

**STAR STABLE**  
**MISTFALL**

T H R O U G H  
Y O U R E Y E S



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STAR STABLE  
**MISTFALL**

THROUGH  
YOUR EYES

**Katie Cook**





**OVER THE SOUND OF** the rushing water, I could hear someone screaming. With all the trees and boulders nearby for the sound to bounce off of, it was hard to pinpoint the direction the sound was coming from, but if I concentrated, I knew I could do it. I tuned out the sound of the water. I tuned out the sounds of the crickets. I tuned out the sound of everything but what I was trying to focus on.

I trusted myself to find the source of the cry for help. And I trusted my best friend to get me to her.



I have never seen my best friend, but I know him so well I could find him in any crowd. I would recognize him instantly if we spent months – or years apart. I could probably describe him so well that an artist could draw a perfect likeness of him. Maybe. Or maybe it would end up looking like a giraffe. I guess that would depend on the ability of the artist, ha!

When I was told he was chestnut-colored, I admitted I didn't really know what color that was. They told me a kind of golden brown. Of course he is. Golden, like his heart. Golden brown like the best comfort foods are... pancakes, cookies... or a perfectly toasted marshmallow.

I remember what golden brown looks like. I lost my sight when I was a little girl... but I can remember golden brown.

My name is Rania Varanger and I am blind.

Oh, and my best friend is a horse. Dellinger. A Haflinger. Please don't call him a pony. He's not a pony, he's just a little small. And really, he's not THAT small for being a Haflinger. He's sensitive about being called a pony.

...Okay, I'M sensitive about him being called a pony. He's a horse. A beautiful, wonderful HORSE.



My mom... other people call her Sigry. I just call her mom. You know I met a kid my age that was trying to call his parents by their first names? What's up with that? Like, I can't just walk up to my mother and say "Hey Sigry, what's up?" That's weird.

Anyway, mom has always been really good with horses. Just naturally amazing with them. Like weirdly good, everyone always comments on it.

So, mom being weirdly, suspiciously, naturally good with horses? I just expected to be

like automatically, weirdly, suspiciously, naturally good with horses just like her.

...And I wasn't. But she wouldn't let me give up.

And my mom didn't give me any extra slack for being – you know – NOT ABLE TO SEE ANYTHING. Nowadays, looking back, I'm glad she didn't. I'm glad she didn't treat me like I was a precious porcelain doll that needed to be kept safe in bubble wrap. But back then – back when I kept getting bucked off the back-side of horses (or sometimes not even bucked, but just like, clumsily slipping off) and face planting into a pile of mud, I coulda' used a break or two.

But I got no breaks, and I got no pity parties. I just got high expectations and the words “When you fall off the horse, you get back on it.”



Dellinger had the opposite problem. He'd always had the opposite problem.

(And yes, it's Dellinger. Not "Dillinger" like people always want to say it. He's not named after some old-timey American bad guy. He's named after a Norse God. Respect.)

When Alonso (rancher, cool guy) went to buy a new work horse, he had no intention of coming home with a little Haflinger. But Dellinger wouldn't let the guy ignore him. He gave him a little shove. He showed off. He showed him spirit was worth more than bulk. Alonso said it was the most adorable thing. If Alonso lets the word "adorable" out of his mouth, you know it's CUTE.

And Dellinger kept on proving himself. They tell me he was an awesome work horse. They tell me he even saved lives. But he always kept trying to prove himself.

And the truth is, a lot of the time when you push yourself, you improve. But the opposite is true too – if you never stop pushing, you just might break.

One rainy night, one muddy trail, one stubborn horse who never knew when to quit... Dellinger broke his leg.

And look, breaking a leg sucks. Sucks for anybody. But for a horse, a broken leg can be a death sentence. And for a horse like Dellinger? A horse who never knew when to give himself a break? A broken leg is almost certainly a death sentence.

But Alonso (the cool guy rancher), he wasn't ready to give up on Dellinger. He wondered if maybe the kinder thing would've been to give up, but he couldn't do it. I'm so glad he couldn't do it.

And so Dellinger was shipped to another ranch for rehabilitation. If somehow, he could learn to slow down... maybe he could make it.



So, one day I had about had it. I'd fallen off the same stallion three times. My face was muddy,

there was something probably unmentionable in my hair, my butt was sore, and my patience was gone. I picked myself up and found my way over to the fence where I'd left my cane. I wasn't saying it out loud yet, but I was done. Quitting. I felt along the fence, searching for the gate. I found a strange horse instead.

I could hear him breathing. I think my cane startled him, because it sounded like he reared up on his back legs and then landed back down in front of me.

Poor thing. I don't like to be startled either. Sorry horse. To make amends I knew I'd have to display the age-old human/animal ritual of "smell me and know I'm safe."

"It's okay," I said, reaching out to the strange horse so he could sniff me. My hand found his muzzle and –

It's hard to describe really. Have you ever had one of those perfect moments? Like... maybe you try a new food for the first time, and you can't believe it's the best thing you ever tasted? Or on a perfect summer day you

rest your feet in a cool stream, and something reminds you that you're the only person that will ever rest your feet in that exact spot of the stream on that particular moment? Or like... more directly – you meet someone, and you just know you've met your best friend? That's what it was like.

Mom warned me not to get too attached. This was a horse with a broken leg who wasn't willing to learn how to take it easy, and he might not be around too long. But it was too late. I was instantly attached.

And here's the thing – so was Dellinger. And Dellinger was smart, and sensitive, and loved to work hard. And what Dellinger realized when he bonded with me was that teaching the blind girl how to ride and work with a horse meant that he had to slow down. He had to be patient, and that that was hard work too. And so, he gave me a new lease on life, and without realizing it, by being patient with me, he was saving his own life too.

Pretty cool, huh?



By now, Dellinger and I have been sharing rides for years. This evening, we were out for a twilight ride through the woods together.

Then, suddenly, we both turned to a commotion in the distance. We were so in tune with one another that when we heard the scream, I don't know if I stopped him or if I stiffened up when he stopped. Probably both. Dellinger must've been startled, but he sensed that I needed a moment – a moment to be perfectly still and listen to where the cries were coming from.

He seemed to spring into action at the same moment I was guiding his reins and saying, “that way!” as I nudged his sides.

I bent low and hung close to his neck as he galloped through the trees, expertly avoiding any branches that might've hit me. I could still hear the cries over the rush of the wind and the pounding of his hooves. Within 20 sec-

onds, I could sense we were at the riverbank.

“Help! Please help me!”

The panicked voice belonged to a girl a few years younger than me. It was coming from the middle of the river.

“I’m trapped! Help me please!” she cried out.

“I’m sorry,” I said, trying to sound calm. “You’ll have to explain to me exactly what’s happening. I’m blind.”

“Oh no! No!” the girl said, sounding more panicked again.

“Look, I’m going to help you,” I said, cutting her off. “But you’re going to need to tell me what’s happening!”

“I’m trapped! I was canoeing and I—” the girl’s voice cut off for a moment and it sounded like her head went under water. I soon heard her inhale desperately then continue. “The water suddenly became rapid and the canoe tipped. Something’s wrapped around my leg – I think something from my camping gear.”

Her voice disappeared again and, as surely

as she was doing the same, I held my breath until it came back. “My leg is tied up to a branch! The current is pulling me the other way. I’m going to drown!”

“OK, Dellinger. We have to go in, boy,” I said, patting the side of his neck to bolster his confidence (and – not gonna lie – my own too).

He didn’t take much coaxing. Dellinger always understood when there was work to be done.

My Haflinger stepped carefully, but quickly into the water. We were only a few steps in when – even on horseback – I could feel the water at my legs... then up to my waist. I held tight to Dellinger as he moved us closer to the sound of the girl thrashing in the water.

“I’m Rania. What’s your name?” I called out... to calm the girl AND to figure out how far away she still was.

“Sophie,” the girl called back. She was close now. Dellinger had done his job – he had gotten me to the girl. The rest was up to me. I pulled

my utility knife out of my pocket and felt for the notch that indicated the longest blade.

“Sophie, I need you to talk me through this. Guide me to your leg. Tell me what to do.”

“I’ll try...” she said, her voice gurgling in the rushing water. “It’s hard to see with my head in the water.”

“Pretty sure you can still see it better than me,” I replied.

Sophie didn’t waste time apologizing. There was no time for that. “Reach down to your right. My leg is just to your right.”

I hunched down with my chest against Delingr’s back and wrapped my left arm around his neck. With my right arm I reached into the cool, rapid water and felt it pull hungrily at me.

“A little forward – like a few inches. And a little farther... closer to my voice.” Sophie called. I could tell she was crying now. From fear or hope? Or both?

I felt my hand hit something hard. It was her leg.

“That’s it! That’s me!” she called out.

“I’m going to cut you loose!” I called back.

“Don’t stab me!” she yelled.

“I won’t!” I yelled, trying to sound more supportive than annoyed.

I felt the cord and fumbled at it ineffectually. One hand wasn’t going to cut it – literally.

“A little closer, boy,” I said, and Dellinger tentatively moved me closer to the trapped girl.

I squeezed my legs around him as tight as I could and reached both arms into the water where Sophie’s leg was tangled. With great effort, I was able to pull the cord wrapped around her leg away just enough to get the knife blade under and pull.

What happened next happened fast –.

Cut free, I could feel the current pulling Sophie away. Not wanting to lose her to the rapids, I instinctively grabbed her ankle. The current was too much for me, I was pulled off Dellinger and into the rushing water, still clinging to Sophie’s ankle.

The sound of the world around me was suddenly silenced and replaced by the echoing, gurgling sound of the world underwater, then my head was above the water and again I cried out for help. I heard splashing close behind. I could hear Sophie was silent, then screaming again. I heard the world above the water – then below again. Sophie and I tumbled wildly, dangerously, breathlessly through the water...

And then stopped sharp. Something grabbed me by the collar behind my neck and hoisted me out of the water. At the end of my arm, Sophie thrashed.

“Hold still!” I called out to her. “We’re going to be all right.”

I knew what I said was true, sure as I knew who had pulled me out of the water, even though I couldn’t see him.

Dellinger had caught my shirt in his teeth and was pulling us toward the riverbank. The current was strong, but my brave boy was stronger. Thanks to his patience and kindness

toward me, he was so strong again.

Safely at the water's edge, Dellinger dropped us to the ground where we panted and gasped for air for several seconds. Sophie grasped at me. It's always weird getting a hug from someone you can't see and don't know... but this one I think I can let slide. I wrapped my arms around her and gently pat her back.

"Thank you," Sophie said between relieved sobs. "Both of you. You saved my life." We had. Both of us. Dellinger couldn't have saved her without me. And I couldn't have saved her without him. I needed his eyes to find her. His strong legs to pull us free. He needed me to guide him to the sound, and my fingers to free her leg.

But much more than what we'd done today... we needed to have saved each other long ago to have even been here to do it.

I guess what I'm saying is. Me and Dellinger? We're a team. The dynamic duo... and we kind of rock.