

Made That Way

by Susan Ketchen

Chapter One

I am galloping. I'm riding a cross-country course, like the top riders do in the Olympics, and I only do in my dreams. I feel the wind on my face and the power of the horse beneath me. We head down a hill, which isn't easy without a saddle or bridle. I steer by shifting my balance and the horse responds as if he's part of me or I'm part of him, I can't say which.

At the bottom of the hill there's room for two strides, then there's a log, and then a pond. We're splashing through the pond when the scene changes—in an abrupt and disorienting way, like it does when I'm watching TV with my dad and he has the remote control channel-changer. Now a truck and horse trailer are crawling up my friend Kansas's driveway. The truck has Saskatchewan plates so I know this is my new horse arriving, the one Grandpa found for me. But I also know that I shouldn't be able to read the license plate from this far away, and that the truck is moving in slow motion, so even if I hadn't noticed before, this proves that I must be dreaming again, one of those lucid dreams where I know I'm dreaming and sometimes I can influence how things happen.

Then the truck transforms into my mom's car, which explains its slow progress. My mom says her car is on its last legs. I have told her this is an inappropriate metaphor for a car but she says it all the time anyway.

Kansas is beside me, shaking her head. "Everyone knows you need at least a three-quarter-ton to pull a horse trailer," she says. "Especially a heavy old steel one like that."

The horse trailer is rusty and a window is open and hanging lopsided from one hinge. I can see a shadow moving inside, and hear a bugled Ha Ha Ha which doesn't sound at all like a horse whinny. It sounds more like that stupid unicorn that wrecks so many of my dreams. I don't even believe in unicorns, so I get kind of annoyed when he barges into my night-life. Plus he's always grumpy and says things to upset me. Well, most of the time. Occasionally he's sensible.

I decide to try to make him sensible for this dream, though usually I have no control over what the unicorn does. Generally my control is

limited to things like the clothes I'm wearing. I check out my feet. I'm wearing sandals, which Kansas does not approve of. She insists that anyone walking around her boarding stable has to wear boots, preferably with steel toes. She says you never know what's going to happen around horses. I concentrate and my sandals transform into my Ariat Junior Performer Paddock Boots.

Kansas still isn't happy. "Lord knows what we're going to find here," she says. "I really wanted to pick out the right horse for you, maybe next year, when your seat is established and your hands are steady. You could have leased Electra and taken lessons . . ." She trails off in disgust. I've never heard Kansas talk this way before, but I've suspected for a long time that this is how she feels. I hate disappointing Kansas, but this isn't my fault. It's not even really Grandpa's fault. I think it's just life.

Kansas is right, I'm not ready. So I try to make the trailer disappear. I try to make the whole rig back away down the driveway, but it keeps on coming. There's more yelling from the trailer, and then a white nose with flaring nostrils appears at the open window. It's the unicorn alright. I try to make it brown, or bay with a white blaze and then in total desperation pink with sparkles like the stick ponies in Toys R Us, but nothing works.

The unicorn is trying to get his entire head out the window, but something keeps catching. I know it's his horn, or what's left of it. For some reason it's been getting shorter and shorter with every dream—I don't know why, and I sure don't want to ask him.

"What's with him?" says Kansas.

"His horn is caught," I mumble.

"His *what*?"

The unicorn pushes again, I hear something snap and his head is outside the window. There's a red patch in the middle of his forehead. Blood is running down his nose, down the side of the trailer, down the driveway. There's blood everywhere and that's when I make myself wake up.

I have my usual headache. Today is the day my new horse arrives so it would have been nice if, for a change, my skull didn't feel like it was going to explode, but no such luck.

Mom is tapping lightly on my door. "Wake up, Sugarplum. It's time for your injection."



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