



Jockey on a Dead Horse

(Aintree Racecourse, 1950s)

Aintree — a suburb of Liverpool, England. The 1950s.

Sasha, a miniature jockey who looked like a child, was resting in a guest house before the race, near the barn with elite racehorses, when the guard started banging and shouting:

— Sasha, run quick! Your Dead Horse was poisoned!

She jumped off the bed with her heart pounding wildly and ran toward the barn in her pajamas, pushing the guard aside.

— I called the manager, he's on his way, — the guard shouted after her, but Sasha wasn't listening.

This horse had been with her too long for it all to end like this.

Crying, she burst into the barn.

The horses were trembling and snorting, their ears moving like radars to every sound, and Sasha understood by their reaction: they were terrified.

She entered the stall and saw her favorite — already stiff, foam at the mouth speaking of horrific pain before death.

She cried quietly, looking at the corpse; her tears flowing like two mountain rivers.

— The barn door was locked, Sasha, — said the guard who came up. — Not even a fly could've gotten past me...

— Leave us alone and shut the door, — said the manager, quietly stepping in — in a gray tweed jacket, hat, and with a briefcase.

He stared at the horse in silence.

— He's like a racetrack mage, — Sasha thought through her sobs. He was quiet, more than restrained, always calm, speaking softly.

She felt his intuition worked flawlessly, as if he could read space itself and knew which foot she woke up on.

— Aintree, — he said. — Did you ever wonder, Sasha, why this place is called Aintree? Why the racetrack was built here? You don't know...

A long time ago, on the spot of this racetrack, I planted a tree — a horse chestnut — on the grave of my beloved horse.

She was everything to me... Yes, Sasha, a friend and ally, and I was ready to do anything to bring her back.

And I found it... or it found me.

That night, I had a dream — a voice told me what to do.

I'll skip the details, Sasha, but after resurrecting the horse, years later, I couldn't keep the tree.

It gave her life, and now I have to extend it by other means — the ones you're about to see.

The manager paused. Sasha waited.

— I need your consent. And silence after what you'll see. It may be beyond your understanding.

— Well, do you agree?

Sasha nodded uncertainly. The manager looked at her long, and she felt darkness swirling in his eyes.

Then he pulled out a medical kit from the briefcase and said:

— I need to draw a full glass of your blood.

Sasha, hypnotized by her own consent, silently extended her arm.

The manager drew her blood into a strange metal container, then poured it into the horse's open mouth.

— Now let's go, — he said.

— By tomorrow morning, everything will be fine.

— Sleep well, Sasha, — he said goodbye.



At dawn, Sasha couldn't remember right away what happened the night before.

What was that? What the hell?

But the morning was so clear and sunny that the darkness of the ritual, death, and the manager's promise all felt like a dream.

Yet the prick on her arm still ached.

She took out the envelope with amphetamine and dosed herself.

Sasha had used it for a long time — she tended to gain weight and kept her shape in this not-so-healthy way.

Trembling with adrenaline, she held her breath and walked into the barn.

She approached the stall slowly.

The horse was alive and well. It snorted softly in greeting, stretched out its neck, and the warm, soft lips touched Sasha's hand.

The anxiety faded, along with any doubt. She accepted it all and understood: it was real.

Later, together with the stablehand, they prepared the horse for the race. Everything was ready.

Dead Horse broke ahead at the starting line to wild whistles and roars of the crowd.

She clearly wasn't the favorite, and no one expected such energy from this mare.

Sasha merged with her breathing and the rhythmic pounding of her hooves, ignoring everything else.

The horse raced as if she was the one who took the amphetamine — not Sasha — and kept leading the race like a mythical Pegasus, not a resurrected Dead Horse.

On the second lap, as if catching a signal from a warped dimension, Sasha began to weaken rapidly, feeling worse the closer she got to the finish line.

As if all her life force was pouring out through the reins.

When Dead Horse crossed the finish line as the winner, Sasha fell from the saddle. Dead.

The End

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Vladislav