# *MIDNIGHT*

By Jeremy Mason

# *CAST OF CHARACTERS*

## Jim

A man of forty-five looking back at his youth. Sixteen-year-old ranch hand on the Cottonwood Ranch.

## Abigail

Henry's fifteen year old daughter.

## Henry

Owner and operator of the Cottonwood, a down on its luck ranch. In his forties.

## Donna

Henry's wife.

## William

Henry's twelve year old son.

## Memory Players

Various rodeo riders, patrons, a Lieutenant and other characters who create Jim's recollection of things. Mostly done through shadows.

## Midnight

The Legendary coal black offspring of a thoroughbred mother and a Morgan-Percheron sire. Portrayed by shadows and a rustic fence.

*(In the darkness we hear the sounds of the rodeo, the gate opening, galloping, cheering and all the magic of that western world. As the sounds float through the theatre we see the shadows of a horse bucking. At the climax of the sounds, the horse settles and grazes. We hear MIDNIGHT's THEME and the shadows fade away. The lights rise on the stable of the Cottonwood Ranch it is 1945. The MAN and JIM enter.)*

MAN: As you can see the stable is still in good shape, only a little repair here and there. And of course plenty of land, perfect for raising up livestock. Oh and let's not forget, the house is in pristine condition. *(Pause.)* Any questions?

JIM: Price seems a bit high.

MAN: Well you have to take into account the historical nature of the land.

JIM: I know about the history.

MAN: You do?

JIM: Yes. I used to work here…in my younger days.

MAN: Oh…you didn't say anything in your letter.

JIM: Didn't really need to, eh?

MAN: Suppose not.

JIM: *(He starts to look around the stable.)* See up there. Those rafters are rotted and you can't tell me those aren't going to start leaking like a siv at the next down pour. Also outside, those fence posts'll have to be replaced and in addition to the "little repair here and there" I'll also have to worry about the well, you and I both know that it's been compromised.

MAN: I see. We can look at lowering the price a bit to accommodate those things.

JIM: Thank-you.

MAN: Maybe we should go inside and discuss.

JIM: Sure thing. *(He notices a saddle; it is embroidered with Midnight's name. He goes towards it.)*

MAN: Is everything all right sir?

JIM: *(Pause.)* Sorry?

MAN: Are you—

JIM: Oh, yes. Sorry.

MAN: Did you know of the horse?

JIM: Yeah.

MAN: Somewhat of a legend around these parts now. But I suppose you don't hear about those kinds of legends up in Edmonton?

JIM: No.

MAN: Yes. After Henry—the previous owner—passed no one really remembers all the exact details. Lots of different versions.

*(Pause.)*

Well, should we go and discuss the price?

JIM: Yes. I suppose.

MAN: What you'll really enjoy about the house is that panoramic view. You can almost touch the Rockies from the kitchen window. It's something like a—

*(JIM just stands.)*

I'm sorry sir, but—

JIM: The current owner...is she around?

MAN: No, she's gone to Calgary for the day.

JIM: Hm...

MAN: Is there something I can answer for you.

JIM: No. No that's fine.

MAN: Shall, we go in and work on a price?

JIM: The price doesn't really matter to me. I can afford it.

MAN: Oh. Well then—

JIM: But, I'm not gonna take it.

MAN: I'm sorry? Is there—

JIM: Unless, you'll do something for me.

MAN: Anything,.

JIM: I need you to listen.

MAN: I'm sorry I don't follow.

JIM: There's a great many different takes on the Legend of Midnight, you said it yourself. This one is my favourite. If you'll just spend this time with me, and listen, I'll take it.

MAN: A story?

JIM: A legend.

It was the summer of 1915. The prairie air was, as always, hot and dry. But that's the way most of us liked it. The days were long and the work was as hard and gruelling as any ranch this side of Saskatchewan. The war was in full swing, and men of all ages were joining the war effort faster than a warm Chinook can melt the snow. But me…I was stuck on the ranch.

*(The lights shift. MAN transforms into HENRY and JIM becomes a young version of himself.)*

HENRY: Jim? Jim?! You ready.

JIM: Yeah.

HENRY: Good. I want you to get started on replacing those beams in the rafters there.

JIM: Sure thing, sir.

*(DONNA enters. HENRY gets lost in his work.)*

DONNA: Hello Jim.

JIM: Hello.

DONNA: Henry?

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: You'll have to go into Macleod later.

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: I need just a few things, but mainly some cloth for the curtains—

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: But something nice. The burlap you brought back last time wasn't what I had in mind.

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: Are you even—

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: Hm. And I would like some gold.

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: And for you to clean the house.

HENRY: Yes, dear.

DONNA: And some rocks…big rocks.

HENRY: Yes, dear. Now is that all.

DONNA: That is all. *(To JIM.)* And how are you today.

JIM: Very good thank-you.

DONNA: Abigail was looking for you.

JIM/HENRY: She was?

DONNA: Said she needed to talk to you.

JIM/HENRY: About what?

JIM: Uh, I'll go find out.

HENRY: After you start your work.

JIM: Right.

DONNA: Now don't let him forget those things.

HENRY: I heard that. Now please leave, you're disrupting our work.

DONNA: "Disrupting." We'll see if you get dessert tonight.

*(DONNA exits.)*

HENRY: Oh, don't be that way. You know I love your desserts. *(To JIM.)* She really does make the best. *(Starts to follow her off. Back to JIM.)* Oh, and if you see William tell him to come see me. I want him helping you with the rafters. We gotta start putting some work into that boy, eh? You show him how it's done okay.

JIM: Yes, sir.

HENRY: And Jim, one last thing.

JIM: Yes, sir?

HENRY: Would you please call me Henry.

JIM: Yes, sir—er, Henry…sir.

HENRY: Now get on it.

*(HENRY exits. JIM prepares for work. WILLIAM appears from behind some equipment.)*

WILLIAM: Is he gone?

JIM: Will.

WILLIAM: Don't tell 'im I'm here, 'kay.

JIM: If I don't, you know it's more work for me.

WILLIAM: Yeah, but less for me.

JIM: Why are you hiding?

WILLIAM: I hate workin' in here. It smells.

JIM: It's a stable. Of course it smells. And besides you better get used to it quick if you're gonna take over your old man's land.

WILLIAM: I don't wanna do that.

JIM: Why not?

WILLIAM: Because I'm gonna go and fight in the war.

JIM: You ain't old enough.

WILLIAM: Not yet I ain't but I will be in a couple of years. Hey, is it true? Are you gonna go an' fight?

JIM: Who told you that?

WILLIAM: Abbey.

JIM: Did Abbey tell anyone else?

WILLIAM: I dunno.

JIM: Well she didn't say anything at the dinner table did she? To your Dad or anything?

WILLIAM: No, I don't think so.

JIM: Good.

WILLIAM: *(Pause.)* But that doesn't mean I didn't.

JIM: You didn't.

WILLIAM: Maybe I did…

JIM: You little toad.

WILLIAM: Ribbit, ribbit.

JIM: I swear, Will, if you said a word I'm gonna hang you upside down from the rafters.

WILLIAM: Not before my Pa does the same to you. You know he needs your help.

JIM: That's it. You're mine.

*(JIM chases WILLIAM around the stable. ABIGAIL enters but is unseen by the boys. Finally she sticks her foot out and trips WILLIAM. He falls and starts crying.)*

ABIGAIL: Oh quit your whining you twerp.

WILLIAM: I'm tellin' pa.

ABIGAIL: Go ahead.

WILLIAM: Fine, I will.

*(WILLIAM starts to exit.)*

ABIGAIL: It's too bad you won't get to finish your sentence because Pa'll put you straight to work.

WILLIAM: *(Pause.)* Well, I'll tell Ma, then.

ABIGAIL: She won't do nothing. And you know it. You're just a dirty little boy and I was defending myself.

WILLIAM: Ah, rats to you!

*(WILLIAM exits, leaving JIM and ABIGAIL laughing.)*