

The Horse Secret

An Equestrian Novel By Stevan Hoffman & Leslie Martin

Chapter One

THE HORSES

THE SUN WAS ABOUT TO SET OVER THE TOWN OF CENTER HILL FLORIDA ON A CHILLY WINTER EVENING. Horse farms were not uncommon to the area and each driveway seemed to end at yet another barn. They came large and small, but only one was a very special place filled with magic and enchantment. Through the iron gates of the property, it sat in a country setting one half mile from the road at the end of a winding tree lined dirt driveway with large open pastures to each side. The barn was owned by Jessi and Steven North, two hard working horse ranchers who treated their horses like kings and queens.

As far as Mr. and Mrs. North were concerned, they owned a run of the mill barn that was home to seven horses and one barn cat. Jessi North was the official proprietor of the ranch and held the greatest enthusiasm for horses. Combining her love and emotional attachment to them while conducting business had sometimes compromised her sales sense, but that made her herd the best-kept horses around the county. None were ever sold unless the new owner fit the horse. Each horse had lived at the North Ranch for a long time and few of the senior horses were ever sold.

Neither Steven North nor any other person could match Jessi's passion for horses. Her husband of little previous horse experience had married into the family and with it came the equestrian way of life. He had come to relish working with horses and gained much knowledge of their unique personalities. Far from a cowboy, he still possessed riding skills and a cautious but close connection with the horses. Jessi adored this about him and in her mind he would always and forever

remain her loving greenhorn.

The magic of the North barn had long been a secret to generations of horses. It was a secret that could never be known to humans. Horse legend has it that magic and wonderment was cast upon the barn long ago by the flying horse called Pegasus. None of the present horses had ever seen the mythical horse, nor did they know a great deal about him. But all were thankful for the magical gift bestowed upon them. The gift came with a single rule. If any human were to witness the magic of the gift, the wonderful spell would be broken forever. So it remained a horse secret.

Mr. And Mrs. North were in the barn finishing the day's last feeding. All the horses received two scoops of grain and an extra large flake of hay was given to each for being such good animals. As Mr. North was closing up the feed room, Mrs. North said her goodbyes and gave kisses to each one of the herd that she loved and was so proud of. The horse's neighed, snorted and crunched on their meal in unison. Mr. North always found it cute when all the horses crunched feed at the same time. To him it sounded like rain falling on the barn's tin roof.

"It's raining again," he cried to Jessi.

"You're a funny man," she replied.

Mr. North was on his way out the barn door when he stopped and thought for a moment. "Hey Jessi, let me make sure all the stalls are locked, you know how we forget that sometimes!" he shouted. All seemed quiet and normal as the horses rested in their stalls and prepared for sleep. The Norths turned off the lights and closed the barn gate for the night.

The A-framed white barn with green trim was old, tall and wide. It had three rows that could stall sixteen horses. The seven horses all lived on the middle row with three on the left and four on the right. Down the left aisle lived Groomswing, Sonny and Miss.

Groomswing, also known as Swing, was a buckskin horse with a caramel colored body, black mane and tail and tiger striping on his legs. Groomswing was named for his mother's habit of constantly grooming her foal's tail in the early years of his life. She would spend hours each day grooming the tail that had grown long, strong

and smooth as silk. He was a proud and beautiful horse.

Sonny was a show horse who came with high spirit and a short temper. He was an Arabian gelding with a stunning white coat, mane and tail and strong powerful eyes. In his heart he loved his home and the rest of the herd but could be bossy and pushy with them and he especially disliked the barn cat.

To Sonny's left was Miss, a fleabait Grey thoroughbred mare who had given birth to at least fifteen foals during her life. Her most recent foal was Princess, born on Christmas Eve nearly a year ago. She and her mother had been stalled together but Princess now lived in the stall directly across the aisle from Miss. The red roan filly with a flaxen mane and tail was happy to be so close to her mother, but having the yearling in a separate stall caused Miss to feel anxious.

Next to Princess lived Trouble, a young carefree chestnut colt whose only concern in life was that he did not want to be ridden. With a taste for bucking, head jerking and rearing, the two year old could present a problem to even the most experienced of riders. Because of this he was considered to be an un-broken horse. Trouble's burnished red color bespoke his firecracker personality while the jagged blaze on his face resembled a lightning bolt.

Geni was a striking bay Arabian horse with a rich chocolate coat and black mane and tail, who stood quiet and proud in the next stall. While most of the horses normally faced the front of their stalls, Geni always stood at an angle facing the rear corner. She was the old lady of the barn who often liked to be alone and all the other horses respected her wishes. She could be a hot-tempered horse not afraid to kick others. Geni was a wise old soul with wisdom only an old mare like she could know. She had lived in the North barn longer than all the other horses.

Dabir lived next to Geni in the last stall. The jet-black thoroughbred mare was faster, taller and stronger than all the other horses. Her tall and muscular frame was enough to intimidate any human or horse. This being the case, it was not a good idea for either to stand behind her if she was not in the mood for their presence. Because she was also a retired champion racehorse who traveled all over the country winning derbies, she was considered the star of the barn and the leader of the herd. When Dabir walked up to a gate or a feed dish, all of the other horses made way for the

undisputed alpha mare.

There was one more four-legged animal that roamed the aisles of the North barn. He was the orange tabby barn cat known as George. George was friendly with all the horses except Sonny. When he was not chasing mice, he was walking the rafters avoiding the white Arabian horse who so much liked to torment him.

Just outside the barn door was the riding arena, a place that Trouble didn't much care to look at. Groomswing had gazed past the arena to the Norths' large two-story house and watched the lights go dark. He no longer neighed or snorted. In perfect spoken English he cried out, **"THEY'RE GOING TO SLEEP...BARN PARTY!"**

For that was the magical gift of Pegasus. It gave the animals the gift of human speech. The charm of the gift came about in only two ways. The resident animal of the enchanted barn must live there for one year, or have been born there. The horses had to be very careful as they knew if any human were to witness them talking, they would all lose the gift forever.

The barn came alive with excitement that night as it did on many nights.

"Don't you keep me awake all night with another barn party," said Geni. "I'm old and I need my rest. This is why we are always tired in the morning."

"Groomswing, open our stalls!" demanded Sonny.

"Yes hurry up," came cries from the other horses.

Swing was the most coordinated horse so he always removed the stall door clips and slid the handle open for the others.

"Let me finish looking at my tail and I will open them up," said Groomswing.

"Hurry up!" blasted Sonny.

"Yes Swing, hurry up!" ordered Dabir in a stern voice.

Dabir was the leader, so Swing's moment of vanity would have to wait. One by one he opened the stalls and the party began. When it was Sonny's turn to come out, he rushed past Swing and walked the entire barn in search of George who was playing it safe perched on top of a tall medicine cabinet. Sonny stomped over to the cat with his ears back and tail swinging. The cat arched up with his fur

pointing to the sky, hissing viciously at the horse.

“Go pick on someone your own size,” said the feline.

Sonny turned to walk away and offered a warning.

“You can’t stay up there forever.”

“HA!” cried the cat.

At the other end of the barn, Princess bumped into a wall and spilled over some rakes.

“I hope the humans blame that on the cat,” said Sonny.

As Sonny approached Geni’s stall, which she hardly ever came out of, the mare spoke.

“How illogical of you to think that they would consider that a small cat knocked over those rakes. Pure lunacy.”

Sonny snorted at Geni and continued walking. Swing turned on the radio and Dabir made an announcement.

“Do you know what time it is? It’s time for Hoof Slap.

Hoof Slap was a game the horses played which was similar to a human child’s game of Patty Cakes. The horses would rear up dancing on their hind legs while facing each other and slap their front hooves together in time with the music. Six of the horses paired off down the aisle and enjoyed the merriment as Geni tried to sleep.

Miss did not seem to be enjoying herself as usual, nor did she seem to act as the tough mare she could be. After hoof slap she paced the barn in deep thought and solitude then approached Dabir. When the horses were troubled they went to Dabir or Geni for advice. Dabir was the leader of all the horses and always seemed to have the answers while Geni possessed unparalleled life experience and a strong sense of influence with Dabir. Tonight Miss was concerned, since after having so many foals she knew that when they were weaned and moved to another stall it was just a matter of time till one day a horse trailer would arrive to take them away.

“Maybe Princess will not be taken away,” suggested Dabir in consoling words. “After all, Trouble can’t even be ridden and a horse that can’t be ridden is only good as a lawn ornament. But he has yet to be taken. So don’t give up hope yet Miss.”

This was true, but Miss had seen all her foals taken and she felt none the better.

The party carried on through the night with horsing around occurring at both ends of the barn. The horses broke off into cliques

normally composed of Miss, Princess and Trouble, then Sonny, Dabir and Swing. Geni typically kept to herself during barn parties. If she did come out of her stall she made it a point to visit with Sonny and Dabir. With Sonny she shared the fact that they were both Arabian horses. Like Geni herself, Dabir was also a wise old horse so she made good conversation. You never knew when Geni was going to come out of her stall and this time she did not.

Dabir noticed that the barn clock read 4:30 in the morning. She knew the Norths arrived in the barn at 5:00 for the first feeding and were never late.

“Back to your stalls everyone!” she ordered.

Miss walked Princess to her stall and groomed her before giving a kiss and telling her goodnight. Miss had a special place in her heart for Princess. She was getting older and knew that Princess would be the last foal she would bring into the world. Swing closed all the horses in and was the last to say goodnight.

“It’s about time,” said Geni. “You all act like such a bunch of yearlings!”

A typical day for the horses started with the 5:00 AM feeding and turnout to the pasture. Geni often preferred stall time, but normally all the other horses ran the pasture as a herd. They had 100 acres of land to roam, which included a pasture behind the barn, a paddock on both sides, a jump paddock, a riding arena and a round pen area. The Norths’ front yard was the only area off limits to the horses.

Most of their days were spent grazing, galloping and playing a friendly game of halter tag. In halter tag, six horses stand about fifty feet across from each other lined up in groups of three. The seventh horse acts as the referee and starter. When the starter moves to the center and drops his or her tail, each horse charges towards the one facing them and attempts to place their teeth around the other’s halter. Like the human games of football, hockey and rugby, halter tag could be a rough game. The object of the contest is to see which side can tag more halters. When a horse is tagged it is considered captured and must move to the opposing side and stand waiting for the round to end. In both tradition and a show of victory, the winning side rears up on their hind legs sounding off while spinning like show horses. Once again, it was time for Halter Tag.

Geni decided to come out of her stall so she acted as the referee and starter. It was her job to also match the horses against each other. The morning game paired off Dabir and Miss, Trouble and Princess, and Groomswing against Sonny. The Norths had been seen driving off the property and the group was in the middle of a large pasture where they could see no humans so they felt safe to speak.

“Why do I always have to play against Princess, she’s a baby?” whined Trouble.

“Because I am the referee and starter and I said so,” scolded Geni.

“Play by the rules,” suggested Groomswing. “After all, I don’t think you would be very happy playing against Dabir would you?”

Looking towards Dabir and thinking about it for a moment, Trouble noticed the large horse kicking the ground, jerking her head and snorting as if ready for combat. In the early morning cold, powerful jets of steam flowed from each nostril of the giant horse and Trouble suddenly envisioned Dabir as a medieval warrior horse.

“No that’s OK,” he cried. “I’ll play by the rules. Lets go, let’s play!”

Geni rolled her eyes and sighed, then dropped her tail and the game began. Both sides charged at each other. Dabir cut loose with all the fury of a thoroughbred champion breaking from a starting gate. The ground roared as if a freight train were passing through. The horses met each other bumping heads, bucking and rearing. One by one each was tagged. First Trouble tagged Princess with ease. With less ease Groomswing tagged Sonny. Dabir and Miss each seemed determined to win, so both battled for several more minutes. They were nose to nose when suddenly the pair stopped. Dabir was the reigning champion who had never lost at Halter Tag. As they stared each other down in the moment of truth, Dabir’s eyes grew large and her great muscles tightened.

Miss cried out, “Oh no!” Dabir quickly reared up and came crashing down beside Miss grabbing her halter. “Game over!” shouted Geni. Dabir had upheld her personal title of nearly 100 wins and 0 losses. The winning horses reared to their hind legs and neighed in triumph. Dabir was still in the air when she shouted, “Off to the water trough for drinks great herd!” She ran, leading the group through the front pasture to the water trough that sat under giant oak trees whose

branches draped the area serving as an umbrella.

The horses not only had the power of human speech, but they had the ability to reason as humans do. Miss was still worried about Princess being sold off so she came up with a plan and presented it to Dabir.

“Hey Dabir, what if we just graze tonight and don’t go to the barn for the evening feeding. You never know when the horse trailer will come and take my Princess away.”

Dabir answered, “That will be ok for tonight Miss, but we can’t hide in the pasture forever. It may be cold tonight and if so we will have to walk to the barn and be stalled. You know if it is cold Jessi and Steven will come out and blanket us. They will also give extra hay. I don’t want the rest of the herd to freeze over something that may not happen,” reasoned Dabir. Geni felt it time to speak her brand of logic. “Look Miss, we have both had many foals and the fact of life is that they all eventually get sold off. It is part of being a horse and like it or not it is the way things are.” Geni’s words did not comfort Miss. Instead, Miss put her head down in sadness and walked towards Princess.

“I think what Miss is so afraid of is that she does not know where her foals go,” said Dabir.

“We mares all have to let go one day,” responded Geni. “Besides, it is Wednesday and the horse trailer normally does not come till the weekend,” said Geni.

“Yes, but Miss feels bad so tonight we will stay in the pasture,” ordered Dabir.

“I wouldn’t worry about it being this weekend. More halter tag!” shouted Sonny.

Thursday came and the horses enjoyed grazing throughout the day, but a winter freeze was coming and each could sense it. So they all flocked to the barn for a good dinner on Dabir’s command. Miss stood close by Princess outside the barn gate. When they were brought in, Jessi changed the stalling order switching Sonny and Princess. The foal was now stalled next to her mother rather than across from her in plain site. Princess remained to the rear of her stall where Miss could not see her. The mare swiftly started pacing her stall, neighing for her foal. Jessi knew the weaning process was not yet complete and she tried to coax Princess to the front of the

stall so Miss would be more comfortable. She knew from experience that if Miss could see Princess next to her she would calm down. But Princess would not move from the rear of the stall.

“Come on silly,” prompted Jessi to Princess with sweet-talks.

Miss was a large horse and watching her move with such excitement in a small stall could be frightening.

“I think we need to switch them back,” realized Jessi.

Finally, with more sweet talk and some hay, Princess was coaxed to change stalls with Sonny. The baby was easy to handle and Jessi was glad it was not Miss who had to be moved.

The horses were ready for another barn party and to them it seemed like the Norths spent an eternity feeding, cleaning hooves, bleaching water bowls, giving medicine and putting down straw. When the Norths finally left the barn Sonny looked towards George with a menacing smile and winked. The Tabby cat sat in the rafters appearing unconcerned.

Each Thursday after the Norths' house lights went dim, the herd would discuss whatever came to their mind at a weekly meeting. It was a way for them to unwind from the week as the weekend drew near. Unlike humans, the horses preferred weekdays to the weekend. For some of them, the weekend could bring work. They would have to be ridden if people came for riding lessons and the ones that were English Jumpers would sometimes be taken to shows far from home. The weekend also meant the Norths would spend most of the day in the barn, which prevented the horses from talking if they were not turned out to the pasture.

When conducting their meetings, all topics were open to group discussion including concerns, praise, suggestions or ideas. But most of the time these discussions would only end up in childish bickering. In the meeting's weekly tradition Swing would open Dabir's door and the leader would visit each horse at the front of his or her stall. Swing returned to her stall and Dabir started on the left side of the aisle.

“I think we have all had a great week,” held Swing. “And it was nice to beat Sonny at halter tag.”

“I had a bad day! I just about let you win!” insisted Sonny. “That will be the last time you ever win against me!” he declared. Dabir was already growing frustrated with the arguing when Geni

broke in. "You're all acting like foals. Haven't you anything worthwhile to talk about?"

"Gripe! Gripe! Gripe!" screamed Sonny.

"I hate it when Sonny starts arguments!" yelled Trouble.

"Your afraid to even be ridden," poked Sonny.

"Make Sonny stop," cried Princess.

"**Quiet now!**" ordered Dabir. "The lights at the Norths' house just went on," the mare said in a raised whisper. The barn came to a sudden hush. Dabir walked towards the gate to keep an eye on the Norths' front door. After a moment the house lights went dark again. "Alright!" exclaimed Dabir, "We are going to finish this meeting like the civilized horses we are."

"These civilized horses you talk about are probably what woke the Norths up," balked Geni. "Try, Try, Try, to grow up," she said. Pacing the floor, Dabir questioned, "Where were we?" Suddenly the barn erupted in babble with all the horses again arguing. Swing was still bragging about beating Sonny at halter tag. Sonny was responding by defending his honor. Trouble was vocal about taking sides with Swing. Princess was kicking her stall and Miss was telling her, "Calm down." Geni just stood still shaking her head in disbelief. Dabir heard enough and suddenly she reared into the air striking her forelegs wildly. "SHUT UP!" she demanded.

"You horses are all out of line. "First...you are going to wake up the humans and if they hear the racket we could all go back to being regular horses. Is that what you want? To break the spell because of your foolish bickering over Halter Tag? We are a herd and a family so act like it!" she ordered.

"Thank you!" cried Geni. "I'm glad someone said it!" The horses all listened to Dabir's stern words and became quiet. None spoke and all eyes followed Dabir as she paced the middle aisle.

"Again... where were we?" Dabir spoke in more of an authoritative tone. "I think it is time for Miss to speak!" Dabir walked to the last stall and told Miss, "Speak your mind." Miss always had plenty to say and throughout her life never found herself at a loss for words. She often displayed the attitude of Sonny, but with age was becoming calmer and less confrontational. She remained quiet so Dabir started across the aisle to Princess, but not before Geni cast a complaint. "I have yet to hear logical insight from

any of you.”

“Quiet Geni, you will have your turn,” stated Dabir.

“I want to play more halter tag and have mom on my team. I know everyone thinks I am a baby and I am. But one day I will be as wise as Geni and as strong as you Dabir. But for now I am a baby horse and wish that I was old enough to be ridden by young children,” said Princess. The foal seemed to speak with wisdom beyond her years when she said, “Isn’t that what we are about as horses? Bringing joy to young boys and girls?”

Dabir thought about the baffling understanding that the foal possessed at such a young age and bowed her head in respect.

“She is a horse beyond her years!” cried Geni.

Dabir had seen Princess run and her belief was that the yearling would never grow up to be a racehorse, but that she would some day make a wonderful horse to the right owner.

Trouble was next to speak.

“The weekend is coming and they may try to ride me again. I’m not like most other horses. I hate to be ridden,” complained the colt. Dabir was about to speak when Geni once again interrupted. “You’re a horse, get over it! Humans ride us and we should carry them with pride. It is in our legacy to carry them. We have carried them for many thousands of years in fun, sport, celebration and war. They have taken care of us because of the great job we have done. That alone should inspire you to be proud of whom you are. A mighty horse! And my Arabian breed dates back over forty thousand years serving man. That’s all I have to say for the rest of this meeting.” She then turned away facing the back of her stall and offered no further comments. Now it was time to hear from Dabir. As she stood in the center aisle all eyes fell on her with curiosity and anticipation. She spoke her words with firmness. “There is too much squabbling at these meetings. Horses arguing over halter tag for goodness sake! Poking fun at those who are not as brave or fast as the others! Like I said earlier, we are a family... a herd ...and we are made up of different breeds from different bloodlines.”

“Some better than others,” snickered Sonny.

“Amen,” added Geni.

Dabir continued, “We must stick together and try to enjoy the wonderful life we have been given. Think about it. No barn party tonight!”

Friday came and went and the weekend was once again upon the North Ranch. Mr. and Mrs. North spent their Saturday working with the horses, a labor of love for both of them. The day started with the morning feeding and then went on to the cleaning of stalls. The horses did not get turned out to the pasture, as there was plenty of work to do with all of them. Geni needed her hooves cleaned because she spent so much time standing in her stall. Sonny was employed to teach a young girl grooming and tacking. The girl was trained to bridle and saddle and to stroke a brush in a comforting direction for the horse. Trouble was scheduled for a bath. Dabir and Miss were obstinate about leaving their stalls that day and Swing relaxed. Princess was slated to meet the farrier who would trim her hooves for the first time.

Saturdays could often be chaos and mayhem for the horses. During the week Mr. and Mrs. North worked regular day jobs. On the weekend they worked the barn from sun up till late hours of the night. They loved their horses and the horses loved them in return. But for creatures that could not let humans know their well-kept secret, their constant presence was an interruption to the enchanted and verbal lives they lived. To Jessi and Steven the herd seemed as all other horses except for the distinct personalities that each was marked by. Jessi and Steven North knew them well. ***But little would they ever realize how much more there was to know about the members of the charmed herd.***

At one time or another all of the horses stood for the farrier and had their hooves trimmed. For most of them it was tolerable. But for Princess, who had never experienced the painless process, it brought fear and resistance she was determined to make a show of. When three people appeared at the front of her stall, Princess knew there was going to be a problem.

“Should we trim her in the stall or out?” questioned Jessi North to Von, her farrier of several years.

“Whatever you suggest,” responded Von in a bright and distinguished Mexican accent.

Jessi started to speak when Steven interrupted. “I think we might be better off in the stall since it is a small area.” Jessi concurred. “Your

going to need some help Steve. Von will be busy trimming the hoofs and Princess certainly outweighs you.”

“Yes I agree,” he replied.

Ross was a part time farm hand and maintenance man for the Norths. He knew very little about horses but was big and tall with a strong back.

“I’ll get Ross to help,” said Steven.

When Steven went to find Ross, Von moved into the stall to try and befriend Princess who immediately became uncomfortable with the situation. To make matters worse Von was a stranger to her. She was in a foaling stall that was larger than the others, designed with a barrier built with a single piece of wood that was used to separate the baby from her mother during feedings. This private feeding area sat at the end of the stall and measured about five feet wide by eight feet deep, containing a single feed bowl. The wooden board was nailed low enough that a small horse could walk under it, but a full-grown mare could not. This prevented the mother from eating any of the foal’s special diet when they were stalled together. When Von entered the stall Princess swiftly ran into the enclosed area. As Steven returned with Ross he noticed Princess in the smaller area.

“This is not really what I meant by a small area. That’s too small and could be dangerous. We should move her to the center of the stall.” Jessi and Von both agreed, but the 500-pound horse did not budge no matter how determined the humans were to move her. Von asked, “Are you sure you want to do this tonight?” Jessi and Steven both looked at each other and nodded their heads in agreement.

“Yes,” said Steven. “I think Princess needs to learn about this now before she weighs one thousand pounds.” Jessi was the true horse expert and she had the final say in all barn matters. “You men go do it!” she said.

With reluctance, anticipation and a sense of impending adventure, Von, Steven and Ross moved cautiously into the small area that was now a territory dominated by the horse. Princess had so much wanted to cry out to Miss and Dabir for help, but she nor any of the other horses were about to carry the burden of responsibility for breaking the enchanted spell that made them all so special.

Steven approached the horse with his hand held open and low as

if offering food. The horses found a lowered open hand as a friendly and non-threatening gesture. Princess allowed Steven to hold her halter while Ross petted her mane and Von attempted to raise her leg to access the hoof. The horse had a wild-eyed look and was not about to be obedient. She had not yet decided to fight, but simply offered some resistance in lifting her leg. But Von was an experienced farrier and without fear he pulled her leg up trying to control the foal. The leg lifted and Von started to manicure the young horse's hoof.

Suddenly Princess leaped forward crashing into the front of the stall. The two men holding her were thrust about like rag dolls but fought hard to control the filly. Ross fell to his knees keeping his arms across the horse's back. From the ground Steven tried to hold the horse by her halter. The frightened horse shook them both off and turned about. Each man rose to his feet and the whole fiasco started over.

Once again, Steven held one hand low with the other grabbing the halter and Ross stroked the filly's mane. The whole scene was played out again, now facing the other direction of the stall. This occurred several times. Von had at least started to trim one hoof, so Jessi instructed them to keep going. Once again the horse's leg was raised and Von continued clipping. The second hoof was just about finished when in an excited voice Steven exclaimed to Ross, "Oh no! She looks like..."

All of a sudden Princess sprung straight off the ground with all four legs in the air kicking in different directions. It was only by luck that each of the men had not been kicked. This time when she landed, Princess caught her right front leg on top of the dividing board and fell to the ground. The men grappled with her but she was on her feet in a quick moment. They continued to battle the horse with all the luck of fighting a wild lion.

"OK that's enough," screeched Jessi. "She could have broken her leg! Von has finished both hoofs and that's it for tonight."

"We better get her used to it now before she is much older," Steven added.

"She won't be here by then," responded Jessi. Miss's ears raised upon hearing those words as she realized her worst fears could soon come true. It was time for Miss to talk with

Princess.

Since the magical gift provided the horses the power of reason, this gave them the ability to recognize when one of the herd was feeling sad. When this was the case the leader did not suggest games of halter tag. Instead Dabir would lead them to the front pasture water trough. This was a place where they could relax and speak with ease. It was far enough away from the house and the trees would hide the horses. In a location centered inside of wide open pasture, this small area of great oak trees and soft ground served as an oasis of solitude and peace for the horses.

Princess was running and jumping near the shade trees with all the joy of a young foal, when in a half-hearted voice Miss called for her. "Princess... come here."

The excited horse ran to her mother without a care in the world. "Yes mother."

"Princess, I must tell you something about a horse's life. We mares give birth to foals for most of our lives and eventually you are all taken away and sold off. You will someday have your own foals. The Norths will sell you and they will keep me, but you will be going to a new home someday."

Princess was silent for a moment and with a child's innocence she replied. "Dabir has told me of this mother. Maybe I can be sold to humans with a young boy or girl." Remembering what Geni said, she tearfully reminded her mother of the words the old mare spoke. "It is our duty to carry humans with pride."

"She's going to make a brave horse," said Dabir.

"And a wise old lady one day," followed Geni.

"She will be a great mother," added Miss.

Trouble came running up. "Lets go race. I love to run!" he yelled to Princess. The two young horses ran off to gallop and play in the pasture.