

# Horse Power: Tom Bass' American Story

By

Michelle Tyrene Johnson

# HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

Copyright © 2025 By Michelle Tyrene Johnson

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee.

## SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

“Horse Power: Tom Bass’ American Story” is dedicated to the heroes, visionaries, and brilliant Black men and women forgotten by time, yet leaving significant and influential impact.

The Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri, in 2025 in co-production with the American Royal from had its World Premiere on September 13, 2024.

The following is the production’s cast and crew.

TOM BASS.....L Roi Hawkins\*  
ANGIE BASS..... Paulette Dawn  
NATALIA “NATE” EDMONDS .....Amari Lewis\*  
SHERMAN HODAK..... Joseph Serrano  
RITA HUNTER..... Ann Zárate  
INMAN BASS..... Terrace Wyatt, Jr.  
CALEB MCCALL.....Erik Pratt

Director.....Teresa Leggard  
Production Stage Manager.....Mackenzie Goodwin  
Set Designer.....Theresa Kelly  
Costume Designer.....Georgianna Londre  
Lighting Designer.....Zoe Spangler  
Sound Designer.....Wren Royer  
Props Designer.....Lacey Pacheco  
Technical Director.....Derek Trautwein  
Assistant Stage Manager.....Ezra Martinez-Haskins

\*Indicates a Member of Actor's Equity.

# HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

## PLACE

Jolly Horse Stables  
Campsite in Iowa (past)  
Kitchen of Tom Bass (past)  
Chicago World Fair (past)

## TIME

Late 1800s/early 1900s  
Current time

PRODUCTION NOTE FROM PLAYWRIGHT: Rather than attempting to write in dialect, I will mostly write dialogue in proper English, but Tom has to sound country and uneducated but not slow or completely uneducated since he has interacted with higher class people through his horse business. He doesn't speak it as well as his school teacher wife Angie.

# HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

## A LIFE IN SILHOUETTE

*A seemingly empty stage. TOM BASS ("TOM") stands in silhouette as he speaks.*

**TOM.** Horses are the most beautiful creatures. If you treat them right, they never let you down. As a child, I felt more comfortable with horses than with most people. And I knew some of the best people - my mama, my grandpa and grandma, my beautiful wife Angie. I wish I had done better by my son Inman. *(a beat)* My work with training horses showed up in places I never could have guessed - Presidents came to see me, European royalty wanted to meet me. All that attention surprised me. I was just a boy born when my mama was considered property, owned by the plantation owner who some would consider my father. It was growing up on that plantation that the lights of my life were my mama, my grandparents, and the horses. And while I loved every horse I trained, even the ones that belonged to someone else, some had my heart like no other - Columbus. Miss Rex. Belle Beach. But I wasn't nobody special. I just had a way with the most special creatures on God's green earth. *(Lights shift and TOM walks directly into his kitchen.)*

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

### **THE HOME OF A QUEEN**

*The kitchen of Tom and Angie Bass. Tom sits at the kitchen table.*

*ANGIE BASS (“ANGIE”) stands nearby holding a coffee pot. She’s visibly pregnant. Angie pours Tom a cup of coffee.*

**TOM.** There may be women who make a better blackberry cobbler than you do, but I doubt it.

**ANGIE.** You always say that.

**TOM.** And it’s true every time I do.

**ANGIE.** I know when you’re trying to distract me, Tom Bass. It’s not working.

**TOM.** *(sighing and pushing back from the table)* So we’re back to this.

**ANGIE.** We never left it. We may live in tiny little Mexico, Missouri, but people know your name now.

**TOM.** Who would have thought that?

**ANGIE.** Presidents, royalty, all kinds of famous people visit here. You trained and rode the champion horse at the WORLD Fair. So, yes, husband, everyone knows your name.

**TOM.** I don’t care none about the world. You’re still upset with me, ain’t you?

**ANGIE.** Of course not. I just still don’t know how you turned down the Queen. THE Queen of England.

**TOM.** I didn’t turn her down.

**ANGIE.** But you didn’t say yes.

**TOM.** It’s not my horse.

**ANGIE.** But you’re the trainer. She wanted YOU to bring Miss Rex over for her jubilee to be in the Royal Horse Show. Doesn’t that sound grand!?

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**TOM.** Celebrating 60 years of ruling England and she wants an old colored man like me to come over.

**ANGIE.** You hush. She's having the biggest party in England and she wants only the best in attendance.

**TOM.** She wants Miss Rex there as the World Champion.

**ANGIE.** I love Miss Rex almost as much as you do, but that horse did not train herself. Queen Victoria invited you. Honey, it bothers me that you won't tell me why you didn't want to go. It can't just be because of the baby.

**TOM.** You mean you're upset that because I didn't go to England you didn't get to go.

**ANGIE.** That's just a little part of it. I did want to go.

**TOM.** I know you did. And you're the one who should be treated like a Queen.

**ANGIE.** That's sweet of you to say.

**TOM.** That doesn't make it any less true. People may say I'm the best horseman in the world, but I couldn't do any of it without you by my side. (a beat) But I didn't want you standing by my side when we saw a shark.

**ANGIE.** A shark? What are you talking about, Tom Bass?

**TOM.** When I was little, my uncle used to tell me stories. About sharks. Crawling around in that big ole ocean. Sharks, woman!

**ANGIE.** As long as I'm with you, I'm right where I want to be. Even if we're facing a shark. But after 15 years together, it's hard to believe it's gonna be three of us.

**TOM.** Another reason we didn't need to be on that boat. Our little boy--

**ANGIE.** Or girl.

**TOM.** Or girl. Will be here any day now.

**ANGIE.** Women have babies on the sea all the time. I would have been all right.

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**TOM.** I'm sorry I let you down.

**ANGIE.** This isn't just about me wanting to see England.

**TOM.** Then what else?

**ANGIE.** I want to know why you didn't go. The truth.

**TOM.** It's too late for us to get on the boat. It left days ago.

**ANGIE.** I know that.

**TOM.** Then why you keep asking about it?

**ANGIE.** It's not like you to keep something from me. And you won't tell me why you turned down something no white man was offered.

**TOM.** Some white men around here ain't happy about that. A few heard about the Queen's invitation and started acting funny. I overheard some of them talking.

**ANGIE.** What did they say?

**TOM.** (*imitating someone*) That colored boy just lucky with horses. Why everyone always acting like he's better with them than we are?

**ANGIE.** You are better. Everyone knows that. Who called you boy?

**TOM.** Paulie Felder.

**ANGIE.** Of course. Young enough to be your son, without the brains God gave a mule.

**TOM.** Don't insult mules like that, Angie.

**ANGIE.** When you first received the invitation, I started thinking about how strange it would be to cross the same waters they forced our people to cross to get here. My mama never wanted to talk about it.

**TOM.** Mine either.

**ANGIE.** But sometimes I think about it. About how scary it would have been. Is that why you didn't want to go?

**TOM.** No, no, it wasn't that.

**ANGIE.** Now I really must know.

**TOM.** I can't see myself trying to get somewhere where I can't see a tree or a road. So, I was a little scared.

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**ANGIE.** Tom Bass. You are the bravest man I know. You've tamed some of the wildest, most dangerous of horses. You should have known you could tell me that.

**TOM.** I was also a little nervous about taking Miss Rex on a boat. She wouldn't be able to run free like she's used to.

**ANGIE.** I should have known. It always gets back to the horses.

**TOM.** And it always will.

### **Everything Old Is New Again**

*In front of Miss Rex's stall at Jolly Stables. NATE tinkers with a portable Bluetooth placed on the ground near the stall. She changes it from playing Lee Englund's violin version of "If I Ever Fall" to Beyonce's "Love on Top". Nate happily bops as she feeds Miss Rex an apple or carrot. Nate wears a Beyonce concert T-shirt, riding pants, and riding boots.*

**NATE.** You are such a good girl. I'm still pinching myself that Mama and Daddy got you for me. Daddy says since you are my 14th birthday present, I can't ask for a car on my 16th birthday. But with you, why would I need a car? I could ride you down to the Plaza to go shopping with my friends. Tie you up in front of the Apple Store. You probably didn't get that joke but if you were human you'd find it a little funny. We had a great first ride today. I gotta feeling you're going to be as talented as your namesake, Miss Rex. But I have to tell you a little secret. You promise not to tell anyone? I'm a little nervous. I won lots of medals in the 9 to 13 divisions, but now I...I mean we, we are about to be in another division. In a whole new horse show. Unless we don't qualify. I mean what if I'm considered one of the worst riders as a 14-year-old? (*SHERMAN HODAK "SHERMAN" walks into the area. He*

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

*holds a rake and is dressed as a stable worker. He has a mid-level job at the stables to groom, clean, feed, and care for the horses.)*

**SHERMAN.** What are you doing back here?

**NATE.** Excuse me?

**SHERMAN.** You're not supposed to be back here.

**NATE.** Uhh. This is my horse.

**SHERMAN.** That's cute, little girl.

**NATE.** I'm not a little girl, I'm 14 years old and this is my horse. Right, Miss Rex? *(Miss Rex neighs.)* I was just riding - - -

**SHERMAN.** Look, you need to leave right now. The field trip kids aren't supposed to be back here alone.

**NATE.** Oh, you think I'm with that field trip. No this is my horse, Miss Rex, and this is her first day being boarded here. Didn't you see me out riding?

**SHERMAN.** Nice try. Seriously, move along. *(Nate doesn't move.)*  
Fine. Then prove to me that you have permission to be back here.

**NATE.** I won't do that.

**SHERMAN.** If you can't then - - -

**NATE.** I didn't say I can't. I said I won't. Other people are back here with their horses. Why are you only questioning me?

**SHERMAN.** If you don't get out of here right now I'm going to - - -

**NATE.** You're going to what?

**SHERMAN.** *(Takes his cell phone from his back pocket.)* I'm going to call my boss and she's going to call the police. *(Nate sighs.)*

**NATE.** Ok.

**SHERMAN.** Ok, you're going to leave? Good choice.

**NATE.** I meant, OK I'm going to wait while you call your boss. Please tell her you're talking with Natalia Edmunds about the horse Miss Rex who transferred here today. *(Sherman looks conflicted.)* Mrs. Lane's your boss, right? She's nice. Or you can wait for my mother. She'll be

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

here in the next half hour to pick me up. But I don't want you to get in trouble.

**SHERMAN.** Me get in trouble? That's a joke. Look, I'm checking in with the office. If you're not supposed to be here, you best be gone when I get back. And you don't want to miss that field trip bus going back either. *(Sherman exits. Nate goes back to talking to Miss Rex.)*

**NATE.** You know, Miss Rex, it seems like every place I go, I'm the odd one out. And now. . . it's even worse. New school - where hardly anyone looks like me. New neighborhood - far away from my friends. New stables with - *(Nate thumbs to the general area where Sherman exited).* It's making me really miss my uncle. He died a couple of years ago. Uncle Nate. He was the first one to put me on a pony and everyone says I took to it like a duck to water. I was already named after him, but lately, I don't know, it just seemed right to start going by his nickname. I still miss him. You would have liked him. He would have loved you. So, the only thing new in my life that feels right is you. You like me, girl, don't you? I fit in with you, don't I? *(Sherman enters. Visibly irritated.)*

**SHERMAN.** A horse is a mighty expensive present.

**NATE.** Do you do this to everyone new who boards a horse here?

**SHERMAN.** You're just a little young. And you don't look like a horse owner.

**NATE.** What does a horse owner look like? *(a beat)*

**SHERMAN.** You just don't look like one.

**NATE.** I'm sure Tom Bass didn't look like a horse owner either.

**SHERMAN.** I don't know who that is.

**NATE.** Not enough people do. I'm going to have a couple of minutes with Miss Rex before I have to leave. Nice meeting you, sir. *(Sherman starts to say something, changes his mind and exits. Seconds later RITA HUNTER "RITA" enters. She looks behind her as if glancing at a departing Sherman.)*

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**RITA.** Hey, Nate!

**NATE.** Miss Hunter, hey what are you doing here? Did I forget a lesson?

**RITA.** I've trained you since you were barely old enough to walk and you've never forgotten one. No, I was here giving a lesson to a new student and remembered this was the week that Miss Rex arrived. I had to meet her before we officially started training for qualifications. New horse show, new division for you, new horse. There's a lot to take in. But oh my! Isn't she a beauty! *(Rita crosses to Miss Rex and starts petting her.)* Hey there, girl. It's so nice to meet you. Your pictures don't do you justice. Nate, hey. I thought you'd be over the moon. What's wrong?

**NATE.** Nothing.

**RITA.** Is there a problem adjusting? You and Miss Rex just need to get used to one another.

**NATE.** It's not that. Miss Rex is perfect. It's like we've known each other forever. It's this man who works here. He didn't believe Miss Rex was my horse!

**RITA.** That man who just walked out? Maybe it was just a misunderstanding. Want me to say something to the manager? I've known her for years. Besides, you don't need distractions. We've got a horse show to get you two into.

**NATE.** No, no. Please don't say anything to anyone. It's probably nothing. I hope. *(Miss Rex neighs.)*

### **Know Your Place**

*A dark 1920s campsite in Iowa with a horse trailer upstage. Tom sits at a campfire by himself, sadly cooking his dinner in a pot. The black horse Belle Beach neighs.*

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**TOM.** I know, girl. Probably should have left you behind with the other horses. But you're good company. Especially when a man ain't in the best of moods. But being out here alone (*Belle Beach gives a neigh of protest*), sorry, girl, being out here with you, under the stars and a sliver of that moon, does make a fellow feel a mite better. (*Belle Beach gives a sound of comfort.*) That ain't true. I don't feel better. But talking to you, all I have to do is just be. I don't feel as if I have to be strong like I do for Angie. Or look tough to all the white men. I bring you horses from Mexico, Missouri all the way to this dang Iowa State Fair. But because one white man said he didn't feel comfortable sharing a horse ring with a colored man, that's all it took to keep me from showing you and the other horses. It ain't right. It ain't right at all. (*Tom showing his rare flash of anger.*) People keep saying I'm the best horseman in the country, some say in the world. But me being a colored man is all some of these folks see. Jack says I should fight it. Make them let me show y'all. But that's easy for him to say. He's white. If he stands up to another white man, they'll listen to him. Me, I'll just get myself arrested or lynched. (*Belle Beach gives a sympathetic neigh.*) I'm supposed to take care of you and the other horses. But lots of time, you the ones taking care of us, taking care of me. Jack told me he and the other Missouri men had the idea of showing my horses for me and then passing over the prize money and ribbons. But that ain't my way. You, me, and the other horses came out together. I dance with the one who brung me. Now Jack wanted to do it. He really did. And I know Angie's gonna be mad when I get home that I didn't let 'em do it cuz she always says I don't get paid enough for all the work I do. But a man has pride. I know you horses have pride too, but not man pride. Not the pride of hating to be defeated. Horses have the pride of showing the world who you are. Your beauty. Your strength. Your speed. Your smarts. Y'all are the best and most majestic creatures on Earth and there ain't nothing

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

wrong with pride in having the world see that. But as a man, I ain't ashamed to say that I'd rather sleep here on the hard ground under the stars tonight than pay money to walk through the back door of a hotel. In a town where they ain't letting me show my horses. Nah. I'm not giving them that satisfaction. If it wasn't so late, I'd take us all home right now. But me, you, and 15 other horses don't need to be trying to get home in the dark. Morning will be here before you know it. *(Tom Bass sings "Motherless Child" which is in the public domain. Actor and director can decide how much of the song he wants to sing. Belle Beach neighs. An owl hoots. The fire continues to crackle.)*

### **A Doubting Thomas Named Sherman**

*The area in front of Miss Rex's stall at Jolly Stables. Sherman stands outside Miss Rex's stall attempting to examine her. Miss Rex ain't having it. Nate enters in riding gear and another Beyonce t-shirt.*

**NATE.** What are you doing to Miss Rex?

**SHERMAN.** Nothing. *(Nate walks over to Miss Rex. The horse is relieved and happy to see Nate.)* You just looked like you were riding her a little hard out there, Miss Edmonds. Looking to make sure she was doing alright.

**NATE.** I wasn't riding her hard! We had a great time. Didn't we, girl? *(Miss Rex neighs.)* And we're in training for a horse show.

**SHERMAN.** That's nice. But I've been around horses since before you were born.

**NATE.** And I've been riding horses practically since I was old enough to walk. I don't remember a time when I wasn't riding horses or taking classes. And now I have my own horse. Isn't she a beauty?

**SHERMAN.** That's a nice story, but I have to get back to work.

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**NATE.** You were taking time to look at my horse. I'm sure you have another couple of minutes.

**SHERMAN.** I really don't.

**NATE.** (*ignoring that Sherman has turned to walk out but turns back around*) My parents put me in horse riding classes at another stable. The days always seemed so long until I could get to my Saturday lessons. And then they let me have Wednesday lessons. And in the summer even more. And I got to be in a lot of horse shows. Won a few of my divisions. I think my first Blue Ribbon was in English Versatility.

**SHERMAN.** That's just fascinating. And good for you that your parents have that kind of money. Not everyone does.

**NATE.** I don't think of them as having "that kind of money." I just see them both as working very hard. That's why they want me to appreciate what important Black figures had to go through, during even harder times, including in the horse world.

**SHERMAN.** Why just Black people? Isn't that kind of racist?

**NATE.** As Daddy says, Black people need to learn about the accomplishments of African Americans all year long, and not just during the shortest month of the year.

**SHERMAN.** I've never understood why Black History Month is necessary anyway. Look, I need to get back to work.

**NATE.** I'm just saying that I know how to treat horses with the respect they deserve. Just like Tom Bass did.

**SHERMAN.** You keep bringing him up and I still don't know who he is.

**NATE.** You should Google him. He's the greatest horseman ever.

**SHERMAN.** The greatest Black one, I assume.

**NATE.** No, the greatest. Period. (*Sherman exits. Nate talks to Miss Rex.*) Daddy told me that when someone is treating me unfairly, I should never explain myself. Just stand tall and know that I have the right to be

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

wherever I am standing. But Mama says I should make people feel comfortable so they don't assume the worst of me. She says she knows it's not fair but that she would rather me get home safely at the end of the day than not get home at all from trying to prove that I was right. I've been trying to be nice to that Mr. Hodak. But I'm beginning to think it's Daddy's advice I should be following this time. Don't explain. Stand tall. Besides, we'll show him when we qualify and then win our first Blue Ribbon together! Won't we, girl?

### **Saying Goodbye To Columbus**

*A stable at Tom and Angie Bass's home. Tom is alone sitting on a stool. He is polishing a horse bit and talking to Belle Beach. INMAN BASS "INMAN" enters.*

**TOM.** I hope you know I would never let anything like that happen to you. *(Belle Beach neighs. Tom sits down. Inman enters.)*

**INMAN.** Hey Daddy. Mama sent me down here to look for ya. *(Tom keeps polishing the bit.)* Daddy, you hear me?

**TOM.** Hey, son. I'm sorry. Yeah, I did. You go back and tell your mama I'll be up there in a few.

**INMAN.** She's cooking all your favorites. And she seems sad too. What's wrong?

**TOM.** You are a smart little boy.

**INMAN.** I'm not little. I'm almost 14 years old!

**TOM.** You're right, son.

**INMAN.** So what's wrong? Did somebody pass away?

**TOM.** My Columbus passed away. Got word yesterday.

**INMAN.** It was in that Wild West Show, wasn't it?

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**TOM.** I thought he was. (*Tom spits the name in the next sentence out sarcastically*) The great Buffalo Bill Cody was supposed to take care of Columbus. But he loaned him to a circus!

**INMAN.** What happened?

**TOM.** There was a fire.

**INMAN.** Oh.

**TOM.** That's all you got to say?

**INMAN.** Daddy, it was a horse. (*Belle Beach gives a disapproving neigh. And Tom looks up sharply. Inman quickly speaks again.*) It's sad. Real sad.

**TOM.** You don't sound like it.

**INMAN.** (*getting a little petulant*) Daddy, what you want me to sound like? I feel bad your horse is dead but it ain't like the horse is a person.

**TOM.** I don't know how I have a son who - - -

**INMAN.** Who what? Who don't spend every waking minute thinking of horses like you do? (*Inman turns to exit.*)

**TOM.** Inman! (he says harshly but then he softens). Son. Don't go. Come sit down next to me. (*Inman reluctantly sits down to the ground. A little far away.*) Son, get over here. I want to show you something. You know there are a lot of people who don't think much of horses.

**INMAN.** I don't dislike - - -!

**TOM.** I'm not talking about you, son. I mean some people really don't like horses. Folks who are downright cruel to them. But horses are living creatures too under the eyes of God.

**INMAN.** I know, Daddy.

**TOM.** Listen to me, son. Anything breathing deserves to not get beat. Not to be harmed just because they exist. Not horses, not even a dog.

**INMAN.** And not men.

**TOM.** Not a man, not a woman either. And I can't do much about that. But I can make it a little easier on the horses with this bit I invented.

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

**INMAN.** We're going to be rich!

**TOM.** No, we're not. I didn't invent this to make money. It's my gift to the horses. I'm going to let anyone who wants to use it to train. *(Inman jumps up.)*

**INMAN.** The horses! The horses! That's all you care about!

**TOM.** Sit back down. *(Inman wavers, sits back down reluctantly. Keeps his head down.)* You are my son. My flesh. My blood. I don't just care about horses. *(Inman keeps his head down.)* Inman Bass, look at me.

You and your mama are the most important things in the world to me

**INMAN.** *(Inman looks up, fire and hurt in his young eyes.)* But we ain't things, Daddy! We're people. You can't treat us like things and treat the horses like they're the people.

**TOM.** From your eyes, I guess that's what it look like. But it ain't true. When you were born, you couldn't do nothing for yourself. Except poop. You knew how to do that all by yourself. *(Inman can't help but smile at this, little kids in the audience probably will too.)* But you couldn't feed yourself. You couldn't walk across the room by yourself. If you fell down, it was our job to pick you up, make sure you weren't hurt none. If one of us fell down when you were a baby, you wouldn't be able to help us up. With horses, I can train them for shows, teach them how to entertain an audience, but I have to take care of them like we had to take care of you when you were a baby. They can eat, but they can't get good food themselves. They're beautiful, but we can wash them and brush their hair 'til they're even more beautiful.

**INMAN.** You saying you don't have to look out for me no more?

**TOM.** No. We gonna always look out for you. You hear me? Always. Because your mama and I love you. Now I want you to look at this bit. *(Inman looks at the bit that Tom shows him.)* Some men beat horses like they beat men who look like you and me. They take whips and treat the horses something awful to get them to behave. Just like they did when

## HORSE POWER: TOM BASS' AMERICAN STORY

they thought they could own us. Just like they still do sometimes. But I made this bit so that I can be gentle with my horses. I don't have to beat them or treat them bad. I talk to 'em. Sometimes I whisper to 'em. And I use this gentle bit to guide them.

**INMAN.** I haven't seen many other men use that like you do.

**TOM.** One day, I hope they will. That's why I've been passing them out. But I don't care what other men do. I'm gonna treat them like God's creatures. And son?

**INMAN.** Yeah, daddy?

**TOM.** You God's creature too. And you're my boy. So I'm gonna love you and look after you until you can take care of yourself and live a happy and long life. That's all I want for you, son.

**INMAN.** Even if I don't like hanging around horses?

**TOM.** Even then. But I still don't know why you'd rather ride one of them bicycle things when you can ride the power of a horse. *(Tom stands up.)* You gonna help me take Belle out for a walk? *(Inman nods and holds his hand out for Tom to get up from the ground.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS--  
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***