

The child shall be named Lev—Lionheart...

Egypt — 1917

Lev Tranquillo rode. I wish you could have seen him. A gale whipped his hair until it flew in a black sheath behind him. He urged his mount onward, thighs pressed flat against her flanks. ‘Dauntless,’ he whispered in her ear, ‘go!’ Because right now he was in the thick of it, where he most—and least—wanted to be. His parents would be sickened and terrified but that could not be helped; Rose, on the other hand, Rose would be beside him all the way. As she always was. As she always had been. And Shir—Christ AllbloodyMighty, where was Shir?

This sort of detail matters considerably because the two most striking specifics about Lev were that, a) from the moment he first found himself astride a horse, the saddle became his home. Yet being a dutiful boy, and he was *such* a dutiful boy, when his parents asked him about the direction he imagined his future might take, he had always tried to please them:

Teacher

Doctor

Lawyer...

But it was smoke and mirrors.

Rider

Rider

Rider...

Saddle or bareback, he cut loose through the wind. No one could catch him. Ever. No one could touch him.

And b)—from the moment he first laid eyes upon Shir, he loved him.

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Stokefield, Australia – 1911