

-Protector-

As a cold, harsh wind swept across the open prairie, breaking against a small stand of trees that bent from its force, the sky darkened, and black clouds gathered, shutting out the evening light. Huddled against the base of one of the trees, a small form shivered in the approaching storm. Pulling a brightly woven blanket tighter around her thin shoulders, black hair whipped across a suntanned face and brown eyes stared in fright as the prairie was plunged into darkness. Jerking as a branch crashed to the ground beside her, a cry rose from the child's lips, burying her head into her arms, the girl sobbed as she continued to cry out in her native tongue, hoping one from her tribe would come. Yet the wind seemed to take her voice and swallow it, allowing no one to hear her pleas. Letting her voice drop, a tear slid down her tanned cheek as the storm raged, whipping the trees around her, and threatening to move her from the scarce shelter she had found.

Suddenly she froze, raising her head quickly, she brushed the tears from her face and look around

hurriedly. From over the wind a chant had risen, sounding faintly, it grew louder as a single drum kept beat with the song. A song that spoke of power, love and protection. Spoken in her own tongue, the chant forced even the winds harsh sound from her ears. Standing quickly, the blanket slipped from her shoulders, and her soft deerskin dress met the wind. Soon the song ended, the last notes lingering around her. Yet the drum continued, four beats then a brief pause, four beats and a pause, growing louder, it soon shook the ground she stood on. Trembling as fear gripped her, she looked cautiously around the tree, out onto the open prairie lit by sudden flashes of lightning. Squinting as the light cracked once more, her eyes widened as her gaze caught on a

horses form, disappearing as the thunder rumbled. Watching breathlessly, she gasped as the prairie lit up once more, and the horse came into view, closer now as he ran toward her, his hooves pounding the ground in perfect rhythm. He wore the night across his head and chest, and it draped over both flanks like a black shadow. The moon rested on his withers, reaching down and giving power to his legs while his tail rippled behind him like silk, containing both the moon's light and the darkness of night. His eyes were as deep and black as the universe itself, and a star graced his forehead. Pricking his ears, he slid to a halt before her, his neck arched as he snorted slightly, heedless of the raging storm. Gazing at him in awe, a tremor ran through the girl's body as she realized the power this horse must contain, stepping timidly from around the tree, she winced as the wind struck her with full force. But then her eyes locked on his and everything else seemed to fade into nothing, moving slowly forward, her moccasins whispered through the tall grass. Hesitantly extending her hand, she froze as the majestic stallion stretched his neck to sniff the small brown hand that shivered in the wind. Snorting, he shook his head violently. Half rearing, his forelegs battered the ground. Standing bravely, the girl whispered softly in her native tongue, soothing the anxiousness of the large animal. Eyeing her carefully, the horse tossed his head toward the sky, as the wind whipped his mane through the air, giving the illusion of a flowing river churning against the rocks, then bursting forth into a white mist. Taking a slow step forward, the stallion stretched his neck once more to nuzzle the child's hand that reached toward him, a nicker rumbling in his throat like the thunder that rolled above. Staring at him in fascination, a smile spread across the girl's face as his velvet nose brushed her fingertips. Stepping closer, the small brown hand moved slowly across his arched black neck,

pausing only for a moment when it turned white close to his withers. Turning his head to watch
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her as she stood by his side, another nicker rumbled in his throat. Moving softly, the Indian child carefully grasped a handful of his silver white mane in her right hand, still speaking soothingly in her own language. Then in a swift yet graceful motion she was on his back, the moon between her legs and the night lit only by a single star before her. Gripping her hands tighter, she felt his muscles tense at the feel of weight upon his back. Pausing for only a brief instant, he snorted fiercely, then rose to his hind legs as lightning illuminated the sky, seeming to reach for the heavens as power seared through his body. Landing in the same instant as the thunder cracked, he

stood trembling, one ear turned toward the girl who sat on his back, whispering a soothing lullaby. Shaking his head, he turned quickly, still unsure of this strange shape that sat astride him.

Continuing her song, the girl felt his muscles relax beneath her, as the storm still raged around them, whipping her long black hair till it mixed with his own white mane. Leaning forward, she whispered into his ear, then felt a powerful surge as he answered her question with a motion that took her breath. Breaking into a run, his body leveled out, as his hooves pounded the earth, creating sparks whenever a stone was struck. Leaning closer to his neck, the girl felt his eagerness surge into her own body, as they became one. Stride for stride, she could feel the power

ripple inside him as the wind whipped his mane across her face. Soon the dark storm was left behind and the bright prairie stars lit up the plains, causing the stallion's coat to shine as the moon, still he continued, racing through the grass as if he had only one sole purpose, the wind rushing past his pricked ears. Topping a slight hill, he slid to a stop with a satisfied nicker aimed toward the child on his back. Sitting up slowly, she looked around in confusion till her gaze

found the small encampment settled at the base of the hill, the fires still burning as they cast an orange glow across the ground. Prancing anxiously, the horse nickered once more. Suddenly

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understanding, the girl smiled as she realized he had brought her home. Sliding from his back, she timidly wrapped her arms around his powerful neck, whispering her thanks into his ear.

Nuzzling her softly, the stallion then nodded his head fiercely, as he looked toward the fires, the light flickering in his eyes. Touching his coat once more, she turned and ran down the hill, her

bare legs still tingling from the feel of his back. Pausing at the bottom, she looked back, able to

see his outline against the sky. Throwing his head toward the stars, a loud whinny resounded

across the prairie as he rose to his hind legs. His forelegs churning the air. As she watched he

faded from view, swept from sight by the night wind. Turning her eyes to the sky, a smile broke

from the girls face when her gaze caught on a star that shone brighter than all the others, a simple

reminder of a wild stallion that ruled the night with the wind by his side, his head as black as the

sky with a single star gracing his forehead and the moon upon his back. A chosen protector over

those who needed him, a symbol of endless power, the meaning of love, and the bond

that is formed between horse and human.