

Rosemary Reynolds

Winter Haven Florida

## Angel in Waiting

*This is the one, the one who truly needs me,* thought 13-year-old Ashley Grieg as she stopped at stall number fifteen and started examining the horse inside. With names such as 'Rescue #704' it was hard to tell the difference between the horses. They were all towing some kind of physical damage: broken bones, malnourishment, disorders, or vices. All of these horses had been rescued from the slaughterhouse, and they also carried one tag: no one wanted them. Ashley had stopped at a small mare with a bad cough and a cute little snip on her nose. "She's in perfect health except for the cough?" she asked the rescuer, "Yes miss," he answered, "just the cough. It's horrible that someone would kill a perfectly good horse just because of a curable cold, isn't it?" Ashley nodded her head and solemnly answered, "Yes, it is. I will adopt her."

She admired the beauty of the horse's coat colors. She was a paint, a Sorrel Overo paint, with a huge white splash that looked exactly like an angel draped over her hindquarters. There was just something about this horse that Ashley liked, and she couldn't resist adopting her. Ashley calmly walked into the stall with the horse's halter, and approached her slowly with her hand extended, and palm facing down. The mare reached out to lightly touch her hand, and then quickly drew back. "This horse has been abused in her past. See how she shies away when I reach towards her?" The rescuer nodded as he observed Ashley make friends with the horse by calmly stroking her and breathing deeply. She offered it a cookie, then slipped the halter on her head while she was content chewing. Ashley led the mare out of her stall, and carefully walked her up to the trailer. "Come on girl," urged Ashley, "your new home is on the other end."

The mare hesitated, no doubt remembering how she was transported to the slaughterhouse, and then cautiously 'tested' the ramp by putting a hoof on it and adding a little weight. When the mare was through testing on that hoof, she proceeded with the next hoof and so on until she was inside the trailer. The entire loading process took about twenty minutes. "What a good girl, you're so brave! You stepped right on the trailer, good girl." Ashley praised the mare with another cookie, and then she secured her. As Ashley's father started up the truck and headed down the drive, Ashley could hear the mare neighing to her stall mates as she departed, finally homebound.



"How do you like it girl?" Ashley questioned her mare, "Do you like your new friends?" She had placed the mare in a stall next to a palomino named Sunny Do Shine, and a paint named Treasure Island the night before, and was currently serving their favorite dish: Bran Mash. She reached out and stroked Treasure as he ate his mash, hoping that the mare might want some too. "I need to name you, girl," Ashley explained to the mare, "I just can't keep calling you Girl, because you're so much more than that! You need a special name." Just then, Treasure stole the attention again, tossing his empty bowl out onto the concrete floor of the barn and sending mash flying everywhere. "Treasure! Look what you've done!" Ashley leaned over and picked up the bowl, then hurried off to retrieve some paper towels to wipe up the mess.

On the way, her father called her. "Ashley! Come up to the house, I want you to see something." "Dad," she yelled back, "Treasure tossed his bowl out again; I've got to clean up the mess. Can it wait?" Her father shook his head and responded, "Right now, come!" Ashley put the bowl on the sink counter, and then jogged up to the house.

As she walked through the door, she could tell that her father was worried about something. "It's on the computer." he said, "Come look." Ashley followed her father into his room where the computer was. On

the screen, there was an exact replica of the rescued mare! "Where did you find this?" asked Ashley. Her father just shook his head, "I just keyed into the search engine 'Paint Horse with white angel on hindquarters' and she pulled up." Ashley questioned her father, "Why do you look so worried?" Her father lowered his voice to a whisper, "Ashley, if this picture was taken, there was a reason for it. Whether something's wrong with her, or something's right, I don't know. I just hope it's something right."



"That's it girl, you're doing great!" Ashley praised the mare. She was teaching her some groundwork, starting with basic lunging. Every time the mare would take a few circular steps, Ashley would praise her. "You're starting to get good at this; maybe we should try the poles?" she asked the mare. As she was leading the mare over to the poles, Ashley's friend, Jennifer walked from her house next door and perched herself on the arena fence to watch. "I've been looking up from the house," Jennifer said, "That mare is doing great!" Ashley walked over to Jennifer's perch and let her pet the mare. "She's very pretty," commented Jennifer, "I love paints. What's her name?" Ashley looked up at her friend, "She doesn't have one yet. I'm considering a few now, though." Jennifer looked curiously at the mare, and then asked, "Like what?" Ashley responded, "I'm thinking Angel, Regal, or Spirit. What do you think?" Jennifer patted the mare thoughtfully, "I think Angel would fit her. Angel represents the angel on her hindquarters, doesn't it?" Ashley nodded and agreed, "It does. That's why I picked it."

"Ashley! Your mother and I need to talk with you." her father's voice boomed from down the stairs to Ashley's bedroom upstairs. *Oh no, Ashley thought, it's those famous words. I'd better make a Last Will really fast.* But then a second thought hit her, *if I don't get down there right now, the situation might get worse.* She decided to run down the stairs three at a time, burst from the last step, calm and straighten herself in front of the closed door, and then easily stroll into the kitchen. "What is it?" she calmly stated. "We have discovered something new about that mare of yours." said Ashley's father, "Honey, would

you like the honor?" Her mother nodded and smiled a huge grin. "Your little coughing abused mare that you adopted for free is sired out of a Paint Horse *legend*. Your horse was once owned by a magnificent trainer and breeder, and that is how her picture ended up on the internet. That mare is famous! Do you want to know her real name?" Ashley nodded, in shock. "Her name is Godiva's Gold, her barn name was Angel, and she is five years old as of June fourteenth. It said on the website that the owner had a terrible rob one night, and all of the horses were stolen, including yours. The horse thieves sold the horses, and used the money for themselves."

"Your father and I tried to contact the owner to explain," her mother continued, "but we just discovered that he is deceased. Your mare happened to end up in the slaughterhouse, about to be killed. If it weren't for you," she hesitated, "The legend would have died."

Ashley was in complete shock. "Does that mean she's mine?" she asked. "Yes," her mother answered, "She is yours."

"But, but I thought that she was just a poor little mare!" Ashley explained, "Sure, her markings were nice and she had a perfect disposition, but I never expected this. Godiva's Gold; that's a very nice name. I'd also like to name her Angel again, but keep her registered name as Godiva's Gold. Can I do that, Mom?" Her mother smiled, "Yes, of course. Her name is Angel."

Later that evening, Ashley slipped outside to give carrots to the horses. She took a special treat for Angel: a peppermint. She had discovered that she liked them a lot. "Hi there, girl. How are you?" she asked her mare, who walked up to the gate and took the mint. While she was chewing, Ashley told her, "I discovered your past, girl. And guess what? I know your name now." She called to her, "Angel!" The results were spectacular! She whirled around and almost knocked Ashley off her feet. She neighed and whinnied and there was a sparkle in her eyes. "I think you might like that name, Angel." said Ashley, "Just a bit." she said, giggling along with Angel's neighs.

*Ten Years Later....*

"Alright Angel, show them how you ride. I bet they've never seen a horse ride as good as you do." It was show time, and Ashley was lined up at the gate, preparing to ride into the arena to be judged. She was giving her traditional pep talk to Angel, while stroking her. Since she had discovered Angel's true identity, Ashley had worked hard on her riding. Now she was so good, she could gallop in a line and do a 10 foot sliding stop: Bridleless. She had racked up so many points, that it had landed them at world class. Now, all Angel had to do was win this class and she would get her World Champion title. Ashley had never had such an urge to scream in all of her life. Nerves were trying to take control of her, but she wouldn't let them in. She loved this show and this horse too much to do such an idiotic thing as scream.

"Contestants, please prepare to enter your class. Next up is Bridleless Reining, 18 and over." the intercom blared all across the show facility, "Contestants are: #498 Julia Roberson with Bye-Bye Blues, #736 Gloria Harrison with Heza Smart Chip, #472 Natasha Newburg with Watch Me Soar, #889 Ashley Grieg with Godiva's Gold, #394 Austen Harrison with Heza Smart Fella, and #749 Robert Johnson with Lo Jet Plane."

"That's it girl," Ashley whispered to Angel, "easy competition for you. You'll show them all how to really ride. Just concentrate, compete, and win. I know we will." She patted Angel one more time and jumped into the saddle. The tassels on her chaps went flying as she did so, showing off their obviously expensive details. It had cost Ashley a whole bunch to buy that extra bling.

As she waited, she heard a familiar voice coming from her left. As she looked, her eyes fell on Jennifer, who was crying, smiling, laughing, and waving all at the same time. Ashley smiled, then turned her attention towards the arena again. *Just a few more minutes*, thought Ashley, *then it's our turn.*

Suddenly, the intercom blared into Ashley's mind again. "Next, #889 Ashley Grieg with Godiva's Gold." it said, setting off a wave of excitement in both Ashley and Angel. The gates opened, and the doorway was ready. *Here we go, girl. Fly like an Angel.* She grasped a handful of soft mane, laid her other hand on her thigh, and gave Angel her starting cue: a kiss.

Off they flew, becoming one with each other. They flew across the arena at top speed, did a sliding stop, and backed up at top speed to the center. They completed four spins to the right, then four more to the left. Three large circles to the left, three large circles to the right. They galloped back to the other end of the arena, did a right rollback, galloped back across, and did a left rollback. To top it all off, they both flew to the middle of the arena, slid, and signaled completion. They did the pattern perfectly without one flaw. At the end of the pattern, the crowd was cheering madly! *You haven't seen it all.* thought Ashley as she smiled at the crowd and, at a halt in the middle of the arena, swung her feet out of the stirrups, placed them on either side of the pommel, and stood up. She waved to the crowd as her points shot strait up. She sat back in the saddle again and spun around one, two, three, four, five, six times and galloped down the middle again, and out the waiting gate.

*Now they're cheering,* thought Ashley. She jumped off of Angel and hugged her tight. "No matter if we won or not," she enthusiastically told Angel, "that was your best pattern ever! You did fantastic. You might be World Champion! But if you're not, you are *my* World Champion."

Ashley put Angel into her stall, and then walked up to the front booth, where she had been told to go. As she looked at the score sheet, she fell to her knees crying. Jennifer ran up and hugged her, along with tons of other friends. They all helped walk her back to Angel's stall. That's where Ashley shared the news with her horse:

"Angel, my coughing little mare," she sobbed, "you're a World Champion. You: the horse who would have died. You: the little mare with a glint of hope. You: a Bridleless Reining World Champion, and My Angel in Waiting."

*The End*