

**STAR STABLE**  
**MISTFALL**

W I L D   A T   H E A R T



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**BLAZE HAD HAD A FRIEND** once. The small one. The gentle one. The girl. But the girl was gone.

Other people were not like the girl. The other people scared her. Other people were loud and unpredictable. Other people had hurt her. The pain was gone, but she remembered the piercing sensation along the back of her neck – along her mane. She had not misbehaved... so why had they hurt her?

She wouldn't allow herself to be hurt again. Never again.

And now? The other horses were scared of her.

That was a good thing. She didn't need friends. She had what she needed to be happy – herself and the wind.

Blaze pushed herself hard, running swiftly through the forest, weaving back and forth around one tree and the next. The wind pushed into her face, whirling around her ears, and whipped her orange mane wildly behind her. The sound of the wind and the blur of the trees rushing past – this was her happy place.

It was enough. She knew where to find fresh water. She knew how to find food. Her legs and hooves were strong enough to fend off any creatures that dared to challenge her. Chasing the wind was the only joy she needed! Again and again she told herself this.

But thoughts of the gentle girl would creep back into her mind. She missed her from time to time, missed her kind words and gentle touch. The girl's touch had felt... like a missing puzzle piece. Something she should have

held on to instead of running. When this happened, Blaze would push the thoughts aside and try to forget again. She would keep running, keep racing forward... tossing her head back to try and shake the memories from her mind. If she let herself think too hard, let herself get lost in emotions and fear... she knew she'd feel the burning anger. The fire that was inside her. She didn't want that.

And with that need to flee, the thought of running away from that memory, is when she ran straight into the fence. She became hopelessly entangled as she tried to break free. She panicked as the feeling of being trapped washed over her.



“It’s not fair,” Grace grumbled as she kicked a small stone that went sailing several feet ahead of her. “Becca gets to ride horses all she wants, but mom says I have to wait until next year when I’m seven to ride by myself. I’m BORED

of just riding in the paddock on a TETHER while papa watches! I can do more!”

Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third had heard Grace voice this complaint many times in the past, but never complained. This was because she didn’t understand a word Grace was saying. And the reason Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third didn’t understand a word Grace was saying was because she was a cat. Even though she never understood what Grace was talking about, the cat adored the little girl and constantly followed her everywhere.

Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third chased after the stone Grace had kicked in case it might be a treat... sadly, it was not.

“Bye, Grace! See you at dinner!” Becca called as she waved and rode off on her speckled mare, Beauregard.

Grace knew it wasn’t Becca’s fault that she wasn’t allowed to ride horses alone along the woodland trails yet, but she was frustrated with her older sister all the same. She stuck

her tongue out at Becca and Beauregard as they trotted down the dirt road, away from the house.

Grace turned in a huff and walked the other direction.

“C’mon, Lady,” she grumbled to Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third, who was still disappointedly looking at the rock in front of her.

The pair walked past the barn and into the field behind it. They walked along the white wooden fence and Grace counted the wooden beams as she passed them to take her mind off her sister getting to have all the fun. One, Two, Three... Oh, this wasn’t working at all.

“You know, when I get a horse it’ll be the prettiest one we have,” Grace proclaimed to the cat. “A white coat... like sugar because she’ll be so sweet! Oh, and with a mane as black as coal.”

“Meow.”

“It’s for contrast, Lady. It’ll look nice.”

They reached the end of the field. Grace

squeezed in between the two rails of the fence and Lady crossed underneath. The family's land extended a little farther into the woods. Grace knew how far she was allowed to go by herself because there was another fence – a less attractive wire fence that marked the border of their land.

Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third swiped a paw at a dragonfly that dodged the attack easily.

“Hrm... No, that's not it. Oh! What if I got a horse the color of chocolate? I love chocolate... with a bright yellow mane that matches my hair,” Grace said. “That'll be really-”

She was suddenly interrupted by a chilling sound – a high-pitched scream.

No, not a scream. A high-pitched whinny of a horse, then silence... then the sound of wood breaking and something very heavy struggling in the dirt.

For a moment Grace debated going back to the house for help... but then she heard the pained noise again and she started to

run towards it. She hopped over a fallen tree, raced around some thick brush that tore at her clothes, and then she saw it – the most beautiful and strangest horse she had ever seen – its coat the darkest gray it could be without being black – its mane... its wild mane was bright orange, the color of fire – so impossibly bright that it almost seemed to glow in the shadows of the forest.

The horse was bucking and struggling as it lay on the ground because it was caught – tangled up in the simple wire fence at the edge of Grace’s family’s property. This fence had not been built for keeping horses in their fields, just to keep the deer and chickens away from the small garden her mother had planted. Now, the wires were wrapped around the horse’s front legs. The horse had struggled so hard to get loose that it had pulled up one of the posts the wires were attached to, but the rest held fast. The poor horse was writhing in fear and frustration, but it could not get loose or even stand.

Grace froze for a moment. The horse threw its head back in frustration again and Lady Catherine Marmalade the Third turned and ran fearfully back toward the house. Grace followed, but not out of fear – out of purpose.

“Don’t worry, horsey!” She called as she ran. “I’ll be right back!”

Her heart pounding, Grace ran as quickly as she could, back to the white post fence, back through the field, and into the barn. She rushed over to her father’s red, metal tool cabinet and looked inside. She had watched him working once when a limb had fallen from a tree and he needed to repair the fence. He had needed to cut some of the wires with – there they were – a large pair of wire cutters! She grabbed them and, though she had not yet caught her breath, turned and ran back toward the ensnared horse.

When she returned to the fence, the poor horse was still trapped. She approached it confidently.

“Don’t worry, I’ll get you out of there!” Grace said.

But as she got closer, the horse thrashed again, the wires pressing harder against its skin.

“Hey... don’t be scared,” Grace said, soothingly. “It’s OK... I’m here to help you.”

She approached the horse again, more slowly and cautiously than before.

“I’m your friend. I’m just going to help you get out of there.”

The horse stopped writhing, but it was still breathing hard and wild eyed.

“It’s okay,” Grace repeated. “It’s okay.”

She reached out and slowly placed her hand on the horse’s side.

“Now let me get you out of there.”

Grace placed the jaws of the wire cutters around the wire and squeezed the handle with both hands. She grunted and clenched her small muscles as hard as she could, but it was no use – the wire was too thick.

Grace looked up desperately at the horse, her eyes full of apology... and met the scared eyes of the animal in front of her. No, Grace

couldn't give up! She had to try again... but how... but how...

AH! The horse had pulled the wire loose enough that it could reach the ground. Grace placed the wire cutters on the ground, put the wire into the blades... and **STOMPED ON THE HANDLE** with all her might.

SNAP! The wire had been cut and Grace was able to begin pulling it away from the horse's legs.

Seeming to understand what happened, the horse flailed her front legs, sending Grace ungracefully sprawling to the ground, the loosened wire along with her. She watched as the horse quickly rose to its hooves and then, reveling in its freedom, reared up on its back legs. Other than the heavy breathing from the horse's nostrils and a small wince, the horse seemed to be okay. No blood, no limping. Good.

The horse seemed even bigger and more powerful than Grace had first realized. In awe of it, she scrambled back and stood up.

The horse came to the ground with a thud and began to stalk over to Grace. The sheer height and menace of the proud horse would be enough to alarm any small child. Grace winced. But she held out a hand in a pleading gesture of “I am safe. You are safe.”

For a moment, it seemed like the snuffling creature before her that was sniffing, perhaps snarling, at her hand might try to take a bite as it bared its straight teeth at her outstretched fingers.

But no... It lowered its head and nuzzled its soft muzzle against her palm. It was as clear a message as possible between two such different creatures: “Thank you.”



Once she had thanked the child, the horse stepped back and looked at her. This was not the same girl who had been kind with her before. That child had a dark mane, this child's was yellow. But she had been about the

same size as this one. Perhaps, she thought, the smaller creatures were the kinder ones?

The child's hand disappeared into something for a moment, and when it returned it was holding something as bright and orange as the horse's own mane – was it... food? She leaned forward and tentatively sniffed at the orange thing. It WAS food. She cautiously pulled it out of the child's hands with her teeth and then chewed it happily. It was crunchy and delicious.

The child reached her hand toward her again and touched her on the nose, rubbing gently. It was pleasant. This child truly was kind, just as her other friend had been – maybe others could be too?

Just as she was considering this, the air was split with a deep shout.



Grace and the horse both jumped at the sound. Grace turned to see what could have made it and saw her father pushing through the forest

toward them. At her father's side was the cat, Lady Catherine Marmalade. She must've run back into the house. Grace's father knew that the cat always followed Grace everywhere, so her returning alone must have startled him.

"Dad wait!" Grace cried out, but he was already yelling.

"Grace! Come here, quickly now! You could get HURT!" Grace's father yelled.

"Dad, no! It's okay." Grace yelled back.

"That's a wild horse, Gracey, and a big one! You don't know what a creature like that'll do!" her father yelled.

The horse, startled by the loud man and the anger and fear rolling off him, stilled. Grace, however, reached a hand up to silently try and show the horse was not a threat to her.

"Get away from her!" Grace's father waved the horse away.

Startled, the horse trotted back a few paces.

"Dad stop, she's my friend!" Grace yelled. She moved a bit closer to the horse, trying to calm it down.

But it was too late. Her father had picked up a small rock and attempted to throw it toward the horse as a warning.

The horse reared back again onto its hind legs. As it did, one of its front legs grazed Grace in the chest... knocking her back to the ground.

It had been an accident – the horse had been so close to her when it was startled. It had knocked into her without meaning too.

Grace knew this. What's more, she wasn't hurt. She was just knocked down. An accident. That's all it was.

But her father didn't see it this way. He cried out for Grace and picked up another stone.

And threw.

The stone whizzed just inches away from the horse's face and thudded into a tree nearby.

The horse stomped its right front hoof hard on the ground and huffed out air – air that almost looked like smoke – from its flared nostrils. It wasn't scared anymore. It was mad.

Grace leapt to her feet.

The horse shook its head wildly. And its bright orange mane grew impossibly brighter. It almost looked to Grace like it was truly made of fire. But that was impossible... wasn't it?

“Wait, please. Both of you wait!” Grace yelled, though she knew neither the horse nor her father were listening.

Her father was attempting to pull Grace away from the animal while the little girl stubbornly stood her ground, digging her heels into the soft dirt.

“Baby, get away from that thing!” he pleaded with her.

Grace grabbed the horse by the muzzle. It was startlingly hot to the touch. She pulled it so the horse's eyes were looking directly into her own.



She felt hot and wild. The booming like thunder had scared her. The man yelling had scared

her. Anger boiled inside her like a smoldering fire.

But now the child? The child she knew was kind – was looking deep into her eyes. She spoke one word and somehow, through the fear, the horse heard and understood.

“Run.”



“Run,” Grace said.

The horse pulled its muzzle out of her hands. Turned away, raised itself up on its hind legs, and took a few steps back. It turned its head, just for a moment, to look at Grace one last time.

“Run away! Be safe!” Grace cried out to her.

And then there was another loud, booming sound... it was no longer the shouts of the man. It was the pounding of her heart, not unlike the horse’s hooves as it ran off into the forest. She felt elated as the horse sped away, its joy of freedom was somehow connected to

her own happiness.

For just a moment on the ground, Grace could've sworn there were small, sparkling embers in the hoofprints on the ground. But that... that would've been impossible. Right?

Her father knelt down beside her and wrapped his arms around her. The cat licked gently at her ankle.

“Are you OK, Gracey?” Her father asked.

“I'm fine, Dad! I was always fine!”

Her father picked her up in his arms, he was still saying something – about how scared he had been for her. How he would never let anything hurt her. Something like that – Grace was no longer listening. She was staring deep into the forest. She had helped the poor horse escape the tangle of wires, at least that was something, but she had hoped she could have done much more for it. Maybe someday, someone else would have the chance.

And way off, deep in the shadowy, endless expanse of trees, Grace thought she saw a tiny orange flame way off in the woods... and the

shadow of a beautiful horse, paused in the forest beyond, watching her being carried away.