LAPD. You hurt a real person back there. Even if he is a dude bro.”

“No one is going to say anything unless...”

“Let me do the talking.” She said. “Since you’re dragging me into this, I can at least keep you from picking a fight with everyone you come across. Those two are not going to ever tell us anything, and you know who they are related to.”

Leonie turned a knob, until the radio's sharp static became the sound of a familiar voice.

“I knew it.” She said. “That was them we heard on the bus this morning.”

A deep, hollow voice bellowed from the speakers. “Again, listeners, this is a call for help. Some punks looking for trouble have injured a very key rider in tonight's events. If you are willing to help us, meet us in the valley beyond the tracks. You’ll see the glow from the event. Inquire about “Police Academy. And now here are some tunes to get you ready for tonight’s event.”

The station cut to soft piano music.

“That is Boone.” Cassie drew closer, eyeing the dashboard as if it were a demon. “That is a real

broadcast. Has to be illegal.”

“That’s something we can use against them,” Leonie said. “What event? Nothing goes on in this city except chicken fried steak day at Neoshou’s diner. Weston and Boone are taking a major risk by making a pirate radio station.”

“Weston is not going to talk to you. Not after you did what you did.”

“We’ll see,” Leonie said. “I have a plan. We are going to ask about Police Academy. As long as we don’t have to watch them all, because there are so many. I bet you there will be a white truck there. We find that, and we find Mooberly.”

“Everyone drives a white truck.” Cassie crossed to the passenger seat.

“Not everyone,” Leonie said. “I have a feeling that the truck will be what leads us to finding her. And me. Enjoying looking for smoke in a tower in the mists of the Ozarks.”



Field. 8:50

A half hour later, Leonie screamed into her hands. In front of them were about twenty-five white pickup trucks, all about the same make and model. Cassie , smirking, gestured in the direction where people gathered around make-shift stalls. Beyond them were cones set out in a long line. Loud gas generators powered stadium-like lights, creating a festive atmosphere. Folks seemingly had travelled there from around the state. More people than Leonie had seen in town.

“Told you so.” Cassie sneered. “We’ve got nothing. Bet you wish you were nicer to the dude bros now, uh?”

Leonie refused to answer. The two stopped cold in their tracks, hearing something from nearby. They heard a multitude of moo’s. Not one or two cows, but a chorus of angry sounds. From the stalls and bonfire, they heard things like “Get your corn dogs!” and “Place your bets here!”

To this last cry, a man yelled, “500 on Police Academy!” He handed over his money to a lady sitting at a desk with a banged-up money box. Half his shirt was untucked, and his suit pants crinkled. People around him murmured.

“Have faith. I do.” He said.

“Hey.” Leonie pointed to a man. “That’s Pastor Branson! Is he... betting? On what? Why are there so many cows here? What the flip is this Cassie! This is an underground cow wrestling ring!”

The girl in the cheer uniform shrugged her shoulders at hearing this. Her face scrunched.

“That. Is where your mind went to. I. Don’t have a word for you.” She said.

They turned at the sound of the gates creaking. Six cows thundered out and across the distance of the long race way. Waving in and out of the cones and into the spectators who laughed and cheered. When the cows had run the full track, handlers gathered them back into the pens.

“They aren’t wrestling cows.” Cassie said. “They are racing them.”

“... well, Cow Wrestling is cooler. Hey! Pastor!” Leonie shouted.

The man froze, with a corn dog still in his mouth. He took a large bite, leaving only the stick.

They met around the fire. Surrounded by people selling everything from cow pins to VHS movies, to fried hot

dogs in a real deep fryer. Its smell of onions and mustard was strong. It seemed like most of the state was present.

“You have some nerve showing up here after hurting my rider.” Branson tossed the stick into the bonfire. “Weston’s wrist is so sprained he can’t even hold onto the reins. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for harming someone.”

“Wait, people. Ride. Cows. That is what this is. This is literally a cow race?” She said.

Cassie came to stand next to her, with a corn dog with ketchup in one hand and a plate of funnel cakes in the other. “Yes. Keep up, please. The town is struggling so bad everyone has resorted to cow racing.” She said.

“Yes.” The preacher nodded. “So bad that Weston’s family might get their land taken by the bank if he doesn’t win this race.” The preacher said. He lowered his voice so that only they could hear. “And now he can’t do it. We can’t find anyone. I spent good money on this racer and you have flushed it all down the drain.”

“Where did you get the cow?” Leonie asked. “Cause you should be ashamed if you stole it.”

The preacher spit away from the girls in total disgust. “I

am not a bank. I do not steal.” He said.

“Weston could have arranged to take Mooberly for this. He has a motive” Leonie said to Cassie.

“I’ve owned Police Academy for months. Best racing cow there is.” The preacher put his hands in his pockets and looked down. He noticed his shirt. He tucked it in nervously. “It has done a lot of good things with our cut of the winnings. No one rides like Weston neither.”

Leonie walked towards the mooing in the pens. She paced, wrapping her hands around her back in thought. “Do you know anyone who was sniffing around for a racer. Someone who with a white truck who was in town around four o’clock.”

A sour look took over the preacher’s facial expression. “Maybe. But after you sabotaged me? Why would I help you?”

Leonie stepped back towards him and Cassie. She motioned with her head towards the cow pens.

Cassie nudged her. She took Leonie aside with a stern look. “What are you going to do? Kick the preachers butt? This isn’t going to work.”

Leonie kicked at the dirt. Sending sand into the roaring

fires in front of them. There had to be a way. But she only knew of one, and that had not given her any answers. No. She had to try something different. And she had one choice.

“You need a rider?” She said to Branson. “I’m your huckleberry.”

Cassie covered her face with her hand. “I am so embarrassed I have to be around you.”

“Then leave,” Leonie said.

“No,” Cassie crossed her arms. “

As the girl argued, the preacher looked out at the people around him. He appeared to be searching.

“She’s a rancher’s daughter,” Cassie said, staring at Leonie. “She can figure out how to do it. And it’s better than not having anyone.”

“Hardly.” The preacher said. “Fine. Go to the pen. Go make us some money.”



Race Track. 9:00 p.m.

The next thing Leonie knew was she was on the saddle of a large calf, in one of six corrals. None of them being Mooberly. Her cow breathed heavily, cause of all the excitement in the air. That would be an unsettling feeling for a cow, the girl felt. It was for her as well. How had she gotten in this situation, now wearing a bike helmet, lined up for five other cow racers? People gathered around the distance of the track, with food and beverages as if it were a town picnic. Her legs were not used to riding, as she had not even had horses on the ranch since she was a little girl. She leaned forward and tapped the reins, excited to move forward. She had not expected this thrill.

The cow did nothing. How was she going to steer a stubborn cow.

The voice of Boone rang across the outdoor PA. “Riders. Get your racers ready. It’s time!”

She could feel the beast shift beneath her. Like she knew what to do. How many times had this creature done this? Cows are not known for being good learners, of course, but she seemed to know the routine.

“Good luck baby girl.” She heard a woman rider nearby shout. “I’d said you are grounded, but I got nothing to

say about that.”

Leonie could not find words to express her shock at who she saw on the cow next to her.

“Mom?!” She cried.

There she was. Wearing bright yellow sunglasses and an extra-large helmet. Looking like she was planning on biking through California. In the most distasteful way.

“I didn’t want this life for you. But cow racing? It has a way of seeking is. Don’t tell your father.” Mrs. Gilbert yelled over the crowd, who now chanted “Let’s go!” With each repetition, their voices grew louder with more excitement.

“Mom, no. This is embarrassing.” Leonie exclaimed from the top of her lungs.

“GO!” A voice cried over the PA.

The gates swung open. Leonie’s cow tried to run past her mother’s racer, but the calf bulldozed its way ahead.

“See you at the finish line, baby girl!” Her cow began to buck. It broke into a brisk gallop past a brown cow, who had stopped to eat a kid’s corn dog. Another racer spun its rider in circles. The crowd began a wild chant of

“Mooooo!” Her mom’s cow wandered into first place.

“Come on Police Academy!” Leonie leaned forward in her saddle and kicked her heels into the creature. It dashed forward, at a slow but amusing speed past 3 racers.

Boone, with a sense of excitement, called the race from the PA.

“Naked Gun has been passed by Police Academy, which is now coming alongside Jaws 3Ds. Police Academy is neck and neck with Rocky! This is unbelievable, ladies and gentlemen, Police Academy has come from behind to.. Yes! Rocky has veered onto the other side of the track, It is now PA, and the cow is in the lead, Schumacher Batman! Hold my corn holders! This is going to be close! Police Academy is close to beating the legendary K.C Gilbert!”

Leonie’s cow stretched forwards as it tried to gain speed. The creature would not stay in a straight line, causing Schumacher Batman to gain speed. She could see the finish line in front of her. Her cow was faster, she could beat her own mother in her first race. And do something good for Weston. She had to find a way to get control of her racer.

She turned the reins, causing the creature to dash ahead.

Boone beamed from the P.A. “Schumacher Batman is being overtaken by Police Academy! It’s going to be a photo finish!”

She could see her mother’s face for only a moment before her racer inched ahead. Each pace the other seemed to gain, then lose step. Each rider was tense, letting out a verbal cry, trying to get their creature to move a little bit faster.

The cows raced across the line.

“Schumacher Batman wins.” A distressed Boone called out.



Moments after the race, when prize money had been collected, people gathered their things. Some kid picked up all the cones along the long track, vendors tossed their wares in the back of their white pickup trucks. Leonie and Cassie ran to meet Branson, who packed church flyers in his vehicle.

“That’s not right, preacher, I tried to help. I almost won. How was I supposed to know I’d be racing my Mom? You’ve got to tell us who was looking for a cow tonight.”

“Our deal,” The preacher said, placing the last box in the

back. “Was that if you’d won I’d tell you what you wanted. You lost. You made me some money getting second, we are thankful for that after only having the cow for a couple of days. But that was not what was agreed to.”

Leonie drew back. “A couple of days? You said a couple of months earlier.”

The preacher started the engine and waved the girls off. “I have nothing more to say to either of you two. Either way, you didn’t find that cow tonight. Someone else must of took her. And not as a racer. Good night.”

The preacher’s truck lined up with the others travelling back in the direction of town. Leonie stood, watching the tail lights fade in the distance.

“I’m going to ride back with my parents,” Cassie said, joining her gaze, standing as one of the few people left. It looked like no race had even taken place. “I found them at the cake stand. I’m grounded, but I can even the playing field. Since they voted against the riverboat gambling bill but were betting on Naked Gun. Tomorrow we are doing things my way. And we are going to decide who gets the job. You better agree with me.”

“Fine,” Leonie said. “I’ll see what I can do to get us

more time tomorrow away from school. After I yell at my mom for being an underground racer. We should stop by Sundown Baptist church and press Branson.”

Cassie shook her head and walked away to her waiting parents and their white pickup truck.

“No.” She said. “Our first stop tomorrow is the gas station. While you were out there losing, I had a chat with Lexy. She graduated a few years ago, works at the gas station. Weston and Boone gave her the shakedown a few nights ago, looking for cattle to buy. That’s a bird we can get to sing louder. She’d know who’s stopped in. No way anyone is leaving a town in the middle of no where on an empty tank.”

Leonie followed after her. “Wait a minute, preacher Branson is hiding something. And Weston is dressing well for someone whose family is about to lose land.”

Cassie waved as her parents uncrossed their arms and motioned for her to hurry up.

“We are doing things my way.” She reminded her. “And I bet you are right. All roads seem to lead back to the church. I’ll see you in school.”

Leonie was left standing alone in the empty field. When

her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, she could see the stars above her come out. She traced the Big Dipper to the North Star and watched it twinkle for a while.

Her mom. Was a cow racer. For a long time, she thought about how lame that was as she wanted on her to give her a ride back home.

Episode Three

Brick

6:30 a.m. May 8th. 1996 Gilbert Ranch House.
Town name redacted.

“Mom. We are not pretending we both weren’t cow racing last night.”

“Okay. We won’t. No pancake syrup for you. Syrup is for winners in this house.” Leonie’s mother grabbed the large plastic bottle from the middle of the table.

The kitchen ceiling fan made a cranking sound as it swirled overhead in the awkward silence.

She’s not doing this, this is a joke. Leonie thought. Seated with a flannel button-down shirt tied around her waist.

She ate her plain thing pancakes at the breakfast table. She had not touched her glass of milk, nor the butter that morning.

“Don’t avoid the question, Mom. I heard Weston and Boone snooping around, looking for a racer. How big of

players are they in the game? What do you know about this world?"

Mrs. Gilbert downed an entire glass of orange juice. "Chunk change. What's what they are. Them and their family are like buzzards in this town. You see them everywhere, but they don't own anything. You need to stay clear of this. This business brings in a lot of money for people who need help. We rely on that to put food on this table," She said.

"That buzzard rides Police Academy? And has their own pirate radio station? And has a starter cap? He has to be making that money from somewhere, Mom. What's easier than grabbing a clueless cow from a school yard pen? Sell it to someone wanting to make a few bucks at the races."

Her mother stood, taking her plate to the sink. Clanking the dishes. It became clear that her mother would not be answering. But why?

"Do you know who took our class cow?" Leonie said. "There was a lot of air freshener in the truck yesterday. Like you cleaned extra hard for some reason."

"I'm your Mom, I don't answer to you." Mrs. Gilbert said, wiping off her plate and placing it on the drainer. Mrs.

Gilbert turned off the tap and closed her eyes.

It was the same answer she always gave when Leonie asked when her Dad was coming back.

Someone knocked at the door. Leonie glared at her mother, who did not reply as the knocking grew louder.

Mrs. Gilbert sighed. "Finding the cow isn't going to make anything better, baby girl. You find one, but it's not enough. So you go looking for another cow. And another. And next thing you know? That's been your entire life."

Leonie slammed her seat into the table and went to answer the door to silence the nonstop knocking. She left her mother, standing at the sink, lost in thought.

When Leonie opened the door, Cassie stepped in. She entered the entry way, wearing a jean jacket, blue t-shirt with black tights and yellow shorts. Her hair was set in two uneven buns.

"We are in trouble," Cassie said.

She handed Leonie a brick. Fayette had come to Cassie's place at 6 a.m. in a panic after she woke from the sound of shattering glass. Fayette told her that Weston and Boone are ticked cause she had talked to the girls about the missing cattle.

Leonie leaned out the door and spotted a concerned Fayette in a white pickup truck in front of their house. The thin girl at the steering wheel motioned for them to get in. Looking eager to get on the road .

At hearing this, still standing in the kitchen, Mrs. Gilbert shrugged. “Told you so, baby girl. They are Buzzards. And they are coming to pick at you next. Don’t forget your lunch. I packed you a tuna sandwich and a handful of in shell walnuts.”

Leonie rolled her eyes. Her mom always prepared the oddest lunches. Who eats walnuts?



Rest Stop. 7 A.M.

“I bought a racer from Weston and Boone. That calf spun in circles for minutes. She didn’t even get across the track last night. I lost everything on that cow. I’m stuck working at that stupid gas station.”

Leonie watched as Fayette tried to light the end of a carrot. She put two quarters into the soda machine near the bathrooms, that sounded with a thunk, dispensing a green and yellow soda can. Leonie walked over and

handed it to the woman, taking the lighter from her.

“Smoking carrots is not healthy for you. Here, have some surge.” Leonie said. She slammed it on the outdoor picnic table.

Cassie coughed.

Leonie remembered that Cassie was the one taking charge. Since her aggression had made everything worse. She felt so close to getting answers. But now, she felt helpless as Cassie talk her way out of a paper bag.

Ask her where the boys get the livestock from. She thought. With the land so trashed keeping cattle had to be expensive. Hay cost a hundred and seventy-two dollars a bale.

Cassie didn’t ask those things. Instead, she asked about what Fayette had lost in the flood. Fayette refused.

“I don’t want to deal with the past. Right now, is hard enough. You two ruined Weston, he is out to return the favour,” Fayette said. She looked at her watch and cursed. “My shift is about to start at the station. We’ve got to get going.”

Cassie looked at her nails. “We need to know who gassed up yesterday. I’m talking full tank, has to go out of town

type fill-ups.”

Fayette looked like she had been caught off guard by this. Even Leonie felt the question was abrupt.

“Most of the regulars. Pastor Branson, of course, since he lives technically out of the county. He’s always running back and forth from Sundown Baptist to his house. Um. K.C. Gilbert. Weston’s uncle. I even saw Coach Blinkensberg. Twice. I only see him once every few months.”

“Coach? He lives in town.” Leonie scratched her head while in thought. Where is he going where he’d need that much fuel?”

“I think we should ask him,” Cassie said.



School Hallway. 8:20 A.M.

“You can’t be here. Neither of you. Both of you are expelled. I won’t answer any of your crazy baseless questions.” Coach. Blinkenberg led girls down the long hallway to the front double doors of the old brick schoolhouse. Leonie and Cassie watched the oak doors swing shut. They stood next to one of the tall pillars,

with a plaque with the name of the town scratched out.

“He didn’t even answer you,” Leonie said, pounding on the door. “Great going, Cassie. You are doing such a great job of uncovering information, remington steele. Coach isn’t going to tell us why he got so much gas yesterday.”

With thoughtful eyes, Cassie turned in the direction of the school barn, the place the cow had been taken. Surrounded by fresh-cut grass and dandy lions. From the view from the cracked marble steps of the schoolhouse they could see through the front entrance to the back. Where the cow had once been. From there, they could see the leaky faucet spraying water into the air.

“I want another look at the cow pen. We missed something.” Cassie said. “Since we got time on our hands. My parents are at work.”

“We’ve seen it. There’s nothing to learn there. You are taking us in the wrong direction,” Leonie said.

“And you ticked off the Dude Bro’s enough to start throwing bricks. You can’t stand not being in control of everything. We don’t need to do everything together. I’ll check the barn, you. Go to whatever. Beat a confession

out of someone.”

“Go do a handstand over a pitchfork.” Leonie shouted.

“Least I can do is one, vampire girl. You know the Golpher Canyon job requires you to lift 50 pounds, right?” Cassie shouted, tromping across to the football field, with patchy brown turf with a bunny logo painted in the centre.

Great. Leonie thought as she walked into the parking lot. Tiny flowers bloomed out of the cracks between the parked white trucks. On one of them, she recognised the flyer that the coach had handed her the day before lying on the dashboard.

At a closer distance, she realised the windows of the truck were left cracked open. Not enough for someone to reach inside to unlock the door. In the seats were piles of candy wrappers and junk food boxes, with a blanket and a pillow in the back.

He looks like he sleeps in here. She thought. *He has a house on 3rd Street. Why would he do that? Like, I know he’s a teacher, but that’s excessive.*

Trying the handle, she looked around. Near a trash

bin that lead to a path from the parking lot to the football field, she spotted a pile of rocks. More than likely left over from weighing the trash can from the high winds that happen during tornado season.

She looked to the glass of the window, then back at the rock. How easy it would be.

No. I'm not Weston and Boone. She thought. Cassie is right. But I'm not telling her that.

A squirrel appeared from the tall grass behind the bleachers. With it's grey fur and tiny legs it crawled up to the trash can. It rummaged, running along the rim as it searched.

Leonie watched the squirrel pack away some Cheez-It for a rainy day. She looked back at the truck. From her bookbag, she took the lunch her mom had prepared. At the bottom of the brown paper bag ontop of the Tuna sandwich, sliced in triangles, were six walnuts. The squirrel's head rose at hearing Leonie shake the bag.

Carefully, with the critter watching her every move, she dropped the walnut through the opening in the window. The nut fell onto the brown and tan pleated seat cover

Leonie cursed and unwrapped her sandwich. As she chewed, she took another nut and tried again. Being more careful to slowly release it so that it came to rest on the latch.

She backed away. The squirrel climbed through the truck window and took the nut, placing it in its mouth. Budding its cheeks out. It propelled itself on the plastic latch and leapt out of the car.

The truck unlocked. Leonie threw up her hands in triumph. After opening the door, she checked the glovebox. Apart from the truck registration, she found several sheets of paper. And several rolls of cash. On each small note, written in red in cursive handwriting, were the names like “The English Patient” and “Tom Cruise”

That’s not nice. Leonie said. *I like Tom Cruise. He’s a good actor and a good person.* What has the coach been doing after school hours?

When she saw “Jefferson Blinkensberg.” written at the bottom, she realised they were receipts.

He is selling cows. But are they stolen cattle? She thought. But why would he steal his own cow?

She found a slip with the name ‘Police Academy’ on top. Sold to one Pastor Branson for 500 dollars.

A voice called out. She placed the papers back in the glove box and locked the door. Cassie appeared from the path.

“You have fun wasting your time?” Leonie asked.

Cassie held up a videotape. “Does this look like a waste of time?”

The label of the tape read ‘May 7th 5- 8 o’clock.’



Radio Shack 9:20 A.M.

“That’s how coach knew I fought with Moo-berly” Leonie lifted a box of transistors for a moment. Cassie searched the back row of the store.

“Coach is selling cattle racers.” Cassie said. “He wants to coach something so bad he’s dealing cows.”

“Can we agree to call them all Moo-sters? Like roadsters?” Leonie asked.

“No.”

Cassie inserted the tape into the grey and brown VHS player in one of the display televisions. The machine clunked and began to play. They saw Leonie on the screen from the camera's raised view. She carried water back and forth to the pen. Cassie splashed water on Leonie. People strode by the girls watching the tape, looking at the electronics and markdowns.

"You didn't even try to hit the trough." Leonie sneered, pressing the fast-forward button."

Cassie pointed to the screen. The barn door opened. They could see themselves fighting, but the tractor blocked their view of the thief. All the girls could see was the barn door opening. For a brief moment, they could see a person. But since the videotape was recorded on 4-hour mode the quality made it impossible to tell who it was. They couldn't even make out the license plate number on the truck as it drove away.

"This has to tell us something." Cassie said. "That cow wasn't only for the class if coach was keeping an eye on the barn with camera's. That's some serious dough what I saw rigged up. There's no way coach is as strapped for cash as he says he is."

Cassie put the tape back into the VHS player and hit

“rewind.”

Leonie rolled her eyes. “Coach is who all these people are getting cows from. That’s why he kept having to fill up his tank. But why would he steal his own cow? That’s at least 500 from the papers I saw and he said the betting was going to get intense.”

Cassie got her tape and they both walked past the counter and outside the store. The clouds now dark with the scent of rain hanging in the air.

“This doesn’t add up.” Cassie leaned against the brick wall of the radio shack, looking up deep in thought. “Why was there only one tape in the loft? And what for even?”

Leonie shrugged. “Maybe someone took the rest of them. It could be that he makes his transactions on videotape. That way, he has dirt on people if he needs it.”

“Why leave the tape? Why only that one?”

Leonie’s eyes darted to the school building in the distance. “So we would find it. This is a warning.” She said. “This has to be Weston and Boone’s work. His uncle filled up at the station...”

Cassie held out her hand. “Police Academy is one of the better racers from what people were betting on. There’s

no way they would have wanted to switch for an inexperienced cow.”

“Someone wanted her for a reason.” Leonie said.

A drop fell from the sky onto Leonie’s forehead. At this they both walked to a covered bus stop, one that had been out of order since the town no longer had a bus. Or a need to transport anyone who couldn’t get a ride with Sundown Baptist church. There they sat, and rain began to pour. They listened to the rapid thuds hit on the sidewalk next to them.

“I hate rain,” Leonie admitted. “It brings back so many awful memories.”

Cassie nodded. “Least we found one thing we can agree on. It’s hard not to start panicking. I. Think we all have a lot of pain still from ‘93.”

“I know I do,” Leonie said. “Where next. Cause I’m out of ideas. Since you are in charge. We aren’t getting anything more out of the coach here. Not while school is going on.”

“We aren’t going anywhere til the rain stops,” Cassie said.

“You got any money? For food or something.” Leonie

said. “I spend all mine on that can of Surge.”

“No,” Cassie said. “But Neosho’s Diner will start a tab. Come on, it’s down the street. We can wait there.”



Neosho Dinner Noon.

Leonie could not get over how gross apple pie looked with a sunny-side-up egg, its yolk dripping into the crunchy crust and baked apples. They had sat for hours, trying to make small talk until the rain passed.

“I’m going to offer you another bite to see the look on your face again.” Cassie said, reaching out to give her a try.

Of course, Leonie drew back at this. “Stop.”

The song changed on the jukebox. The little dinner was quiet, as it usually was. An older man ran the place, always standing in front of a grill taking orders and delivered food himself. Since business had gotten so bad over the years, he had to let his staff go. Like everyone in town.

A bell chimed. Two boys walked into the restaurant. On

sight, the cook stopped what he was doing and started cooking four hamburger patties on top of a bed of white onion. It sizzled as Weston and Boone walked over and took a seat with the girls.

“Bro. Look who we found in our burger spot,” Boone said

“Dude.” Weston pointed to Leonie with his wrist now in a cast. “It’s the ones who lost me a lot of money last night.”

“Look who it is Cassie,” Leonie said. “The numbskulls throwing bricks into peoples houses. That’s illegal, you know.”

Weston and Boone looked at each other.

“Nope. We’ve never done anything wrong Bro.” Boone said. “We are always above the law on everything. That wasn’t us. That’s not our style.”

Leonie narrowed her eyes. “You’ve lied to us before.”

Cassie finished the last bite of her pie. She said. “Like your radio show, uh?”

“Bro, that’s how they found us last night,” Boone said. “They found our secret radio show.”

Then she tanked your chances against her own mother.”

The cook brought over two double cheeseburgers and sodas for the boys. They thanked him and leaned back.

“No more bull,” Leonie said. “The threats stop here. Where were you two around 5:20 yesterday?”

Boone ate a fry and sipped on his soda. “We were on the air. At our broadcasting post. Like we are every weekday. You can ask all our listeners. Now that you know what we do.”

Weston added, “Every morning at 7 and at 9 o’clock when we hold events, dude.”

The cook told Cassie that he could confirm that. As he always tuned into the show when there weren’t any customers in the place.

“Joe wouldn’t lie to us.” Cassie stated about the cook.

Boone continued. “We’ve heard you are running around playing detective. That’s not sitting right with us. You see, we are a part of something larger here. We need you to stop talking. If word gets out too much we are going to get caught, and a lot of peoples well being are going to be at risk.”

“Help us find Mooberly.” Leonie snapped. “And we won’t have to talk to anyone.”

Weston took a bite of his burger. “This is our last warning. If we see you on or near a cow, you pay.”

“We’ll see about that.” Cassie said.

Weston and Boone nodded and left the cook a twenty-dollar bill. Both of them politely thanked the man for the meal on the way out of the dinner.

Episode Four

Moo-ster Drift

1:30 pm Sundown Baptist Church. Town name redacted.

White paint dripped from Pastor Branson's paintbrush. He stood in front of what used to read "Sundown Baptist Church". The girls stood near him by the sign in front of the yellow hexagon brick building.

Leonie felt it strange that he was painting the sign, yet the sky overhead suggested a lot more rain to come that evening. There wouldn't be enough time for the paint to dry.

"Why didn't anyone tell me what 'Sundown' meant?" The preacher said. "I thought this was a sundown town, as in. Jesus is with his people from sunup to sundown. How was I suppose to know the name was so unwelcoming. "

The preacher stepped back. In white letters on a red background read: "Everyone Welcome Baptist Church."

"Cassie asked you something. Where do they keep the moo-sters?" Leonie crossed her arms.

“We are not calling them moo-sters,” Cassie said. “Why did you lie about when you bought Police Academy? And yes, where is the cow, as my classmate said, who is being all supportive?”

“Bite me.” Elonie snapped.

The Preacher looked around. He said. “There’s so much that I do in a day. I can’t even remember if I ate breakfast. And I am in no way putting any pressure on Weston and Boone. That is not what we are at su...”

He paused. “Everyone Welcome Baptist Church.”

“How many racers do you own, Preacher?” Cassie said.

“Four of ‘em.” He said. “Their winnings pay for everything in the churches donation bin. Let’s end this real quick. How about you take a ride over to my property and check out my barns? That’s not something I usually stand for, but in this instant, it might be the best. And you can take Police Academy and Schumacher Batman to the race. Since you’re gonna be filling in permanently for Weston.”

“You own Schumacher Batman as well? My Mom’s racer?” Elonie said.

The preacher’s face grew pale. He shut the lid of the

paint can with a snap. “I don’t think I reckon be talking about that. You should ask your Mom.”

“Who owns that cow, preacher?” Leonie growled.

Cassie tapped on Leonie’s nose. “Down girl. That isn’t relevant. We should check out the barn, make sure our cow isn’t there.”

Leonie rolled her eyes, but nodded her head. Cassie stared in stunned amazement.

“Well. That’s a knuckleball. Stop acing weird.” Cassie scoffed.

“I got two of them you can ride back to the place.” The preacher said. “And if you’re hungry, look in the church fridge. Mrs. Stevenson brought some red herring casserole for anyone who wants it. See you girls tonight. Win me some money tonight won’t ya?”

“There are two riders here? Where?” Leonie asked.

“In the Baptistry.” The preacher said, taking a step towards the church’s large wooden doors. “There’s a way in on the other side of the bell tower. That’s where I keep them if I have to keep one in town. Stay out of view of the main street and you should be fine. Most the town is in on the races anyways.”

“Why is this town so strange?” Cassie said.



4 pm. Branson's Barn.

“Mooberly isn't here either.” Leonie cursed. The two girls walked out of the barn, with six rows of cow pens behind them. She felt a trickle of rain from the skies above.

Cassie adjusted her book bag, which Leonie had noticed her looking to do every few minutes. She felt like asking about why, but she didn't want to question it. Not having to rely on yourself, didn't feel as bad as she thought it would. The two girls had learned a lot more than when Leonie was trying to do everything. And unexpectedly they seemed to have a lot more in common than the two ever expected.

They paused. She saw two boys on cows from on top of the ridge in front of the preacher's property. They paced on the edge that led to grassy rolling hills. Below was a clay valley, void of plant life.

“Look who's come for a visit,” Leonie said, pointing out the riders to Cassie, their cattle sniffing at tall grass.

Cassie joined her by the fence where the Preacher had dropped them off at only thirty minutes before. “Glad Weston is feeling better.” She said. “They ask you to race PA in place of Weston, why are they here looking for trouble?”

“To get us out of town.” Leonie said. “Away from others so they can beat me out of the race.”

Weston and Boone on Cow-back charged towards the barn.

Leonie pulled Cassie to the nearest cows. “Get to the secret cow track.”

Cassie seemed confused as Leonie grabbed a saddle and threw it over the closest racer.

“Go!” Leonie said.

“I... don’t know how to ride...” Cassie mumbled.

Leonie guided Cassie onto Police Acemedy and gave it a gentle slap on its massive hind legs.

“Too bad!” Leonie shouted.

Cassie and PA bolted out the doors and into the open field. As she saddled another cow, she saw Weston and Boon come ride up from a ditch. They followed after

Cassie, whistling and hollering.

Leonie screamed, “Giddup!”

But the cow did not move.

“Dang it, Schumacher Batman, get going!”

It mooed in disagreement, but trodded a few paces forward. With a swift tap of the reins, Schumacher Batman sped forward out of the barn towards where Cassie had fled the dude bros.

They drifted down the steep hill towards the valley, the cow leaping in mid-air when reaching the bottom of each hill. Boone drew his racer along side Cassies. He drove his creature into hers.

Racing down towards her as fast as Schumacher Batman would go, Leonie pulled up alongside Boone. She removed her backpack and threw it, striking Boone on the head. He fell off his racer face first into the clay. Cassie’s cow took her away from the chase. Weston cursed as he changed directions to head towards Leonie.

Weston’s racer rammed Schumacher Batman, letting out a fierce battle cry. Leonie drove her cow back into Weston, who removed something strapped to his back.

He's got a bat. She thought.

Weston from on his cow swung at her, missing. The cattle racers fought back and forth, like sumo wrestlers on a treadmill. He swung hard, but Leonie grabbed the bat with her hands. She tried to force it away from him.

A black and white backpack came flying out of nowhere, hitting Weston on the side. It sent his cow tipping over sideways, helpless. He cried out as the cow flipped around like a turtle on its shell.

Leonie turn. Cassie had come back and was smiling ontop Police Academy. She stopped smiling when she noticed her bag had come open.

Leonie picked up a VHS tape. Dated May 8th 8 o'clock to noon. At the same time that Cassie had ventured to the barn to take a second look without her.

"What is this?" Leonie said waving the tape. "You said you only found one VHS recording of the barn. Why do you have this?"

Cassie did not answer. She closed her eyes and hung her head. She tapped the side of the cow and headed in the direction of the tracks.

"I'm sorry." She said.

“Cassie! What did you do?” Leonie shouted across the rolling hills.

She did not answer back.



5:20 pm Outside the secret Cow track

The cotton candy had looked too good to pass up, even in the rain. Leonie looked out through the mists that had formed around the track. She took a bite.

At least I get free food here because of my mom. Leonie thought. *That's cool. I guess.*

She hoped that Cassie was not lost out there, and had found cover from the storm. Even if she felt mad about what she did.

I guess I wanted things to stay the same. She thought. *Maybe. I've liked being her friend. Maybe that's why this sucks so much. Do I even care about the summer job? I'm not sure. I'd rather her be okay than anything.*

She tossed the cotton candy roll into a nearby trash can. The rain fell harder.

A white pickup truck approached. Coach Blinkensberg sat behind the driver's seat. He rolled down the window as the vehicle came to a stop next to Leonie.

"You again. I'm starting to believe maybe you didn't steal my cow." He said. "I think I'm paranoid. I even thought a squirrel broke into my truck yesterday."

Leonie looked down and away. She grabbed Cassie's bag and threw it around her back. "You haven't seen Cassie anywhere, have you?" She asked.

The coach cut the engine. "Why aren't you asking me 50 questions? Like about the camera's I have in the barn at the school? Or you must have figured out that I sell cattle, right? Only legit."

"Yes." Leonie said. "I don't care about that right now. I haven't seen her and I'm worried she's out there lost."

The coach sighed. "Okay. Get it."

"Before I do," Leonie said, backing away slowly. "Tell me why. Why this cow? Why Mooberly?"

The man started the engine once again and turned on the radio. They could hear Boone giving updates about the betting odds for the night's race.

“That cow is the smartest cow anyone has ever seen. She could be unstoppable. I thought you took her because of your mom. And everything, But it looks like you had no idea about that.”

Leonie climbed into the truck and closed the door. “I don’t think you stole your cow. You have no reason to. I think I know who did it. But I’m afraid.”

The coach drove off-road and turned on his brights. They drove over the land, searching for Cassie and the lost racer.



7:45 pm Outskirts of town

They found Cassie and her cow through the heavy rain only because of her light-up sneakers that everyone in town owned. The girls did not speak to one another on the trip back to the secret cow track. Even though Leonie wanted to know what she was hiding, she could not find it within her to ask.

Coach and some cattle handlers gathered around the

racer in the truck bed. They led her to her pen. The race track was nearly flooded. Several canopy tents were being set up along the edges to shield spectators from the weather.

“Did you watch the tape?” Cassie unbuckled her belt.

“I didn’t need to.” Leonie looked at her own knuckles. “I should have seen it. You. We’re working with my mom to kidnap Mooberly.”

Cassie shook her head, sending water from her hair dripping to the floorboard. She shivered. “No. That’s not it.”

Leonie opened Cassie’s book bag and handed her the Yankees’ jersey. Cassie put it on.

“My mom got weird when you were around.” Leonie said. “The amount of air freshener in our truck was a clue. How did you even know each other?”

“Because I was supposed to go to the World Series in October,” Cassie said, buttoning up the pinstripe jersey. “Yankees vs Braves. We had three tickets to game 6. Then our water heater went out. We had to sell them. Your mom knew some people. She sold them for our family. I watched that game on TV. I missed the best

game ever played. I cried for an entire night and was depressed all week. But it hit me. Everyone around me has lost so much. Their farms. In some cases. Their Families.”

Cassie covered her eyes with her hands. She continued. “How dare I get so sad over something that means so little. I felt that I had lost touch. With everything. And I feel that way even more now. That’s why I needed to connect with the summer fire lookout job. I went to your mom. To help me get. This. Job. She said yes. But that’s not why I don’t want you to watch the tape.”

“What do you know?” Leonie asked. “What did you and my mom talk about when you saw her at the barn? Before you took the tape.”

Cassie got out of the vehicle. Leonie followed her out the same door, carrying her book bag.

“I said something. About you.” Cassie said as they ducked into a canopy.

“Where is Mooberly?” Leonie asked.

“That’s the thing, I don’t know. I asked, but she didn’t answer. I was only supposed to stall you. I am so sorry. I was wrong. I thought we were going to find the cow, so I

wanted to ask the questions, so I didn't have to tell you. I never wanted the cow to be hurt, and I'm worried."

"I should have figured." Leonie took off towards the racer pens.

"Where are you going?" Cassie shouted at her.

"To confront my mom!"

But she stopped. She turned back to Cassie, who had stepped forward after her.

"I'm glad you're okay." Leonie said. "Stay dry."

"Why aren't you mad?" Cassie repeated. "I was working with your mom behind your back!"

"Be. Because. I don't know, I trust you," Leonie said.

"What does that mean?" She yelled back.

Episode Five

Don't have a cow

8 oclock pm. Secret Cow Track

A cow handlers let all the riders know that the rain race would begin soon. Leonie chased after her mom, who approached her racer. Mrs. Gilbert gave the large cow a gentle pat, and pressed her head against it's white fur.

"Mom, stop denying it." Leonie pointed. "You talked Cassie into getting into a fight with me so that you could steal the cow. She admitted it!"

"Baby girl," Mrs. Gilbert said . "I am telling you the truth. Yes, I sold three tickets for Cassie. I have not seen her since then. We can't talk about this now, the race is about to start."

"Where is Mooberly. I want her back and safe." Leonie climbed onto her racer, who moo-ed a happy like hello.

Mrs. Gilbert climbed onto her mount and played with the cow's hair in the front of it's head. She said. "Cassie told you a little fib, I had nothing to do with this. I did run

into Cassie at the barn. But she didn't get in a fight with you because of me." Mrs. Gilbert said, climbing onto tired-looking Schumacher Batman.

"You can't talk your way out of this, Mom. She told me, and I believe her. She has nothing to lose. You?" Leonie climbed onto the saddle atop a nervous Police Academy. "You didn't want me gone for the summer. And you knew the only way you could stop me was by taking that cow."

Mrs. Gilbert began to slow clap, glaring at Leonie. This went on for several uncomfortable seconds. She took a bow from ontop of her racing cattle.

"You have no idea how proud I am to have a daughter who figured it all out. How smart. How courageous. How. Gullible. I did plot to take the cow. Asked Cassie for help, and I even drove to the school after driving out to the glass repair shop. Which is closed for the week, by the way, since Sedalia is out with the flu. Because I've seen the damage those hooves do, and I needed to know if I could cover the repair..."

"Wait!" Leonie said. "Sedalia is sick?"

"Yeah, the repair shop has been closed for days." Mrs. Gilbert said. "I got as far as the parking lot before I saw you, taking care of a cow. I know you're angry at us. I've

watched you take that out, verbally, on cows since. You put that aside and you worked for what you wanted. It's true. I don't want you gone for the entire summer. But you don't deserve to have that taken from you. So I didn't steal your Mooberly. I left my truck in the parking lot and walked to the diner. When I got back, the cow was gone. It could have been me. But it wasn't. You're welcome."

"Why did Cassie take the tape of when she meet with you at the school barn?"

"Because she Cassie admitted to me that she was the reason you both failed the group project. That's why she joined you in the barn before someone took the cow. To help you."

"She was not helping." Leonie said.

Boone cried over the PA. "GO!"

The Gates opened, and all six racers slid out onto the track like six kids running on a slip and slide. The cows bounced off each other, struggling to keep their racer headed towards the finish line. The people cheered. Police Academy pulled up along Schumacher Batman. Kicking up water and clay all over the cheering spectators.

The Gilbert mother and daughter headed in a dead heat towards the finish line.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Leonie shouted across the noise of hooves splashing in the water. “About how you didn’t want me to leave this summer.”

“Can’t talk now babygirl, I’m busy taking first place!”

Schumacher Batman, with a burst of speed, bolted over the finish line.

Bright flood lights filled the east side of the tracks. On top of a hill sat a black four-door sedan with two men standing outside the driver’s side door. From a handheld receiver, he spoke.

“This is the State Gaming Commission. Everyone stop where you are. We need the names and amounts of every bet taken here today. We are coming to hand you your fines.”

The crowd panicked. People frantically broke down their stands and awnings and rushed to their cars.

“Don’t let them catch you on that cow. Get out of here.” Leonie’s mom said.

“Find Cassie. Keep her safe.” Leonie shouted back.

They nodded at each other. Leonie dismounted her racer. Two suited men in clear plastic raincoats approached the track. The girl ran into flooded fields in the direction of Fayette's house.

She knew she had to go when her mom said that Sedalia was out sick with the flu. She is the only glass repair person in the area.



8:15 Fayette's back door.

Fayette motioned the girl inside the old farmhouse. It had seen better days, with rain dripping in from the cracks in the windows. Fayette had placed buckets all throughout the house to catch the leaks.

The girl followed her into the kitchen, panting from all the running. Her drenched clothes pooled puddles of rain water on the tile floor.

"I heard the races got raided on the Weston and Boone show." Fayette opened a drawer with a WWF wrestling poster above it. She handed Leonie a faded yellow towel and pushed aside an ashtray of burnt carrots.

She patted her face and hair. She said. "I forgot your brother Shell was one of the wrestlers on coaches waiting list."

"Don't remind me," Fayette said, popping open a bottle of cold diet Dr. Pepper. "I'm sure glad he couldn't raise money for a wrestling mat. As soon as I get Shell out of this town, he'll lose interest in wrestling. I don't think his body can handle that kind of thing. He doesn't agree with me. We can hang out in the other room until things calm down. Then I'll drive you home."

"Oh that sucks," Leonie said, following her into the living room.

There, to the left of the front door was a giant glass window looking over a field. It's glass still in tact.

"You got 2nd place again. That's not bad for your first two races." Fayette said.

Leonie could not take her eyes off the glass of the window. Stained a light purple from all the years of use. She spotted some dust on the still below. Looking completely untouched.

"Yeah. It's fun. I'm good at it." Leonie said.

"Branson has to be happy; that's better than what

Weston was doing. Since you have to stick around for a few years, you might do okay for yourself. If that is what you want.”

“You live a far way from town.” Leonie placed the wet towel on the table. “It has to blow filling up your tank with gas all the time uh?”

“I spend a third of my paycheck in gas. Yeah it blows. Have to fill the tank about every other day.” She said.

“You drive the same white truck as everyone. I’m sure you filled up at the station and didn’t tell us when Cassie and I asked you. You lied about Weston and Boone breaking your front window. Since I am looking out of it right now. Please tell me that this is a mistake. And my mom wasn’t telling me the 100 percent truth.”

A loud noise came from the garage. A sound that excited her, but that feeling turned to fear. Fayette stepped between Leonie and the back door.

“Um.” Leonie said. “I hear a cow in your garage.”

“It’s not what you think,” Fayette said. “Go look for yourself.”

Leonie walked down the long hallway and into the garage. There inside she found Mooberly. Fatter than she

had been, eating out of a bed of hay.

The garage door slammed. Leonie heard Fayette drag the kitchen table towards the door. She ran, first hitting the garage opener. A cut wire fell from the device.

The knob would not turn, and she could feel Fayette holding on the other side. Leonie fought to push her way out.

With a thud, the knob was free to turn. But the door was barred from the other side.

“I’m selling that cow and getting me and my brother out of here. Why couldn’t you have stayed away!” Fayette yelled from the other side.

She tried to ram the barricade, but it was no use. The girl was trapped with Mooberly.

“What are you going to do to me?” Leonie shouted, frightening Mooberly. Who gave an angry moo.

“This is all your fault Moobery, if you would stop getting into strangers trucks!” Leonie said.

She shouted to the inside of the house. “Let me out! I can help you get out of here. If that is what you want. But I think you’re missing something. There is a

community here. And everyone is beaten up, and petty, and doing some shady things after dark, but we do care about each other. Even if we don't always know how to talk to each other. We can learn."

"I'm not going to hurt you," Fayette said.

"Maybe you could avoid the kidnapping charges at least? And let me in the house?" Leonie said.

The door opened. Fayette moved the table away so she could enter.

"I'm sorry. I'm a terrible person." Fayette said, motioning her inside.

Something crashed into the garage, causing the cow to run into the house. The panel garage door split into pieces from the impact of the white truck. Still smelling strong of air freshener. The headlights switched off from the damage. Mrs. Gilbert leapt out of the driver's side.

"I should have known it was you Fayette, let my daughter..."

"Mom, cool it. She's letting me out. How did you know?"

Mrs. Gilbert took hold of her daughter in her arms.

"I went looking for you. And I saw the front window

intact. Glass repair guy has the flu. Knew you needed help.” Mrs. Gilbert said.

“You told me to stay away. That’s because you were looking for the cow. That. You didn’t steal. Cause I guess you do care about me.”

“Bingo.” Mrs. Gilbert said, hugging her tighter.



Tuesday. May 9th. 1996. 8:30 AM Gilbert House

“Special thanks to everyone for sticking with us at the races last night.”

Leonie and her mother gathered around a radio in the living room. Birds sang outside, and the sunlight trickled in through the windows.

“Welcome back to the Weston and Boone show.” Boone said over the airwaves. “In new Racer news, the famed smartest cattle ever Mooberly has been found. She was found and returned. She was then purchased shortly thereafter by...”

Mrs. Gilbert clicked off the radio.

“Hey,” Leonie said, reaching for the knob. “I want to know.”

“Why would you care? I thought you hated that cow?” Mrs. Gilbert said.

Leonie stood up. “I searched for Mooberly all over town. Everyone Welcome. Okay, I don’t like the new town name but it’s better than the last one.”

Mrs. Gilbert picked up the radio and carried it with her into the next room. Leonie followed.

“What are you hiding now?” She asked.

“My rent went up.” Mrs. Gilbert said. “I’m renting two stalls at Branson’s place. You can’t keep Mooberly in the garage. You can start racing and paying back the cost after you get back from your summer job. If that’s what you want.”

Leonie covered her mouth with her hands. “You mean. Mooberly is mine? Thank you! But. I’m not going to take the job this summer. I’m going to give it to Cassie.”

Mrs. Gilbert felt her forehead. “Do you have a fever? She betrayed you remember?”

“Ugh, no,” Leonie said, backing away. She cleared

the table of dishes and placed them in the sink. “I found the cow I was looking for.”



1 pm. Golpher Canyon State Park

Birds chirped nearby Leonie and Cassie, who sat resting on a fallen tree. The ranger station was not far away, but the packs they carried were heavy. With all the needed supplies to last them a month and a half it had taken longer than they expected to arrive. Still, Leonie enjoyed the abundance of trees and plants around them before Cassie had to check in. Leonie was stunned at the number of leaves they could see at one time, all moving with the wind.

“Are you sure?” Leonie asked.

Cassie gave a not-so-confident nod.

They finished their sandwiches while talking about anything and everything. From what they wanted to take in next year’s classes, to whether Leonie really wanted to continue cow racing. She had lost twice in a row. Maybe but Cassie would do better.

“You think this is going to work?” Leonie asked again.

Cassie shrugged. “I wronged you. So I’m going to do whatever it takes to make it right.”

The two girls saw a woman in forest service green approach them from the top of a steep hill. She adjusted her hat to keep her light brown hair out of her eyes. The woman stared at them, and Leonie felt she was about to be integrated.

“Are. You, Cassie?” The Ranger adjusted her hat.

Cassie nodded.

“Why. Are there two of you?” The Ranger said. “There’s only one job...”

“Leonie is my emotional support human. I need her. For. Support...”

The woman frowned and placed her hands on her hips. She looked up to the sky for a moment before answering.

“Fine. Whatever. Both of you need to double up on everything then, okay?”

“Yes, we can do that,” Leonie said. Smiling.

That evening, the two settled in the fire lookout tower.

They familiarised themselves with the map and compass in the centre of the room. The girls were exhausted from all the walking and dragging their packs up so many flights of stairs. But from there, from all sides, they could look out and watch the sun set. As the heat gave way to the cool of the night, a mist formed around the forest. Lit by moonlight. After checking in on the radio to the ranger station, they turned on the portable cassette player. There, away from any judgment, they sang their hearts out.

THE END



This series was so much fun to write. Thank you all for listening, I hope you've enjoyed our time together. I love the cover art Moryssa Block came up with. Especially the goofy looking cow. You should check her out on Instagram and her other art work.

I'd also like to thank the awesome Shayleigh, who helps this show so much with feedback and creative consults.

Who puts up with all my mooberly jokes.

Check out lookingforcows.com for future audiobooks.

Until next time, good luck looking for cows out there.