

BORN THAT WAY

by Susan Ketchen

Chapter One

I am galloping flat-out across a field of tall grass on the back of a horse I have never seen before. I am so full of excitement and happiness that my chest could burst. The horse's ears are perked and he requires no urging to keep the pace, and that's just as well because I have no reins, no bridle, no saddle. My fingers clutch deep in a thick wavy mane and I am out of control but at the same time so secure that even if I let go I know I won't fall off. I'll be fine.

We are nearing the end of the field and looming in front of us is a stone wall. Galloping bareback is one thing, jumping is another—but I have no way of stopping. The horse does not slow. He picks his spot and soars above the wall and I fly with him. We land safely on the other side and gallop on along a path snaking through the woods.

There must be a farm ahead—through the trees I hear a ringing sound.

The horse dissolves beneath me.

The alarm clock rings from my bedside table. My fingers clutch my blankets.

I am awake.

Ahead of me is not an unexplored forest, but another day of school. We get our math tests back today. That will be the peak of my excitement.

"I dreamt I was riding again," I tell Mom at breakfast.

"That's nice, Honey." She is eating a piece of dry toast with her tea, and reading.

Because she's not paying attention, I put an extra spoonful of brown sugar on my porridge. Then I say, "I thought we weren't supposed to read magazines at the table."

"This isn't a magazine, Sweetie. It's a new professional journal about my work. See?" She points to the title on the cover and sounds it out, as though the words are too long for me, as though I'm back in elementary school. "*Psychoanalyst Review*," she says.

I'm feeling kind of insulted, even though I know I'm not the world's best speller. But I decide to brush it off with a joke. "Oh that's how you spell it," I say. "I always thought you were a Cycle Analyst."

She doesn't laugh, though I hear a snort from Dad. Mom frowns. "There's an article on eating disorders," she says. "And I'm meeting a new client this morning who has bulimia. But you're right, Sylvie, I shouldn't be eating at the table. It sets a bad example." She sighs and looks sad. I hate it when she looks sad, but decide against another joke.

"It's okay, Mom. Go ahead—I don't mind."

She pats my hand. "Are you sure?" she asks, but she's reading again before I have a chance to answer.

I add another spoonful of sugar then dribble on the milk. The porridge is a floating island surrounded by a beach of golden brown sand. When I have a horse one day I will canter along a beach like this and plunge in and out of the breaking waves. "I was galloping and we jumped a gigantic stone wall and I stayed on," I say.

"Quiet—the stock market report is on," says Dad, adjusting the volume on the radio. Dad loves hearing the morning market news on the radio even though he's already spent half an hour reading updates on the computer. I listen to the commodities report with him. Mom notices all the extra sugar in my bowl and is about to say something, but Dad shushes her, so she frowns at me then goes back to her journal



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