

A Horse's Tale

My Notes

- 1 She calls me Manuel—as if I need a name! The other horses know me by my size, my smell, my beautiful black coat, and my wild ways. People have names for everything, which we translate, but we have a language of our own that they will never understand.
- 2 When the man with the dark hat brought me here, I was only a young colt. I could not have predicted the awful outcome of that day: I knew only that the light was bright, the sun felt warm on my back, and the alfalfa tasted sweet. My mother and I and the others were grazing in the field, and we raised our heads from the cool green ground when the truck appeared, pulling a trailer and making dust and noise. The man with the dark hat stepped out, opened the gate to the field, and walked toward me like a human with a sinister intention. My mother sensed it too and stepped between us, but he got around her and slipped the leather strap over my ears and nose. His hands smelled of earth and sweat, and I didn't like the feel of that strap, so I tried to toss it off, but the man knew I would try, and he prevented me. Then the strap was fastened, and he tugged on it, and although I could have pulled away and galloped across the field, I didn't think of it in time: it seemed I had to follow him, and so I did. He led me from the field, up a ramp into the trailer, and into a stall where there was hay. The hay distracted me, and the man shut the trailer door behind me with a sudden, heavy, metal sound. Then everything began to move, and through a little window I smelled dust and saw the land and sky go by. There was a motion up and down and side-to-side that jostled and made me sway, and I heard windy sounds of trucks and cars passing faster than I could run. They frightened me, and I tried to think only of the sweet smell of the hay, but I could not. That was the last day I saw my mother.
- 3 I'm two years older now, and the woman who calls me Manuel comes every day. Her voice is low and gentle, and she mucks out my stall and brushes me and brings me hay. Her hands are strong and smell of mint, and she lets me into the pasture every morning with the others, and that is my favorite time. I can race then, or stand on my hind legs and neigh, or nip at the flanks of the others in fun and mischief. In the pasture the others can admire me, as they should: I am biggest, most powerful, and most wild. My coat is sleek, my mane and tail are long, and I am very proud.

4 I have seen how people put the shiny metal bit between the teeth, and the heavy saddle on the back, and the tight wide strap around the belly of the others. If they dare to do such things to me, I will rear and buck and kick. The woman who calls me Manuel has friends who call me dangerous. They worry about my size and temper, and they warn the woman to beware, and she should listen.

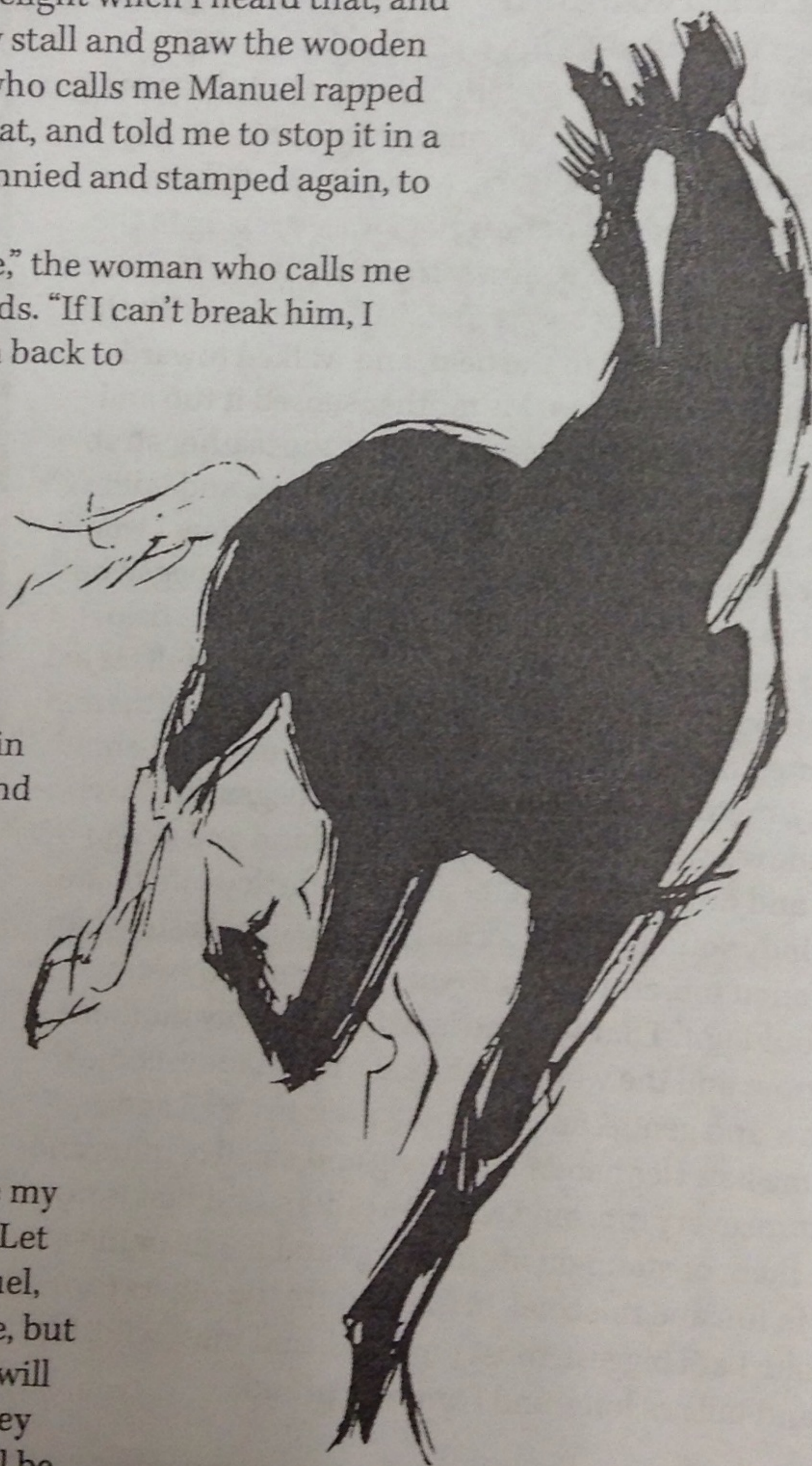
5 "You may not be able to break that horse, Anastasia," one of her friends whispered to her this morning in the barn—as if I couldn't hear!

6 "Look at his eyes, Anastasia," her other friend said, from a safe distance. "There's a determined expression there, as though he refuses to be tamed. If I were you, I wouldn't put him to the test!"

7 I whinnied with delight when I heard that, and began to stamp in my stall and gnaw the wooden railing. The woman who calls me Manuel rapped me on the nose for that, and told me to stop it in a stern voice, but I whinnied and stamped again, to prove that I am boss.

8 "Well, we shall see," the woman who calls me Manuel told her friends. "If I can't break him, I may have to send him back to Montana, where he probably belongs."

9 I whinnied louder at that, and kicked the back of my stall in glee, with a deafening noise that made them all cling to each other in dread. No one will brand me, no one will break me, and no one will nail iron shoes to the bottom of my hooves! No one will put a cold hard bit in my mouth, no one will saddle me, and no one will ride my back and make me run! Let the people call me Manuel, or any name they choose, but I will have my way: they will despair of taming me, they will set me free, and I will be as wild as wind!





- 1 Linnie and her family lived on Monhegan (mahn HEEG un) Island, off the coast of Maine. They had two guinea pigs, two white mice, a rabbit, a cat, a dog, and thirteen tropical fish—along with two ferrets, in a cage in the basement, that they were pet-sitting. To others it seemed that the family owned more than enough pets, but to Linnie it seemed otherwise: she felt deprived. She had wanted a horse as long as she could remember (a very long time), and she still did not have one.
- 2 Linnie knew almost everything there was to know about horses. She had read everything about them that she could find—which was a lot, because she was a fast reader. In fact, there was no type of printed matter about horses that Linnie had not read. She looked up entries about different breeds in encyclopedias. She read stories and novels in which horses were characters, and she memorized poems in which they were described. She read articles about them in magazines and over the Internet. She studied horse anatomy and medicine in handbooks and veterinary journals. She even read memoirs and biographies of horse owners. Her bedroom walls were covered with pictures of Appaloosas and Arabians, Bretons and Clydesdales, pintos and palominos. The refrigerator door was covered with her own pencil drawings of ponies. Every January, she hung a new Horse of the Month wall calendar over her desk. If a university ever offered an honorary degree to an expert on horses, then Linnie, of all people, deserved it.

3 Given her knowledge of horses, it was only logical, in Linnie's opinion, that she should have one. This opinion she voiced often, especially at dinnertime, when she could state things bluntly and get an equally blunt answer. The conversation was invariably the same, and it went like this:

4 "Mom, I still want a horse. When can I get one?"

5 "Linnie, you can't have a horse."

6 "But Mom, if I *did* get one, could I keep it in the back yard?"

7 "You *can't* get one, because a horse isn't like other pets: it's a huge animal that needs lots of land to run on, which we don't have, and a barn to stay in during the winter, which we don't have; and it costs a lot of money, which we also don't have!"

8 "But Mom,—"

9 "Linnie, the answer is no."

10 But no conversation can remain the same forever, and so, one night at dinner, Linnie's opening question took a different turn.

11 "Mom, how much would it cost to transport a horse from Wisconsin to Monhegan?"

12 Linnie's mother choked on her broccoli and reached for her glass of water. "Why are you wondering *that*?" She was looking at Linnie with a suspicious expression.

13 "Well, there's a miniature palomino there named Goldie that I'd like to get. She isn't any bigger than a dog, so I could probably keep her in my room. They don't need much space to run, and she's so small we could even fit her in the car! I wrote to her owners on the Internet and told them I was interested."



14 "You did *what*?"

15 While researching miniature horses on the Internet, Linnie explained, she had done a search on "horses for sale" and found a horse breeder's website. She had sent the breeder an e-mail note, asking for more information. She hadn't bothered to mention her age.

16 Moments later, Linnie's mother was sitting in front of the computer, reading her daughter's correspondence. Then she typed out a short message to the horse breeder in Wisconsin. "Thank you for the information about miniature horses," it began. "It may be helpful to my daughter nine or ten years from now, when she's old enough to buy one of her own. Sincerely, Linnie's mom."