

Fresh Horses

by Larry Ketron

DRAMA

Characters: *LARKIN (20's)*
 JEWEL (16)

SETTING: An abandoned railroad station in the rural south.

LARKIN, a temporary college drop-out, begins to be lured back to the coed joys of campus life when a party of female ex-classmates drops by for some soul-searching fun. The party fizzles when JEWEL, LARKIN's new nubile girlfriend, enters with her most recent saga of life on the other side of the tracks.

JEWEL: Then you don't even want to give me a chance to explain?

LARKIN: I gave you a chance, too many chances. This whole five months I've known you has been me going slowly down into a hole. Because you don't have brain one or any social grace and nobody wanted to be around us except others of the same type like Jean McBaine and her daughter Laurel. And you have a bad temper, I think you even scare people. And you haven't even finished high school so you have this pervasive dumbness which follows you around like a dog. And hitting the bottom of the hole was finding out you were married. But I even tried to work that out somehow. Then you break up a night I'm having, you take my car for a few minutes, and I sit here all night long! Bullshit! I've had it. I had fun here last night for the first time in a long time.

JEWEL: *(Sarcastically)* No, you never had fun with me.

LARKIN: I had fun with you. But not like last night. Last night was fun. It was loose. There was ... happiness in it. That group that was here, we were all on the same plane.

JEWEL: What am I, on Mars?

LARKIN: Yes. As a matter of fact, you're on fucking Mars. Those kids and me, we have things in common to talk about. We have school in common. They were refreshing. Fucking wasn't the only thing I wanted to do with them.

JEWEL: That's all you want to do with me.

LARKIN: It's all we do! There's nothing else to do! We can't talk. I can't, for example, discuss with you, the, the, the ... or when's the last time we were together somebody had an idea? Never.

JEWEL: I can't talk good to you. You get me all nervous inside with butterflies. But those girls that were here? I told them a whole story I heard over at Jean's about a little girl fell into the river and this guy tried to save her but couldn't -

LARKIN: Over at Jean's. We try to talk and the only thing you can say is something you heard somebody else

say over at Jean's.

JEWEL: I don't hear you no brilliant conversation!

LARKIN: Don't argue with me! You shouldn't have left me alone all night, Jewel. After I had such a good time with those people here, I started getting more and more angry, at you until I popped. Then I settled down. And I sat here all night. And I realized what a good time I had had earlier before you showed up to spoil everything.

JEWEL: Yeah, everywhere I go.

LARKIN: Whose fault is that?

JEWEL: I hate those girls who were here.

LARKIN: Of course you do, that's you!

JEWEL: Life is handed to them. Life is not handed to me. I got no advantages. Everything's always been against me.

LARKIN: Who wants to listen to that? I want to listen to somebody who wants to help herself, not somebody who all she can do is twist your guts out.

JEWEL: No you don't! You don't know what it was like growing up like I did with that -

LARKIN: Don't start!

JEWEL: — with this body! Looking seventeen when I was fourteen, looking nineteen at sixteen. I never fit in with anybody.

LARKIN: Don't do this to my sympathy, not anymore!

JEWEL: You don't even care what happened to me last night. You're as cruel and awful as everybody else I ever met.

LARKIN: I'm not going to listen to something from you that may or may not be true.

JEWEL: You think I wouldn't have got back here quick if I could?

LARKIN: I don't know. That's the thing, I do not know. Okay, why couldn't you?

JEWEL: I drove out and met Green at the back of the Blue Devil Drive-In Restaurant.

LARKIN: See, that you would even go to a hangout like the Blue Devil! It's just a hangout for thugs.

JEWEL: That's where he told me to meet him! I had to if I wanted him to go along with the annulment.

LARKIN: Why didn't you tell me you were going to meet him there, I wouldn't have let you go or I would have gone with you.

JEWEL: You didn't ask me. *(Pause)* I parked in the back where he was with some other guys.

LARKIN: Thugs. Hoodlums.

JEWEL: And he come over to my car.

LARKIN: To my car! And he came over. He didn't come over, he came over, he came over, it's past tense, it's already happened, Jewel.

JEWEL: Don't correct my English!

LARKIN: Did he ask you where you got the car?!

JEWEL: He knew it was somebody else's car. And he made me get in the backseat with him. He said just to talk. I give him the paper this lawyer give me for him to sign it. And he did sign it. But by then a bunch of these other guys had started gathering around and some of them got in with us.

LARKIN: Got in the car?

JEWEL: Some of em in the front seat and some in the back. One of them was Green's old man, he was there. He's even more awful than my stepfather ever was. Everybody's drinkin cans of beer and I was so a-scared I could have died. I didn't know what they were going to do.

LARKIN: Well what did they do, Jewel!

JEWEL: They all started grabbing me and touching me. Or tryin to cause I was strugglin. Then Green made them stop and I thought he was gonna protect me but I should of known better. He was only keeping them off a me till they paid him.

LARKIN: Paid him what?

JEWEL: Till they gave him money. Cause he had told them he would show me off for money from them.

LARKIN: What?!

JEWEL: So they started paying him. And one would hold me and he would pull up my shirt and bra and show me off to one or two of them, then others would pay and he'd show me off to them. Then one or two would get out of the car and others would get in and the same thing. And the windows were all fogged up and I was getting dizzy and shaken and bruised and I couldn't even struggle any more or think straight. Then I know people paid more money and Green pulled my pants down and my underwear down and every one of them was laughing and slappin each other around and crawling over each other to get a better view of me and drinkin beer and passin liquor around and then some would get in and some would get out and Green with his whole fist full of money. I was in shock, swear I was.

LARKIN: (*His hand is on her shoulder*) Jewel ... Jewel, did they rape you? Are you telling me you were raped in the back of my car?

JEWEL: I don't know!

LARKIN: Of course you know!

JEWEL: I was in shock, I said! I said it was awful and I am only clear about it as much as I've told you!

LARKIN: How long did this go on, Jewel?

JEWEL: I don't know, I don't know! It seemed like a long time. At one point they held my nose and made me drink liquor.

LARKIN: You were assaulted! If you were raped, too, that's — we'll have to get the cops!

JEWEL: No! Just, no! I want to be done with it and forget about it. I went through it and it's over. I passed out, I must have passed out. I woke up this morning in the back seat with my clothes every-which-a-way. I straightened myself up and come right here.

LARKIN: Did you recognize any the others besides Green and his old man?

JEWEL: One. That friend of Tipton's was one of them.

LARKIN: Who?!

JEWEL: Sproles. That guy Sproles.

LARKIN: Sproles!?

JEWEL: He was one of them. He paid his money to see me. I swear it.

(Pause. LARKIN is blown away)

LARKIN: I can't go out and, I don't know, avenge this for you.

JEWEL: Who asked you to?

LARKIN: Because everybody's going to have a different story, aren't they, Jewel? Everybody's going to have a different tale to tell.

(Then)

Will you let me take you to a doctor?

JEWEL: NO! JUST SHUT UP ABOUT IT!

(Pause)

Now that I've said my piece, I'll leave. Now that I've lost any chance I had of having you, I'll just leave. I know you don't want me now, I'm used, I'm worn-out as far as you're concerned. I'm bad goods. Ya can't trust me. I'll get your money back to you somehow. I don't know how. But if it takes ten years, I'll do it.

(Pause)

You deserve one of those college girls. Somebody new. Somebody really up there. One of those you can be proud of to take around with you places. You think I'm a dope. But deep down I've always been smart enough to know it wouldn't last. **LARKIN:** Everything you told me about last night, was it true?

JEWEL: You're not going to believe me if you don't want to.

LARKIN: See ... even the way you reply to me, I feel like I'm being manipulated. Even the way you reply. I can't let somebody manipulate me.

JEWEL: What does that mean?

LARKIN: Draw stupid emotions out of me by telling me stories of bad luck all the time and manipulating me.

JEWEL: Bad luck, yeah...

LARKIN: Whatever it is, then, whatever it is! But they're horror stories one right after the other and you've used them to suck me in and suck me in deeper. It's got to stop. I even feel it right now, Jesus Christ, I feel it right this second! I don't have any damn respect for myself. I don't feel like I'm making decisions based on anything but sex and sympathy, it's stupid. I'm sleepwalking with a hard-on.

JEWEL: *(Sarcasm and anger)* Then why don't you just wake up?

LARKIN: That's the plan.

JEWEL: *(Softer)* I'm going to walk over the hill. And if I never see you again ever, don't worry about it. I'm used to it. I'm going over to Jean's house and get as drunk as I can.

LARKIN: Good, you go on.

JEWEL: I will.

(As she starts out)

LARKIN: Jewel!?

JEWEL: What?

LARKIN: *(A beat, then)* Please don't go over to Jean's.

JEWEL: Ha ...

(She walks out the door and disappears)